

**A Private Commentary
on the Epistle to the
Hebrews**

By

James D. Quiggle

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Dedicated to my great friend
David R. Hollingsworth.
His thoughtful comments, incisive criticisms,
and positive encouragement
make this commentary worth reading.

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James D. Quiggle
Private Commentary On the Bible

Preface

The *Private Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* was written to support the author's teaching ministry in his local church, and is privately published by the author.

The plan of the *Private Commentary* series is a verse-by-verse exegesis, explanation and application of the spiritual truths, principles and precepts presented in the Scripture. The scope of the work is to bring the reader/student to a practical understanding of the Scripture. In every commentary I explain and discuss each verse, idea, theme, and biblical truth as discovered in turn during the course of the exposition. My target audience is the non-technical Bible study/small group leader, Sunday School teacher, and local church Pastor. My point of view is a conservative theology. Contrary or alternate opinions concerning the Scripture are presented and discussed as I believe will be of profit to the target audience.

This commentary is my opinion of *Hebrews*, neither more nor less. I am responsible for the use made of all quoted material. Bible students who desire to understand and apply the message of *Hebrews* are invited to study the book with me and come to their own conclusions.

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Introduction

Two questions have often sidetracked the Christian seeking to understand the epistle to the Hebrews. The first is, who is the human author of the book? The second, to whom was the book written? There are no definite answers to either of these questions. The very title of the book, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, is misleading, as the writing "does not possess the form of an ancient letter. It lacks the conventional prescript of a letter and has none of the characteristic features of ordinary letters from this general time period."¹ As with other New Testament writings, the title was added by Christian scribes making copies of the New Testament documents. Because the title is so familiar, I shall continue to identify the document in that manner. The "Epistle to the Hebrews" was written to Christians as an exhortation to remain steadfast in their faith in Christ. The Author assumes the reader is well-versed in Old Testament history and the Law of Moses. This applies in the first instance to Hebrew Christians. However, there were many Gentile proselytes to Judaism throughout the Greek and Roman world. The book of Acts tells us that many of these proselytes readily gave their faith to the good news that Jesus saves. Therefore, the intended audience may have been a mixed congregation of former Jews and Gentile proselytes to Judaism. There is some concern expressed in the epistle that the readers might return to their old religion: 3:6, 12; 4:1, 11; 5:12; 6:4-6, 11-12; 10:22-39. Many commentators believe these Christians were undergoing intense persecution. In the early history of the church, Christians identified themselves as a part of Judaism that accepted Jesus as the Messiah. In modern terms, the early Christians identified themselves as messianically-fulfilled Jews. The Jews rejected the Christians, for religious and political reasons. The religious reasons are well-documented in the Gospels and Acts: their refusal to accept Jesus as Messiah and as deity. Their political reasons involved the status of Judaism in the Roman empire. The Roman government tolerated many religions, but legally recognized only two: emperor worship and Judaism. The Jews disowned Christians for religious reasons, therefore they were politically an illegal religion. The Christian sect, separated from the legal protections an association with Judaism might have provided, but still claiming to be a sect of Judaism, was a threat to the status of Judaism as a licit (legal) religion. Therefore, the Jews persecuted Christians. Persecution by the Roman government soon followed, (e.g., under Nero, AD 64), and intensified about the time Hebrews is assumed to have been written (Hebrews is usually dated between AD 60-70). Christians were, therefore, under an intense and constant temptation to "de-emphasize, conceal, neglect, abandon, and thus in a crises reject and deny the distinctly Christian dimension of their faith."² There were also in the churches those who were seeking salvation, but had not made a commitment to Jesus as "my" Savior, whom persecution would tend to lead away from a commitment. And, as in any local church, there were those who benefitted from an association with Christians (e.g., Christian morality, compassion, practical aid), without seeking a commitment to the Savior, who needed to be warned about the consequences of their choices. The epistle encourages and exhorts believers to remain steadfast, and unbelievers to go on to faith in Jesus, by demonstrating Christ as the fulfillment of everything promised by the old covenant. Christ "accomplished once for all what the old priesthood and its animal sacrifices foreshadowed but could not effect. Anyone who abandons him has no other hope."³

Who wrote Hebrews? No one knows. Even Christians in the second century did not know. Hebrews seems like a continuation of Paul's thoughts and literary style, so it was placed in the Bible immediately after his epistles. However, "the language of Hebrews constitutes the finest Greek in the New Testament, far superior to the Pauline standard both in vocabulary and sentence-building."⁴ Many persons have been suggested as the Writer, with Luke and Apollos leading the field. My opinion is based on a feature of Hebrews noticed by others. The epistle contains two distinct types or styles of writing. In very simple terms, the first style teaches doctrine, and the second exhorts the believer to the practical application of that doctrine. The exhortations may be removed without materially affecting the argument of the doctrinal parts. For example, one may remove 2:1-4, and the argument that Christ is superior to the angels is unaffected, and to a certain degree

¹ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, lxx.

² Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 80.

³ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 80.

⁴ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, xlix.

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the passage has a better narrative flow when 2:1-4 is removed. Further on, 3:7 – 4:13 may be removed without affecting the teaching that Christ is greater than Moses and is the Christian's high priest. The intrinsic connection between 3:6 and 4:14 is more easily followed when 3:7 – 4:13 is removed. Other passages of exhortation are 5:11 – 6:20; 10:26-39; 12:15-29. The striking difference between the doctrinal and exhortation sections has led me to the following theory. I believe the main body of Hebrews, which is the doctrinal sections, is the substance of Paul's synagogue addresses, as recorded or remembered by his traveling companions. In every city Paul visited he began his ministry at the local synagogue, following the evangelistic pattern of the "to the Jews first, then to the Greeks." Like most modern evangelists, Paul probably used a small group of sermons, or the same points from a few stock sermons, to make his evangelistic appeals. Some unknown person took Paul's messages and used them as the basis of an exhortation to one or more Christian communities suffering persecution, to encourage believers to remain faithful to their Christian profession, and warn unbelievers to go on to faith in Christ.

A number of outlines or themes have been proposed for Hebrews. One of the most popular has been to see Christ as "better than" the prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, the Aaronic priesthood, the Mosaic covenant, and the Levitical sacrifices. Another view would be to understand the epistle as an argument that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law. I have often viewed the epistle as presenting Jesus in terms of the fulfilled sacrifice for sin. Jesus is:

- The offeror who brings the sacrifice for sin
- The sacrificial offering for sin
- The altar (his body) where the sacrifice is offered
- The high priest who presents the sacrifice on behalf of the sinner
- God who accepts the sacrifice as full payment for the sin.

This view encompasses the whole of Jesus salvific ministry, and incorporates much of the epistle's teachings. The exhortation of the epistle is to believe on Jesus as the savior of my soul, and continue in that faith through the end of life. Noting this, perhaps the primary theme of Hebrews is the need to go on to maturity of faith in Jesus Christ.

The epistle is a compendium of biblical theology, which could be copiously expanded (e.g., Owen's seven volume exposition) beyond the patience or attention of the modern reader. The Christology of the first three verses, not to mention the angelology and eschatology of the rest of chapter one, could fill a large volume. The arguments are theologically complex, and the Writer often repeats his arguments, in different forms and words, so as, in the totality of his exegesis of Old Testament Scripture, to help the reader grasp what he is saying and be able to apply salvation truth to their spiritual need. The scope of this commentary is not so ambitious as to reproduce a complete explanation of the theology of Hebrews. Moreover, I cannot fully repeat explanations of theology given in one passage, at the several locations where the Writer repeats his arguments, thoughts, and exhortations, without expanding the commentary beyond a reasonable size. Therefore, the reader is cautioned against "sampling" various passages in the commentary, and against reading comments made at one passage, without looking at more detailed explanations where a subject was initially, or more fully, presented by the Writer. My ambition is simple, to help the reader understand and apply the teachings and exhortations of the epistle to his own life. I shall not, then, take up time and space with detailed repetitions, nor with theological questions the epistle neither asks nor answers.

The epistle uses many Old Testament quotations from the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament Scripture. The purpose was not to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. The Writer and his original readers took this point for granted. The Writer uses the Old Testament to show that Jesus was Creator as well as Redeemer, but on these points his readers were already agreed and had expressed saving faith in Jesus as such. What, then, was the point of using so many Old Testament scriptures and restating doctrines already accepted by the readers? The epistle to the Hebrews "is in its main theme a reasoning from the Old to the New [Testament] . . . for the purpose of proving . . . the completeness of his [Christ's] dispensation in itself, and the mingled folly and danger of keeping up the shadowy services of Judaism, which had lost all their importance when their design was accomplished in Christ. . . . The question was, What honor and respect might be due him as such [as Messiah and Redeemer]? and whether there was not a glory in him

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that overshadowed, and in a manner extinguished, the glory of all preceding revelations?"⁵ The answer is that the nature and power, holiness and justice, and the dignity and glory of the Messiah gave the Gospel a clear superiority over the Law. As he himself is preeminent in all things, even so the word of salvation spoken through him is preeminent.

⁵ Fairbairn, *Typology*, 391, 392.

HEBREWS ONE

*1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom
also He made the worlds;*

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets

The practice of ancient times was to begin a letter with the writer's name. Whoever the inspired human penman may have been, he wanted his readers to understand that his message came from "the God"¹ who has spoken in Son. This is the God who is the author of both Law and Gospel, who spoke of old in the prophets and in the last days in the Son. Under the first covenant, God spoke by dreams, direct voice, and signs, in different ways to different men.² There was a progressive nature to the revelation God gave. Information and understanding came in the form of "here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:9-10). God's purpose in this progressive revelation was twofold. First, to mature the religious understanding of the world through a gradual revealing of himself and his rules for living. Then, to prepare the world for the arrival of his Son, in, by, and through whom the world would receive a completed revelation. The progression of revelation is not the evolution of the idea of God, but the movement from promise to fulfillment.³ The men and women living in the days of the old covenant received the promise, but did not experience the fulfillment of the promise in which they had trusted. God's plan was that they should experience the fulfillment with believers yet-to-come who would follow their example of faith, Hebrews 11:39-40. That fulfillment is in the Son.

The Writer (whoever he was) begins in a way that was sure to remind his readers of the repeated statements of the prophets: "thus says the Lord," "the word of the Lord came to me," and "hear the word of the Lord." The message of Hebrews is a "thus says the Lord," a word of God to be heeded with profit, or disregarded with peril. Skeptics believe and teach that the Old Testament revelation contains the words of God. Or, they teach that the prophets expressed their religious experiences in their own words, guided in some manner by God. The Writer of Hebrews believed the words written in the Old Testament covenant were the very words of God. The Greek text reads *en tois prophetais*, which is, "by the prophets." The definite article ("the") is used to indicate that these specific persons and only these persons were God's instruments of communication. The preposition *en* is probably in the instrumental case,⁴ God spoke "by" or "through" the prophets. The instrumental case in this use probably indicates the means by which God spoke. However, it may be looking to God as the cause of the prophets speaking, as Westcott notes, "not merely *through them* using them as his instruments, but *in them* as the quickening power of their life."⁵

has in these last days spoken to us by His Son

In the *Koine* Greek language, writers created emphasis by putting first in the sentence that which they believed was most important. The text literally begins, "In many parts and in many ways of old, the God having spoken to the fathers in the prophets," etc. The writer emphasizes that in the past God's message was revealed through diverse means and many people over a long period of time. Then comes the contrast, "in these last days [God has] spoken to us in Son." The sense of completion and fulfillment in a final word spoken through this one person, the Son, is clearly communicated to the reader. The message of God came through

¹ The Greek text uses the definite article: *ho theos*, "the God," meaning the one true God, who is Father-Son-Spirit.

² Robertson, *Hebrews*, V:334.

³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 45.

⁴ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 92.

⁵ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 6.

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many prophets in times past, but in these "last days"⁶ it has come in his Son. Below, the Writer reveals the nature of the Son, and one understands this is indeed a final word, a completed revelation, made by one whose very substance fitted him to complete the revelation.

God spoke "by the prophets" but in these last days he has spoken "by his Son." The Greek is literally "in the prophets" and "in Son." The words "in the prophets" indicate that when one reads the prophets, the words read are the very words of God communicated by men specifically chosen by God for this purpose. The words "in Son" indicate that when Jesus spoke, the words he said⁷ were the very words of God. The Greek text is "spoke to us in Son." The definite article is missing before the word "son", a condition in *Koine* indicating the emphasis is on the character and nature of the communication. The communication "in Son" is distinct and of a different category than the communication "in the prophets" where the definite article is present in the text. The prophets are a class of individuals, rational instruments through whom God accurately, authentically, and credibly communicated his message.⁸ But in these last days God spoke through one who is in character a Son. The phrase "in Son" could be legitimately interpreted to mean that Jesus was not merely the medium of communication, he was in fact the very language of God's communication. Jesus explicitly acknowledged that in his person, works and words, he himself was the language God spoke: John 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

Hebrews constantly contrasts the differences between the Old and New Covenants.⁹ This is the first such contrast. The contrast between "various times and various ways . . . in the prophets," and "in these last days . . . in Son," does not mean the old message was inferior; God is the one author of both Law and Gospel. Rather, this first contrast indicates God has completed his message begun in the prophets by and through the person of Jesus Christ. "No limitation is here added, as before . . . so as God's *speaking* is here to be taken for a full revelation of his whole will. . . so far as it is requisite to be known by man in this world."¹⁰

The local church community or communities¹¹ the Writer was addressing needed to know God's final message was "in Son." They grew up under the Old Covenant, believing that an understanding of the "Law and the Prophets" was essential to their everyday life. Now Jesus had become part of their life (by faith or profession), but persecution threatened to persuade them to turn back to the relative comfort and security of their former religion(s). They needed to know that God's last word (in Jesus) agreed with and fulfilled his first word (through the prophets). They needed to know that God appointed his Son Jesus as the giver of eternal life, as the one who brings a better hope, and as the ever-living intercessor for sins (7:16, 23, 28), things the Old Covenant could not do. "The Writer of Hebrews knew that only an intensified personal understanding of God's final and decisive communication would generate the resilient, sustaining faith they so desperately needed."¹² The horizontal message of Hebrews is that Jesus is God's completed word to man. "The story of divine revelation is a story of progression up to Christ, but there is no progression beyond him. . . . God's previous spokesmen were his servants, but for the proclamation of his last word to mankind he has

⁶ The "last days" is a New Testament term indicating the time between Christ's ascension and his second advent (Acts 2:17; 2 Timothy 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:18).

⁷ Most, if not all, the readers of Hebrews did not hear Jesus speak the words spoken "in Son" Therefore, the Writer of Hebrews is implying that the written record of Jesus' words is an authentic, accurate and credible record.

⁸ Divine inspiration is the Holy Spirit superintending chosen believers in the use of their natural faculties, experiences, historical-cultural background, language, vocabulary, style, education and information to reproduce God's words that God breathed-out into their souls. When the revelation came "in Son," the communication was direct: God speaking God's words. The inspiration, accuracy, authenticity, and credibility of the words is the same, whether in prophets or in Son, because the source is the same.

⁹ The contrast, however, is based upon the essential unity between the Old and New Covenants. God is the author of both covenants. The Messiah is the "substance and center" (Saphir, *Hebrews*, 24) of both covenants. The two are one in their message of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ Gouge, *Hebrews*, I:12.

¹¹ Composed of Hebrew Christians, Gentile proselytes to Judaism who had believed on Jesus as their savior, and the usual "mixed multitude" of seekers, the curious, false professors, etc.

¹² Sacks, *Hebrews*, 9.

chosen his Son."¹³

whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

God spoke *en huio*, "in Son." The intended meaning is made clearer by the absence of an article or pronoun. "Here the idea is not merely what Jesus said, but what he is, God's Son who reveals the Father (John 1:18)."¹⁴ What is Jesus? The Writer states seven facts about the Son. First, the Son is God's heir. God has one Son and therefore one heir. In the simplest terms, everything that is God's belongs to Jesus. The Old Testament allusion may be to Psalm 2:8. In speaking of the Son as heir, one must not confuse the divine Person with the mediatorial office he performs as the God-man. The Son of God is the sovereign God the Son. He is the Second Person in the Trinity. He is also God in humanity, the God-man. He is the heir of God through the union of his divine and human natures. In the absolute sense, "there was never a time when the Son was not the heir."¹⁵ However, the Writer's point of view is of Jesus the theocratic Son. He is the Son of Abraham, heir to the promises made to Abraham, and the Son of David, heir to the promises made to David. He is heir "not in his abstract deity, but as the Son who became man; as the Word made flesh; as the Lord God visiting and redeeming his people; as the Son who became servant to fulfill all Jehovah's good pleasure. . . . According to his deity incarnate, the Messiah, in the everlasting covenant, is appointed heir, and all things are given into his hand."¹⁶ The consequence of his mediatorial office—the works he performs as Saviour—is to inherit all things belonging to God. Our understanding of the Son as God's heir must be clear: Jesus the Son of God is the union of two natures in one person; he is the God-man. The properties and effects of the one nature are attributed to the other: John 3:13, "The Son of man who is in heaven"; Acts 20:28, Jesus purchased the church with his own blood.¹⁷ In regard to his divine nature, God has no blood; in regard to his human nature, he shed his blood; the God-man shed his blood, and in that respect blood is attributed to God. The theocratic Son is the heir of God because the God-man inherits the promises. What does he inherit? A throne and a people. He will reign until he has put all enemies under his feet, 1 Corinthians 15:25; he will receive a people through his work as redeemer, Hebrews 2:13b; 3:6. "His inheritance is the innumerable company of the redeemed and the universe renewed by virtue of his triumphant work of reconciliation."¹⁸

The Son is the One through whom God made the worlds. The Greek word translated "worlds" is not the usual word, *kosmos*, but is *aiones*, usually translated "ages." "The reason is that the word for 'ages' is more comprehensive, including within it the periods of time through which the created order exists."¹⁹ Building on this thought, Bruce writes, "The whole created universe of space and time is meant, and the affirmation that God brought this universe into being by the agency of his Son is in line with the statements of other New Testament writers."²⁰ It is a Scripture principle that the work of one Person of the Trinity is the work of all the Persons of the Trinity. If in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, then the Son is Creator as well as Redeemer. In the words of Paul in Colossians, 1:16-17, "by Jesus all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things consist." Some maintain that the Son was an instrument, a created inferior agent by which God made the worlds. The apostle John wrote that in the beginning—that historical moment when all created things began their existence—the Word, the preincarnate God the Son, was already present. Since the beginning was the

¹³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 46.

¹⁴ Robertson, *Hebrews*, 335.

¹⁵ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 65.

¹⁶ Saphir, *Hebrews*, 50.

¹⁷ Gouge, *Hebrews*, I:13.

¹⁸ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 39.

¹⁹ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 65.

²⁰ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 47.

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creation of all created things, and since the Son was the one through whom and by whom (John 1:3) all created things were made, then the Son, who existed before the beginning of creation, must himself be increate.²¹ The person who created all things must himself be increate, because by definition the creation of "all" things must exclude the one who created. Is it possible that the Son was himself created by God before God created the heavens and the earth by and through the Son? John answers this question with a resounding "No." The Son who created all things was "with God" in the beginning. God is by definition increate. The Son who was with God prior to God creating the material and spirit domains of existence (created through and by the Son), must himself be of such a nature as to exist apart from the material and spirit domains he created. Put another way, if the Son was a created being who created all things, then (if he was a created being) before he created all things there must have been some type of created domain in which he, a created being, could have existence. No such domain existed prior to God creating the heavens and the earth, because the purpose of creating the heavens and earth was to create domains in which all created things might exist. To be with God prior to God creating is to be of the same nature as God, which is, that the Son was and is increate. "Surely he who makes all things, 'without whom nothing that was made that was made,' was not himself a creature. Omnipotence and infinite intelligence—both of which are necessary in the Creator—cannot surely be delegated."²² In a manner incomprehensible to man, the Father, Son, and Spirit cooperated in creating the *aiones*, Genesis 1:1; John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6. Jesus the Christ is God the Son made flesh, the incarnate God-man, the heir of all things he has made.

Excursus: God the Son and the Son of God

In my interpretation of Hebrews, I will often refer to "God the Son" and the "Son of God." In using these two terms, I am not indicating a difference in persons. The term "Son of God" is an attempt to identify truths relating to God's Person and work as the incarnate God-man. God the Son and the Son of God are the same person. The Son of God never ceases to be God the Son, and God the Son is, in his humanity, the Son of God. In the commentary, the term "God the Son" will indicate the Son in his essential nature as deity, and may also be used to identify God pre-incarnate. The term "Son of God" will indicate the Son in his two natures as God incarnate, i.e., the God-man. For example, how can God "grow in wisdom stature, and in favor with God and man? The answer is that the humanity of the God-man matured as he grew from child to man. Under the terms I am using, I would say that it was the Son of God who experienced this maturation process. I am not ignoring the deity, I am recognizing that Jesus was one person with two natures, which are humanity and deity.

The focus of Hebrews is on the works God the Son performed and continues to perform as the Son of God. Those offices are Redeemer, Mediator, and Intercessor. The glory the God-man has, and the inheritance he has obtained, directly relate to those offices. In order to perform those offices, God the Son joined humanity to his deity and became the God-man at a particular moment in history. I am identifying that historical Person by the term the "Son of God." In doing this I am following the example of the Scripture, for example, God bought the church with his own blood, Acts 20:28. God doesn't have blood, but in the Person of the God-man he does, and he shed it to redeem the church. The term "Son of God" will be used to identify God the Son as the incarnate Jesus the Christ, the God-man.

3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

who being the brightness of His glory

²¹ Increate: existing without having been created.

²² Brown, *Hebrews*, 28.

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Owen's comments here are most helpful (emphasis is Owen's).²³

- "First, It is not the immediate design of the apostle²⁴ to treat absolutely of either the *nature* of Christ, his divine or human, but only of his *person*.
- "Secondly, That which the apostle principally intends in and about the person of Christ, is to set forth his *dignity, pre-eminence, and exaltation above all*; and that not only consequentially to his discharge of the office of mediator, but also antecedently, in his worth, fitness, ability, and suitableness to undertake and discharge it—which in a great measure depended upon and flowed from his divine nature.
- "Thirdly, These expressions are none of them . . . used . . . concerning any other but Christ only. . . There is in the words evidently a comparison with God the Father: he is infinitely glorious, eternally subsisting in his own person; and the Son is 'the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.'
- "Fourthly, Though the design of the apostle in general be to show how the Father expressed and declared himself unto us in the Son, yet this could not be done without manifesting what the Son is in himself and in reference unto the Father. . . whence it follows that in him, being incarnate, the Father's glory and his person are expressed and manifested to us.
- "Fifthly, There is nothing in these words that is not *applicable* unto the divine nature of Christ. . . He is in his person distinct from the Father, another not the Father; but yet the same in nature, and this in all glorious properties and excellencies.
- "Sixthly, These things being premised, we may discern the general importance of these expressions . . . The Son, in whom God speaks unto us in the revelation of the Gospel, doth in his own person so every way answer [match, correspond to] the excellencies and perfections of God the Father, that he is in him expressly represented unto our faith and contemplation."

Having these thoughts in mind, let us consider the third fact concerning the Son, that he is the brightness of God's glory. The 'glory of God' is the manifestation of his attributes. Man's comprehension of God's glory is in part dependent on the means used to display or communicate that glory.²⁵ The Greek word *apaugasma*, translated "brightness," means either "to radiate" or "to reflect" a ray of light, and is here being used metaphorically. The essential meaning of the metaphor is that Jesus the God-man perfectly communicates the glory of God. The subject of the passage, the nature of Christ, requires us to consider not an isolated ray of light, but the whole bright image that brings to our attention the source of the light.²⁶ The shining of the sun provides an illustration. A single ray of light reveals the presence of the sun; all the sun's rays reveal the glory of the sun. The idea implied by *apaugasma* in this theological context is that the rays of light coming out from the original body form a similar "light-body" that perfectly represents the original.²⁷ It reasonably follows that since the *apaugasma* is formed from the original light it is of the same substance or essence as the original. In Jesus the God-man the invisible God is made visible. Jesus is "the true and proper representation of the infinite perfection of deity."²⁸ Jesus is the light that reveals the full presence and all the glory of God. When man sees Jesus, man sees God's glory truly and in truth. Before Christ, man's understanding of God's glory was limited by the finite limitations of the prophets, through whom the message of glory was being communicated. They could communicate only what they themselves were capable of receiving. In these last days, God's final and completed revealing of himself "in Son" is a perfect revelation, because the Son in his own Person as the God-man perfectly communicates the excellencies of God. "Through

²³ Owen, *Hebrews*, III:90-91.

²⁴ Owen believed Paul the apostle was the author of Hebrews.

²⁵ Man's understanding of God's glory is also affected by the finite limitations of human nature and the corrupting influence of man's sin nature.

²⁶ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 11.

²⁷ Wuest, *Hebrews*, II:36.

²⁸ Brown, *Hebrews*, 29.

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Christ God becomes visible to man."²⁹ To see Jesus is to see God; to know Jesus is to know God.

and the express image of His person

The Greek word translated "express image," is *charakter*. The original meaning of this word described an engraving tool. Then, as metal coins came into use, it indicated a "die" used in minting coins. From that use it came to denote the impress or image made on the metal. The idea of moral character follows from the original meaning.³⁰ The word occurs only here in the New Testament. The incarnate Son is the "exact reproduction"³¹ of God. Jesus is the exact reflection and the perfect image of God's glory. "His being [person/nature/substance] as image and impress not only contains God's glory within it but also discloses this to the cosmos."³² Man the creature was made in God's image (an image now defaced by sin). God, however, is infinite in his person, nature, and attributes; the infinite-ness of God is not communicable. Therefore, one who is the "exact reproduction" of God must himself be God, because he must possess the incommunicable attributes of God in order to be the exact reproduction of God. The incarnate Son is God-in-humanity, being the real, physical, and continuous presence of God in the universe he created. Another thought comes with *charakter*: the word spoken by God "in Son" is a word of salvation. Therefore, "it is the humiliated and exalted Christ who bears the very stamp of God's nature."³³ To see and know Jesus is to see and know God.

The Greek word translated here as "person" (NIV: being) is the word *hupostasis*. Some have conjectured, despite the descriptions above, that Christ is a created being, a mere reflection or image, created to manifest, but not possess, God's glory. In this word that notion is refuted. The base meaning of this compound word is "to stand under," or "support." However, its scientific use was predominant in Greek as a special term for "everything that settles, hence the philosophical 'existence,' 'reality.'"³⁴ The word is used three times in Hebrews (1:3; 3:14; 11:1). In the present verse the meaning is best represented by the English "essence." The word is parallel to *doxa*, "glory" and is describing God's essence. Jesus is the *apaugasma*, brightness, of God's *doxa*, glory, and is the *charakter*, the express image, of God's *hupostasis*, essence. The *hupostasis*, "or substance, or mode of subsistence of God, is just equivalent to God himself."³⁵ When Jesus is called the *charakter* of the *hupostasis* it means "As is the Father, so is the Son."³⁶ There are three subsistences, or Persons, in the Trinity and one substance or essence: God is Father, Son, Spirit. Christ is the second Person of the Trinity and Christ is Immanuel, that is, God with us, incarnate,³⁷ God manifest in the flesh. Christ is the whole divine essence, and all the divine properties are possessed by and communicated to him.³⁸

and upholding all things by the word of His power

The incarnate Son is the Creator who maintains his creation. The Greek *phero* is here translated "upholding." This word has a broad range of meaning, from bearing a burden to governing. Because the incarnate Son is the Creator, the idea of being in charge, to direct, or to govern must predominate. Westcott

²⁹ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 11.

³⁰ *Charakter* was also used to "denote the 'distinctiveness' of a language or manner of speaking" (Kittle and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, IX, 419). God has spoken "in Son."

³¹ Wuest, *Hebrews*, II:38.

³² Kittle and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, IX:422.

³³ Bromiley, *Dictionary*, 1309.

³⁴ Kittle, VII:572.

³⁵ Brown, *Hebrews*, 30.

³⁶ Owen, *Hebrews*, III:95.

³⁷ The human nature is hypostatically united to the divine nature. Thus, Jesus Christ is visibly the character or express image of God (Gouge, *Hebrews*, I: 16).

³⁸ Gouge, *Hebrews*, I:6.

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says, "the word *pehro* is not to be understood simply of the passive support of a burden, 'for the Son is not an Atlas sustaining the dead weight of the world.' It rather expresses that 'bearing' which includes movement, progress, towards an end."³⁹ Jesus the Son of God sustains the creation and maintains it, i.e., he moves it along or governs it, to the ends he has purposed. He maintains, *phero*, all things by the word of his power. The phrase "word of his power" means his powerful word. Omnipotence is a pre-requisite to governing all creation. The word translated "all" is *panta*, and is synonymous with "all things" (*panton*), and "worlds" (*aiones*) in v. 2. The Son of God is the heir of all the things he made, and he maintains them by his powerful word. "The new clause ascribes to the Son the providential government of all created existence, which is the function of God himself."⁴⁰

when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

This is a theme the Writer will take up again in chapters nine and ten (cf. 10:12). Here, as there, the context is the worth of the incarnate Son to propitiate sin. The one who is the *hupostasis*, *apaugasma*, and *charakter* of God is the one who purged sin. In sum, these words describe the worth or merit of the Son. He must be these things, i.e., he must have an infinite worth, if the penalty and power of sin was to be permanently cancelled for all sins—past, present, future—committed by a believer. The underlying reference or context in which the reader is to understand the purging of sins is the sacrifices for sin conducted under the conditions of the Law of Moses. Under the Law, an atonement (literally "to cover") was made by an animal sacrifice for the judicial guilt pertaining to an act of sin. Thus the penalty, death, was cancelled in regard to the offeror because the penalty was (by God's grace) satisfied in the death of the animal offered as a substitute for the offeror. Faith in the revealed way of salvation—the vicarious death of the animal sacrifice—was the means by which grace applied the penalty of sin, death, to the substitute, and purified the offeror from the defilement caused by his act of sin.⁴¹ Salvation under the Law of Moses was by grace: God accepted the animal sacrifice as a substitute for the sinner; through faith: the sinner had faith in God's revealed way of salvation, the animal sacrifice. The nature of the sacrifice was such that its efficacy was limited⁴² to the act of sin for which it was intended by the believer's confession and repentance. For every act of sin the believer must in like manner bring another sacrifice. Bulls and goats could, by the grace of God, receive the sinner's guilt (by imputation), and thus suffer the sinner's penalty generated his (or her) act of sin. The recurring need for a sacrifice for each act of sin revealed the innate limitation of the sacrifices: each sacrifice covered sin once, not once for all. There was a necessity (10:4) for a once for all sacrifice (10:10-12) that could cancel the eternal penalty (separation from God by the second death, Revelation 20:15) due a person as a sinner by nature (Adam's sin nature inherited through procreation, Genesis 5:3) and as a son of Adam (bearing Adam's guilt by imputation, Genesis 5:8ff; Romans 5:12-21). Such a sacrifice is found in the Son.

The nature of the Son is of such infinite worth that his blood (death) can permanently deliver the believer from the penalty and the power of sin.⁴³ (This is one of the main arguments of the epistle.) The Greek word translated "purged" is *katharismos*, meaning "purification." The text reads that Jesus made a purification of, or for (not from), sin. Sin was the great uncleanness of mankind. Jesus put away sin. He makes clean those who have faith in him as their personal Savior.

- "The writer states succinctly 'having made cleansing for sins.' The aorist participle designates the

³⁹ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 13, 14.

⁴⁰ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 14.

⁴¹ The believer's faith in the merit of the vicarious sacrifice was faith in the testimony of God, e.g., Leviticus 4, therefore it was faith in God himself as Savior, for God alone, by grace, gave value or merit to the sacrifice.

⁴² The merit of a sacrifice is established by God's decree. Only the propitiation made by Christ has infinite merit. The merit of an animal sacrifice was limited because the animal was not an exact substitute, since its nature was animal, not human.

⁴³ The saving death and resurrection of Christ deliver the believer from the penalty, power, pleasure, and (ultimately) the presence of sin.

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purification as a definite act performed once for all. The middle voice indicates that the Son made purification for sins *in himself*, clearly relating the act of purification to his sacrifice. By that one action, the defilement of sins was removed forever. The genitive [case of the noun *katharismos*] must accordingly be construed as objective, implying that the sins were purged away by the death of the Son. Hebrews 1:3 does not designate Jesus as 'priest.' But in this pregnant clause the writer strongly implies that God's unique Son is also a priest."⁴⁴

Jesus, by his actions and in his own person, made an full expiation of the believer's sin. The Old Testament word used to describe purification through sacrifice was atonement. An atonement was a covering of sin. In figurative terms, when God looked at the sinner, he did not see the sin, but the blood (death) of the sacrifice that covered, or atoned, for the sin. The purification of sin that Jesus made was not an atonement. Jesus was made to be, and thus he did make, a propitiation for sin. The difference is significant in two ways. For an atonement the sinner was required to bring a sacrifice for his sin. The sinner laid his hands on the sacrifice and confessed his sin, thereby imputing his sin to the sacrifice. The sinner killed the sacrifice, which was an implicit confession he was guilty of his sin and worthy of death. The sacrifice suffered death in the sinner's place, making an atonement: covering the sin with the death of the sacrifice. But the propitiation Christ made was done wholly by God on behalf of the sinner. God declared the sinner guilty. God brought the proper sacrifice, Jesus. God imputed the sinner's sin to Jesus. Jesus himself willingly laid down his life and suffered death in the sinner's place. Propitiation is what God did through Jesus to satisfy himself, his laws, his holiness and his justice concerning the payment of the penalty due the crime and guilt of sin.⁴⁵ Second, an atonement was limited in its scope and efficiency. An atonement under the Law of Moses was effective for and limited to the sin or sins confessed by the sinner immediately prior to killing the sacrifice. When the sinner again sinned, he must needs bring another sacrifice intended for that new act of sin. The propitiation made by Christ is permanent, effective against all sins. Jesus' death on the cross, when applied to the believer by his faith, permanently delivers the believer from the penalty of all sins past, present, and future. Jesus' blood—his sacrificial death on the cross—effects a change in the believer that delivers the believer from the guilt, penalty, and dominating power and pleasure of sin.⁴⁶

We should not be confused by the seeming change in how God dealt with the guilt and penalty of sin between the two Testaments. The basis for salvation, from Adam forward, has always been the propitiation made by Christ at a specific moment in history. In eternity past God made a decision to save sinners (Ephesians 1:4), through the propitiation to be made by Christ in history. Because Christ's propitiation was decreed in eternity past, the occurrence of the historical event was a settled fact effective for all eternity. Any and every believer is saved because God's decree in eternity past made the historical act of Christ (his propitiation) the only basis for salvation. The infinite merit of that historical act of propitiation is applied by a believer's content of faith as the sole basis for salvation for all believers from Adam forward. The individual believer's salvation (from Adam forward) is effected by God's grace in the believer's historical present through his or her historical act of faith. What has changed in the ages of man is the way faith applies the merit of Christ to the believer's sin; more simply, God has changed the content of faith from age to age according to his purpose, plans and processes. The content of Enoch's faith (walk with God) was not the same as Noah's (get in the ark); which was not the same as Abraham's (believe in the promise); and not the same as Israel under the law (bring the right sacrifice). The content of faith since Christ's ascension is not the same as under the Law of Moses. However the basis or foundation for salvation is exactly the same in every age, being the propitiation made by Christ. The difference from age to age is that the means of faith used in the past (to express the faith that covered the guilt and penalty of sin) was designedly limited in scope and efficiency to each one act of sin, so that Christ, in his historical act of propitiation, would have the preeminence as the one

⁴⁴ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 15.

⁴⁵ Propitiation is a "satisfaction." God satisfied his justice concerning the judicial guilt and penalty of sin by applying that penalty to Jesus. In imputing the guilt and accepting the penalty, Jesus fully satisfied God's justice. Jesus not only made a propitiation, he himself is the only propitiation for sin.

⁴⁶ Sin has "no more dominion," Romans 6:14, meaning the believer no longer leads a life of habitual sin, and has the power to choose not to commit an act of sin.

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Redeemer and one Mediator between God and man who permanently eliminated the guilt and penalty of all the believer's past, present, and future sins.

The book of Hebrews compares the content of faith required under the Law of Moses to faith in Christ's historically completed act of propitiation. The limited efficacy that the sacrifices had under the Law was derivative, based in the propitiation made by Christ, but by God's decree only Christ's propitiation has the full efficacy (merit) necessary to permanently remit the guilt and penalty of sin. The Writer of Hebrews will argue that since the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, has historically made and completed his act of propitiation, the need for further sacrifice, and thus for the Law of Moses, has been superseded and eliminated. The new content of faith and way of salvation is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus had made a cleansing of sin, he sat down (cf. Psalm 110:1). The metaphor, to sit, means to cease from one's labors. The Writer is again looking ahead to his argument (cf. 10:12-14). The purging of sin accomplished by Jesus was of such a character that no more purging was required. The priests under the Law of Moses stood ready to offer the next sacrifice: there were no chairs in the temple. When Jesus had completed his offering of himself for sin, the nature of that offering was in itself so complete that no more offering was needed or could be made. Looking to the immediate context (vv. 1-3), the worth or merit of the offering, Jesus himself, was infinite because Jesus' worth is infinite. The saving word God spoke "in Son" is the word of permanent forgiveness and deliverance from sin. No more word from God is needed, thus the living Word of God has sat down. He has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The "right hand" is figurative of approval and blessing, and (in keeping with the context) of inheritance. God was "well pleased" in all things Jesus had accomplished. Looking ahead, the works of Jesus merit an inheritance, 1:5, 13; 2:13. The term "the Majesty" is a synonym for God as the exalted ruler of his creation. Jesus sits at the right hand of "the Majesty," implying that he is co-ruler with God. The figure is not of a subordinate throne (on which Jesus sits) beside or lower than God's throne. Rather, the reader should imagine a long and wide throne, on which Father and Son (and Spirit) sit side-by side, together enthroned as ruler of creation. The figure of Christ sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high indicates the exaltation and supremacy of Christ.⁴⁷

4 having become⁴⁸ so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

This verse concludes the introductory section and introduces the next subject. As the epistle proceeds, Christ and the work of salvation he accomplished will be compared to angels, the covenant of the Law of Moses, and the priests and sacrifices of the Law of Moses. The comparison to the Law of Moses and its priests and sacrifices is understandable, as that system contained the content of saving faith for certain Old Testament saints. The new covenant in Jesus is the content of saving faith⁴⁹ in this age (the time in history between Christ's ascension and his second advent). The Writer's intention throughout his epistle is to show the superiority of the Gospel over the Law. He begins, in this verse, with a comparison to angels. To the modern mind, not completely familiar with or trusting in the Scripture presentation of angels, this comparison might seem dubious at best, meaningless at worst. To the first readers of the epistle, and to modern Christians believing in Scripture, the comparison to angels is necessary.

This is not the place for an extended explanation of angels. In brief, angels are a race of sentient beings that God created and suited for life in the spirit plane of existence, whereas man was created to live in the material plane of existence. Angels live in the spirit plane, although they can move between their natural home and the material plane. The race of angels is divided into two opposing camps. These are the holy angels who never sinned, and the fallen angels that did sin, were cast out of God's presence, and are known

⁴⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 50.

⁴⁸ The KJV reads "being made." The Greek word is *ginomai*, "to become," not *poieo*, "to make or create."

⁴⁹ "The basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations," Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* 115, emphasis is Ryrie's.

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as demons. Mankind, then and now, worshiped and continues to worship angels. The worship of unfallen angels is simply ignorance, for they worship God and instruct others to join them in worshiping God (e.g., Revelation 19:10; 22:9). The worship of fallen angels is satanically inspired, and occurs under many forms and names.

The ancient world strongly believed in supernatural beings. The Gentiles, not knowing the Scripture, gave them many names. To the Jew and Christian well-versed in Scripture, they were known as angels. The Writer is concerned with his Hebrew and Gentile readers whose religious background (prior to salvation) led them to regard angels very highly. To some, they were powerful beings worthy of reverence (cf. Colossians 2:18). Scripture teaches that the angels played an active role in giving the Law of Moses, Galatians 3:19. If angels were part of the divine origin of the Law, and they were, then who was Jesus to usurp the Law? The word spoken "in Son" might complete and fulfill the word spoken "by the prophets," but is the word spoken "in Son" superior to the word "appointed through angels?" Some came to believe that God could speak to man only through the intermediate agency of an angel. Who then was this Jesus to circumvent the divinely ordained means of God's revelation? The argument has no merit for those who realize that the Law, the word to the prophets, and the word spoken "in Son" have the same divine origin. To others this was a powerful argument to return to the Law of Moses, or perhaps to pagan forms of worship. God also spoke through angels; perhaps the word given through angels is the better word? Was Jesus an angel to whom man should give heed? The Writer will show that Jesus is superior in every way to the angels. God the Son is in his essence superior to all created beings, and the Son of God is exalted above all created beings. Therefore, salvation in his name—Christianity—is superior to the Law, even though the Law was received by the direction of angels (Acts 7:53). The Son brought salvation, but the angels are servants of those who receive salvation. The Son is superior in every way!

The Writer begins with the "name." The Son has, by inheritance, obtained a more excellent name than that of the angels. The Writer does not mean the word-name "Jesus." Nor is he speaking of God the Son. The reference to "name" is a reference to reputation, or office. When my Bible study class thinks of "James" they picture in their minds one who writes commentaries and teaches them Scripture. The "name" represents the person. Throughout the Writer's introduction he has viewed God the Son as the incarnate Son of God in his mediatorial offices.

- We must "distinguish between what is said of him in his essential being, and what is predicated of him in his official character . . . By his 'essential being' is meant what he always was and must ever remain as God the Son. By his 'official character' reference is made to what may be postulated of him as Mediator, that is, as God incarnate, the God-man. He is the same blessed person in each case, but looked at in different relationships."⁵⁰

Jesus is the God-man who is the revelator of God's word, the Savior of man, and the inheritor of the promises. As I noted in v. 2, God the Son is the theocratic heir of the promises made to the Old and New Testament saints. As v. 5 will reveal, the "name" indicates Jesus as the "Son." God has many messengers (the meaning of *angelos*, angel). He has many adopted sons and daughters, the believers in Christ.⁵¹ He has, however, only one Son. The more excellent name which Jesus has obtained, the name in which he inherits all things, is the name of Son. This refers not to his essence as God the Son, but to his office as the Son of God, the incarnate God-man, who was born, lived on earth, suffered and died for our sins, was resurrected for our justification, and has ascended to forever make intercession for us as our high priest. (But, we are getting ahead of the immediate goals of the passage.) Thus, to use a more modern illustration, Jesus is as superior to the angels as the boss's Son is superior to an employee, or the heir to a household servant. "Their name is created spirits. His name is the only begotten Son of God."⁵² The servant is appreciated, but the Son is all-important.

⁵⁰ Pink, *Hebrews*, 42.

⁵¹ Believers are adopted sons (men and women), Romans 8:14, through their relationship with the only-begotten Son, Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:5.

⁵² Brown, *Hebrews*, 41.

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Some commentators speculate that the more excellent “name” referred to in this passage is not the title “Son.” They note that the word *onoma*, “name,”⁵³ was initially used as a reverent reference to God, and came to be used by the early Christians as a designation for Jesus. Guthrie is representative of this view: “what the Son inherited was the title ‘the name,’ a designation or rank formerly reserved for God.”⁵⁴ Yet, the general thrust or theme of the passage, 1:5-13, seems to be the exaltation of the theocratic Son, i.e. the Son of God who is the Messiah who brings the salvation promised through Abraham and inherits the kingdom promised to David. The Son, preincarnate or incarnate, is always God the Son. He need not inherit a title identifying him as God. God was, is, and always will be Father, Son, Spirit. What is in view in Hebrews is God the Son’s offices as the incarnate Son of God. The “name” he has inherited is that of the Son. The “Son” is a title insofar as it refers to his person and works: the one who, through his birth, life, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension, learned obedience, suffered death, entered beyond the veil, received the promises, and brought salvation as the incarnate Son.

5 For to which of the angels did He ever say: “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You”? And again: “I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son”?

In the following verses (5-13) the Writer draws from seven Old Testament passages to prove his theme. These are (in order of appearance), Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14; Deuteronomy 32:43 (LXX);⁵⁵ Psalm 104:4; 45:6-7; 102:25-27; 110:1.⁵⁶ Throughout Hebrews, the Writer makes extensive use of the Old Testament Scripture, drawing from passages that, in their original context, seem to have no reference to Jesus. For example, Psalm 45:6 was addressed to an Old Testament king. Psalm 102:25-26 concerns God’s creative activity. Yet, all the New Testament writers make a similar and extensive use of the Old Testament to explain the new covenant God has made in the person and works of Jesus. Why did they, and the Writer of Hebrews, do this? Raymond Brown notes that the New Testament writers had a “profound conviction that the Old Testament is a Christ-centered book.”⁵⁷ They had a Holy Spirit given conviction that their scriptures described realities beyond those present in the immediate historical circumstances under which they were first given.

- When the Writer of Hebrews comes to the [Old Testament scriptures], he looks beyond their initial meaning and, without denying the validity of that original context, extracts a further and more important message from the words. It is not that he superimposes on the text a meaning that it was not intended to convey; he brings out a truth already there. He believes that Christ is everywhere present in the Old Testament, though that might not necessarily have been discerned by the original writers and readers.⁵⁸

The New Testament writers took this view of the Old Testament from Christ, e.g., Luke 24:27. Their belief in the continuing relevance of the Old Testament is reflected in the use they made of it to preach and teach salvation in Jesus Christ. A final thought. When other New Testament writers quote from the Old Testament, they often make reference to the human author. The Writer of Hebrews “quotes the words as coming from the lips of God himself. . . . these words of God contain a divine depth of meaning which the human mind never could have grasped or expounded.”⁵⁹ When one finds the New Testament writers making this use of the Old Testament Scripture, he should readily accept their use as an inspired interpretation of the Old in the New. The Writer, then, intends to make use of the Old Testament to demonstrate the truth of his proposition

⁵³ The text of 1:4 is without the definite article, being simply “name.”

⁵⁴ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 50.

⁵⁵ LXX is an abbreviation indicating the Greek version of the Old Testament. “LXX” is the Roman way of writing the number 70. According to tradition, 70 Jewish scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek about the 3rd century B.C.

⁵⁶ Hagner, *Hebrews*, 47.

⁵⁷ Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, 36.

⁵⁸ Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, 37.

⁵⁹ Murray, *The Holiest of All*, 49.

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that "The Son is greater than the angels because God has given him a higher status than theirs."⁶⁰

The Jews had produced extensive writings speculating on the nature, names, and mission of the angels. Rather than give some validity to these writings by arguing against them, the Writer goes to the genuine source of truth concerning angels. He begins by asking a question: "For to which of the angels did God ever say: 'You are my son, today I have begotten you'? And again: 'I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a son'?" The answer, as the original readers well knew, is "None." The Scripture quoted is from the following:

- Psalm 2:7, "I will declare the decree: YHWH has said to me, 'You are my son, Today I have begotten you.'"
- 2 Samuel 7:14, "I will be his Father, and he shall be my son."

The quotation from Psalm 2 is in reference to the Lord's anointed who shall rule the nations. The immediate reference could be to king David and his triumph over Israel's enemies. The most usual interpretation, Jewish and Christian, is that Psalm 2 refers to the Lord's anointed (2:2), meaning the Messiah.⁶¹ (Those Rabbis who refer it to David may cite 2 Samuel 5:17.⁶²) The Writer of Hebrews uses Psalm 2 to establish his point that the Son alone is the only begotten Son of God.⁶³ God has not called an angel his begotten Son; a truth also reflected in John 3:16. Angels are created beings, and their creaturely essence is a "substance" or essence one may call angelic (compare man's essence: humanity), that was created by the Creator out of nothing because his divine will caused it to exist. The incarnate Son of God possesses two natures, increate⁶⁴ deity and created humanity. The term begotten is used to identify God incarnate in humanity. Although the humanity was created, the Person was not, and it was the increate Person who joined humanity to himself. Therefore, the Son incarnate is not created but *monogenes*, begotten, a compound word from *monos*, meaning only, and *genos*, meaning kind. Put together *monogenes* means "one of a kind," or "unique."⁶⁵ Angels are God's created sons.⁶⁶ No angel may be called God's son in the sense that the Son incarnate is God's begotten Son.⁶⁷ Therefore the Son of God, Jesus the Christ, is superior to the angels, as uniquely God's one of a kind Son.

The quote from 2 Samuel supports this conclusion. To be God's Son is a position and a title indicating a relationship. All created beings are God's creatures, but not all are sons. Scripturally speaking, to be a Son of God means a man or woman has a saving relationship with God. The sinner, man or woman, becomes a son—is made to be a son—when by faith in God as personal Savior he or she is adopted as God's son (cf. John 1:12). All angels were created with the intent they be sons, but only the unfallen angels have maintained this

⁶⁰ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 104.

⁶¹ The word "messiah" is the English transliteration of the Hebrew *mashiach*, which means "anointed." The word "Christ" is the Greek equivalent (*christos*) of the Hebrew *mashiach*. *Mashiach* was the term used to describe one who had been anointed to an office, such as priest, or prophet. The use of *mashiach* in Psalm 2:2 is defined by the Psalm: the Son of God anointed to be the ruler of the earth, thus the One who is uniquely the Anointed of God.

⁶² Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, 114.

⁶³ There are Old and New Testament references to the "sons of God": Genesis 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Matthew 5:9; Luke 20:36; Romans 8:14, 19; Galatians 3:26. With the clear exception of Job 38:7, the reference is to human beings.

⁶⁴ Increate: existing without having been created.

⁶⁵ Theologically, *monogenes* is thought to refer to the eternal sonship of God the Son, or his incarnation as the Son of God. The second view corresponds to John's use. Only John uses the term in reference to Jesus: John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9. The other uses are: Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; Hebrews 11:17. John developed *monogenes* into a term identifying the eternal Word-Light-Son in his incarnation. The Hebrews Writer uses Psalm 2 to make the same observation.

⁶⁶ Believers are adopted sons of God, Romans 8:14; Ephesians 1:5.

⁶⁷ In the words of the ancient creeds: "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father . . . incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man" Nicene Creed, AD 381; "begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead . . . born of the virgin Mary, according to the Manhood" Symbol of Chalcedon, AD 451.

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relationship with God. The fallen angels lost their position as sons when they sinned.⁶⁸ God is Father to certain men and angels because of their salvific relationship with God. Their son-ship began at a certain moment in time that was relevant to their faith in God. The relationship between Jesus and God is unique. In their Trinitarian essence there is an eternal relationship between these Persons. That eternal relationship is the basis of the Father-Son relationship of the incarnate Son toward God. The Son is the only-begotten God incarnate, that holy one (Luke 1:35), the Son of God. In reference to the 2 Samuel 7:12-16 passage, there is a promise to king David of earthly heirs, and an eternal heir. The eternal son/heir, v. 13, is a reference to Messiah, the heir of David's kingdom, v. 12. In one breath, the Writer of Hebrews proclaims Jesus as the only begotten Son of God the Father, and as the son/heir of the Messianic promises. He is the only begotten Son and the theocratic Son, the one who brings salvation and inherits the kingdom.

6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world

This is a most difficult verse from the standpoint of grammatical interpretation. How one understands the first few words will determine the interpretation of the verse. With this thought in mind, let us proceed. The first words of the verse are "*hotan de palin eisago*." Literally, "When but again he brings." The question is whether *palin* (again) should be connected to *hotan* (when) or to *eisago* (he brings). This question has divided commentators beginning with the earliest interpretations of Hebrews up to modern times. A comparison of several modern versions shows the translation choices:

- KJV: And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world
- NKJV: But when He again brings the firstborn into the world
- NIV: And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world
- HCSB: When He again brings His firstborn into the world

The choice of translation affects one's view concerning the timing of the angelic worship, "Let all the angels of God worship him." If one translates the text as, "when he again brings," that translation leads the interpreter to the conclusion that the verse is referring to an appearance of Christ subsequent to his incarnation. The interpretative choices are the resurrection, Christ's ascension and subsequent worship by the angels in heaven, or his second advent. However, *palin* (again) may also mean "furthermore" or "on the other hand." If one translates *palin* according to these meanings, the translation would read, "And furthermore, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says," etc. The meaning of "furthermore" connects the quote in v. 6 with the quoted verses in v. 5. "It seems preferable, therefore, to construe *palin* as a connective, following the interpretative tradition of the Old Latin, and the Syriac versions. Its force is continuative ('and again he says') or mildly adversative ('but he says')."⁶⁹ Using this translation, the interpretative choices are quite different. The verse is not referring to a second appearance of Christ, but to a chain of Scripture the Writer of Hebrews is using to exalt the Son above the angels. This chain of references regarding Christ's superiority to the angels continues through verse 13. If we look ahead, we find this same usage in 1:5; 2:13; 4:5, 7; and 10:30. The use of *palin* as a continuative is the Writer's habit.⁷⁰

What, then, is the event to which the Writer is referring? That is, what was the event in the history of the Son when God instructed the angels to worship the Son of God? The emphasis of Hebrews is the Person and works of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. The question the Writer continually answers is "What is the relationship of Jesus toward the persons and events of the Old Testament Scripture?" More simply, Jesus is "better than" angels, Abraham, Moses, the Mosaic Law, the priesthood, the sacrifices, etc. In the current context, Jesus is better than the angels. In the context of his deity, God the Son, this could never be a

⁶⁸ It may seem unusual to think of unfallen angels as "saved," because they never sinned. However, when these angels did not follow Satan in his sin it was by grace through faith. God gave them grace to never sin. I am using "saved" to reflect their preservation in grace.

⁶⁹ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 26.

⁷⁰ *Palin* occurs 10 times in Hebrews. Only in 5:12; 6:1, 6 is it used in the sense of repetition.

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question. However, in the context of his deity joined to humanity, is the Son of God superior to the angels? This is the question the Writer is answering for his readers. Chapter 2:9 is especially significant in this regard. As Jesus the Christ the Son was made a little lower than the angels, becoming fully human. Could the angels still worship him? Did the assumption of humanity degrade his deity? The Writer answers these doubts. The Son is God and man, so he never ceases to be God: he is worthy of worship. The angels were instructed to worship the Son, even though, in his incarnation, he was made a little lower than the angels. This understanding answers the question of when that instruction took place.⁷¹ When God the Son became the incarnate Son of God, the angels were instructed to continue their worship. The Writer of Hebrews is amplifying (or summarizing) the testimony of Scripture regarding their worship of the God-man. In particular, I am thinking of Luke 2:11-14. Jesus, the baby in the manger, was still the "Lord," according to the angels. When God brought the firstborn into the world, the angelic hosts worshiped him.

This brings us to the meaning of the word "firstborn." The word "firstborn" is often used in Scripture to indicate priority. Israel is the firstborn of the nations, Exodus 4:22. Jacob, physically Isaac's second born son, received the blessing of the firstborn, becoming the inheritor, Genesis 27:1-37. Romans 8:29 describes Jesus as the "firstborn" among many brethren. The context is the Spirit's work to conform the believer to the character of the Son, and that work began in ages past, beginning, at the least, with Adam's son Abel. Yet, regardless of historical timing, Jesus is the "firstborn" because he is the one to whom all others must conform—he has the primacy. In Hebrews 1:6, "firstborn is a title expressing priority in rank."⁷² Jesus is pre-eminently the firstborn.

- "Our author's designation of the Son as the *firstborn* carries important doctrinal implications. To begin with, it carries on the thought of the immediately preceding verse in which the Mediator is assigned the dignity of the divinely begotten Son: as the unique Son he is also the firstborn, and as the firstborn he has precedence over all others who, in a secondary and non-essential sense, may at times be addressed as sons, whether angels or men. As the first-born, moreover, he is the heir (as he has already been described in v. 2 above), to whom the birthright, 'the right of the first-born,' with all its privilege and prestige, belongs."⁷³

Therefore, the condescension of God the Son in becoming man did not effect his dignity or pre-eminence. To become man, God the Son must come "into the world." In my view this phrase refers to his incarnation. The Greek word translated world is *oikoumene*, a word that means "to inhabit." The word usually refers to the earth as habitable or inhabited. Sometimes, as in Acts 17:6, it refers to the speaker's "world," that is, to his culture, or the circumstances of his life in the world. In Hebrews 2:5, the meaning is the age, i.e., the economy and culture, the circumstances of life, in which the earth's inhabitants are living during Messiah's millennial reign. Here though, Hebrews 1:6, the reference is to God entering the material plane of existence through his joining of humanity to his deity. It is the *oikoumene* because it is the world of man, versus the "world" of heaven. God entered the world of man the sinner as a man, subject to the conditions of the world, sin excepted. The contrast between the two "worlds" informs our understanding of his pre-eminence, and the angelic worship due him. He came into man's world as a man, but he retained his deity (he remained God), his dignity (the only begotten Son), and his pre-eminence (firstborn).

He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

A further difficulty in understanding this verse is that the source for the quotation is uncertain. The meaning of the verse is plain. The condescension of God the Son in his incarnation, which required the laying aside of the outward manifestation of his deity, did not affect his essential dignity as God, nor his pre-eminence as the Son. In the current context regarding angels, he never ceases to be their Lord. Jesus, the

⁷¹ I do not for a moment believe the angels had to be so instructed. These words are for man's sake, not angels. The angels knew who Jesus was in his essential nature. In being incarnate, he laid aside the outward manifestations of his deity (Philippians 2:5-8), but the Son of God never ceased to be God the Son.

⁷² Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 26.

⁷³ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 59.

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incarnate God-man, the Son of God, is superior to the angels. As one of his “proofs” that Jesus is superior to angels, the Writer brings forth this verse of Scripture. The problem is, no definite Old Testament Scripture matches this quote. The difficulty has two possible solutions. One, the quote is from the LXX version of Deuteronomy 32:43. The Hebrew version of this Scripture reads,

- “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people; for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and render vengeance to his adversaries; he will provide atonement for his land and his people.”

The Greek version reads,

- “Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let 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.”

In defense of the LXX view, the New Testament writers often made use of the LXX in their Old Testament quotations. Jesus also quoted from the LXX. This does not sanctify the LXX above the Hebrew version. Rather, it was the version the majority of Jews and Gentile proselytes were most familiar with. One hundred years ago preachers preached the word from the Authorized (King James) version, because that was the version their congregation used, knew and understood (although other versions existed). Today, about 90% of all Bibles sold are in the New International Version translation. Because it is the version most used by their congregation, it is the version from which most preachers preach. As with the variations to be found between modern versions, differences in translation and variations from text to text are not an indictment against the inspiration of the Scripture. The original writings were inspired. The copies and translations have been preserved by the God in a condition that makes them trustworthy communicators of God's very words. The differences are minor and unimportant to any doctrine. One may trust that the translation he or she is using authentically, accurately and credibly communicates God's word. If the Writer of Hebrews is using the LXX text and translation of Deuteronomy 32:43, then his inspired use of this text indicates it communicates spiritual realities. The verse, in its Old Testament context, has a primary reference to worshiping God. Its use in Hebrews to refer to Christ conforms to similar uses of other Old Testament Scripture.

The second solution to the origin of this verse is that it expresses or summarizes truth found elsewhere in the Bible. This is not unusual in the New Testament.⁷⁴ For example, Matthew 2:15 identifies Hosea 11:1 as a prophecy relating to Jesus (cf. Numbers 24:8). However, an examination of Hosea indicates this was not a prophecy in its original context. Matthew's inspired understanding of the Hosea passage applies Hosea's words to Jesus. In so doing, he is using the Old Testament Scripture to help prove his point: Jesus of Nazareth meets all the prophetic requirements to be the Messiah of Israel. Matthew 2:23 is more to the point. There is no one Old Testament source declaring that Jesus “shall be called a Nazarene.” In fact, the city of Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament. Matthew is not referring to one prophet, but the general tenor of all the prophets, which indicates Messiah in his first advent will be humble in his person and rejected by his people. France comments:

- “It has been suggested that Matthew saw in the obscurity of Nazareth the fulfillment of Old Testament indications of a humble and rejected Messiah; for Jesus to be known by the derogatory epithet *Nazoraïos* (cf. John 1:46) was not compatible with the expected royal dignity of the Messiah, and thus fulfilled such passages as Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Zechariah 11:4-14.”⁷⁵

Matthew uses the word *Nazoraïos*, “he shall be called a *Nazoraïos*” to indicate his humble origins and coming rejection by the Jewish people. First century Christians would have caught this sense, cf. Acts 24:5, the “Nazarene sect”, a designation meant to demean the Christian community. As Carson points out, “Matthew is not saying that a particular Old Testament prophet foretold that Messiah would live in Nazareth; he is saying that the Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messiah would be despised.”⁷⁶ Another example would be Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” a truth not elsewhere

⁷⁴ Compare the connection the Magi made, Matthew 2:2; Numbers 24:17.

⁷⁵ France, *Matthew*, TNTC, p. 89.

⁷⁶ Carson, *Matthew*, p. 97.

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explicitly stated, but in Hebrews used to summarize doctrine concerning the deity of the Son of God.

The same summarization of truth expressed elsewhere may be said of the current verse, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." For example, Psalm 97:7, "Worship him [YHWH], all you gods" (the word translated "gods" is *elohim*, and is sometimes used in the Old Testament to refer to angels). The name "YHWH" is the Old Testament name for the Trinity. This Old Testament verse commanding worship of YHWH is as applicable to the Jesus the incarnate Son of God as it is to the pre-incarnate God the Son. The only difference between God the Son and the Son of God is the joining of humanity to deity. The point of all Scripture regarding the nature of Jesus the Christ is that the joining of humanity to God's deity did not humanize the deity nor deify the humanity. Rather, the one person, Jesus the God-man, is as truly God as he is truly man, and therefore he is due worship. The Writer summarizes this truth as regards the angels: let all the angels worship Jesus the God-man.

7 And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire."

Continuing his chain of evidence, the Writer quotes from the LXX version of Psalm 104:4. The Psalm literally reads (LXX), "who [God] makes his messengers (or angels) winds, and his ministers a flaming fire." The meaning of the Psalm concerns the result of God's creative activities. The winds and the lightening (probable meaning of "fire") were created to serve God. Psalm 104 parallels the account of creation in Genesis 1:3-31, and v. 4 corresponds to the creative activity of day two, when the wind blew and divided the waters (the water on the earth from the water in the atmosphere). Wind and lightening are very appropriate to that activity. Hebrews uses this verse from the LXX, translating *angelos*, "messenger," as "angels," and *pneuma*, "wind or breath," as "spirits."⁷⁷ The translations "angels" and "spirits" are appropriate to both the New Testament and to Hebrews. The point is not that angels are like the wind or fire, nor that they are or can be formed to be wind or fire, still less that they control earth's weather. The point is that, just as God created the wind and lightening to be his servants, even so, the angels were created to be his servants. In their relationship to the Son, they remain servants. The Son was made, in the process of time, a little lower than the angels in his humanity, but in his whole person, the God-man, he remained far above them.

8 But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom."

The incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, will be lifted up to a perpetual throne, in contrast ("but") to the angels who were created by the Son (1:1, 2) to be servants. God says to the angels, "Go here and do that." To the Son he said, "You are God." This is another quotation, Psalm 45:6, 7 that extends into v. 9, below. The Psalm reads,

- "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions."

The Writer rightly applies the meaning and force of the original. The Psalmist is referring God as the king of Israel. The immediate historical reference is probably to king Solomon. But, what was in the Psalmist's mind? Not Solomon as deity, for that idolatry never occurred in Israel. One may also dismiss the thought the Psalmist was referring to the incarnation, for, although the idea is present as early as Genesis 3:15, the incarnation of God in the Messiah was not clearly revealed to the Old Testament saints. However, the idea of the coming Messiah was known.

- "I conclude, therefore, that in the use of such language the Psalmist was carried beyond himself, and that he was led to employ it by a twofold conviction in his mind, the conviction that God was the king of Israel, combined with the conviction that the Messiah, the true king, who was to be in reality what

⁷⁷ The Hebrew is *malak*, messenger/angel, and *ruwach*, wind/spirit.

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others were but in figure, was the Son of David."⁷⁸

The Writer recognizes the Psalmist's intention and uses the verse to proclaim the superiority of the Son. Bruce's comment is instructive:

- "To Hebrew poets and prophets a prince of the house of David was the viceregent of Israel's God; he belonged to a dynasty to which God had made special promises bound up with the accomplishment of his purpose in the world. Besides, what was only partially true of any of the historic rulers of David's line, or even of David himself, would be fully realized in its fulness when that Son of David appeared in whom all the promises and ideals associated with that dynasty would be embodied. And now at length the Messiah had appeared. In a fuller sense than was possible for David or any of his successors in ancient days, this Messiah can be addressed not merely as David's Son (v. 5) but actually as God, for he is both the Messiah of David's line and also the effulgence of God's glory and the very image of his being."⁷⁹

The Psalmist, inspired by the Spirit, intended his psalm to be about David's greater and coming Son. The Hebrews Writer, living after the days Messiah's advent, applies the Psalm to the incarnate Son to further his argument that the angels are finite creatures subject to their creator. The Messiah, the God-man Christ Jesus, is their Creator, and his reign is forever. His kingdom is the one that endures forever and is the only righteous kingdom. "*He* has a throne; *they* have a station before it. He is the ruler; they are but subjects. His rule is not temporary but perpetual."⁸⁰

The holy unfallen angels are righteous because God has imputed righteousness to them and by grace preserves them in their righteousness. Jesus Christ the Messiah, who is the very image of God, is intrinsically righteous. The righteousness of his kingdom has its origin and source in him. His righteousness is seen in his offices of Mediator and Savior, demonstrated by his works during his earthly ministry. Though tempted he was without sin. His temptations were not only to gross evil (Matthew 4:9-10), but took more subtle forms (Matthew 4:3-4), and came also from friends, (Matthew 16:22-23). Compare Isaiah 11:5, which applies to Messiah during both advents. The scepter (emblem of royal authority) of the Son's kingdom "is not one merely of power, arbitrarily exercised, but a 'righteous' one."⁸¹ Messiah will do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, cf. 1 Kings 15:5. The word translated "righteousness" has the basic meaning of "straight," and it is this meaning that gives relevance to the figure. A crooked scepter would be a symbol of an unrighteous government. A righteous, that is a straight, scepter indicates the Son's rule is strictly and invariably just.⁸² "All the laws of his Gospel are righteous, holy, just, full of goodness and truth, and all his administrations of grace, mercy, justice, rewards and punishments, according to the rules, promises and threats of it, in the conversion, pardon, sanctification, trials, afflictions, chastisements, and preservation of his elect; in his convincing, hardening and destruction of his enemies; all are righteous, holy, unblameable, and good."⁸³

9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness

This particular style of Hebrew poetry (this verse is continuation of the quote from Psalm 45) brings together two opposing or contrasting ideas to enable the reader to gain a fuller understanding of the subject. In this instance, the opposing ideas are righteousness and lawlessness. The subject is the moral character of the incarnate Son. The immediate frame of reference is his life and ministry at his first advent. How he

⁷⁸ Perowne, 371.

⁷⁹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 60.

⁸⁰ Brown, *Hebrews*, 56 (emphasis is Brown's).

⁸¹ Pink, *Hebrews*, 60.

⁸² Brown, *Hebrews*, 57.

⁸³ Owen, *Hebrews*, III:184.

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conducted himself reveals the character of his coming kingdom when he fulfills his office of Messiah the king at his second advent. The Son loves righteousness. Believers struggle with their sin nature and may often perform their godly duties without enthusiasm. The incarnate Son loves godliness. He does God's will with joy; his is a voluntary obedience that looks forward to acting righteously and pleasing God with his obedience (cf. Psalm 119:54, 97). When the Scripture says the Son loves righteousness, it means his soul has a positive inclination toward righteousness in thought and will, and a genuine delight in making every act conform to God's holy standard of moral character and action.⁸⁴

At this point, I believe a brief discussion of "righteousness" will be helpful. The term "righteous" means to be right, fair, and just. At its heart it is a description of moral character. For the believer in the God of the Bible, the definition of "righteous" must be based in the character of God. "Righteousness is that attribute by which God's nature is seen to be the perfect standard of what is right."⁸⁵ The term "righteous" is used in two contexts in the Scripture. The first relates to the state of the soul in regard to salvation. The soul is either in a state of sin or a state of righteousness. The sinner is separated from God by his sin nature. He is not righteous. God's holiness demands his justice punish the sinner for his sin, Romans 6:23, the wages (or just due) of sin is death. When the sinner has faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ, God pronounces the sinner just or righteous: the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer. That is, God declares that the claims of justice against the sinner, so far as God is concerned, are satisfied on behalf of the sinner by the death and resurrection of Christ, so that the saved sinner cannot now be justly condemned.⁸⁶ The sinner with saving faith in Christ is declared by God to be righteous because of his faith. This is the righteousness of salvation. In this first sense, righteousness is the saved sinner's standing before God by reason of his saving faith in Christ.

The Writer of Hebrews, however, has a different view of righteousness in mind. He is thinking of moral acts, not moral standing. The moral standing of the Son is intrinsic, he is the God-man. What is in view in Hebrews is the moral character of the life and ministry of the incarnate Son. His acts are that he "loved righteousness and hated lawlessness." In the context of actions, righteousness is behavior toward God and man that is in keeping with the moral standard set by God's character.⁸⁷ One must realize that righteous acts arise out of a righteous nature. "It is not we who possess righteousness but righteousness which possess us; we are its servants"⁸⁸ (Romans 6:18; 2 Corinthians 2:9). In the context of Hebrews 1:9, the Writer is stating that the righteous nature of Jesus expresses itself in a love of righteous actions. The moral opposite of righteousness, in the context of right actions, is lawlessness. The Greek word translated lawlessness is *anomos*. The word *nomos* means law. In Greek, when the character "a" (*alpha*) is placed in front of a word, it acts as a negative. The word *anomos*, literally means "without law," "lawless," "not having, knowing, or acknowledging the law." In its practical use in the Scripture, *anomos* means to oppose or to have contempt for God and his law. The *anomos* person despises righteousness and disobeys God's law. The Son's positive inclination toward, and his voluntary delight of, righteousness, requires its opposite in his character, a hatred of all that is unrighteous. The Son is, in his essential nature and in his character and actions, righteous.

therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

The first objection of skeptics is that if the Son is God, vv. 1-3, then how can he have a God? I cannot do better than John Brown answering the skeptics of his day (1862). "To the person who holds the plain scriptural doctrine, that the incarnate Son, as Mediator, is subordinate to His Father, who in the economy of grace sustains the majesty of the Godhead, there is nothing unaccountable in this. He who was God, equal with the Father, was, in his assumed character of the Mediator and Savior, placed by the Father—who was

⁸⁴ Gouge, *Hebrews*, I:63.

⁸⁵ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 953.

⁸⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III:118.

⁸⁷ Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, III:355.

⁸⁸ Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, III:365.

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his God as the man Christ Jesus—on a throne elevated far above every earthly throne, secured from all fluctuation, and destined to endure forever.”⁸⁹ The reader must constantly bear in mind that the Writer is proving the superiority of the incarnate Son. At 1:6 God commands the angels to worship Jesus the Christ when God the Son joined humanity to his deity. In the union of the two natures the glory of the divine is communicated to the humanity. The humanity is perfected, not elevated or changed to deity, and the deity remains deity. The one Person has two natures, and that Person in his essential nature is deity. Therefore, it is appropriate the angels worship God the Son in his incarnation, for his glory is unchanged in his incarnation.

It is also true that the human nature of the God-man must worship. The desire to worship God was designed by God as a necessity in human nature.⁹⁰ Jesus had a genuine human nature. Therefore he must worship. Since his humanity was sinless, he worshiped the one true God. In the union of deity and humanity the substance and properties of each nature remain unchanged and unimpaired (see *Excursus: the Hypostatic Union*, below). It is a designed property of created human nature that man's rational soul must worship. As the incarnate Son, i.e., as the man Christ Jesus, it is appropriate, reasonable, logical and necessary that God should be his God.⁹¹ Therefore God is Father not merely in relation to the essential second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, but he is also God and Father to the incarnate Son, the God-man Jesus the Christ. In his office of Savior, Jesus the Son is subordinate to the Father. In the context of his Person, the deity is consubstantial and co-eternal with the Father, and the humanity is always subordinate to the deity, e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. In the context of his human nature, God is his God. God is said to be the God of the Son in a threefold way.⁹² First, in respect to his divine nature: the eternal generation of the Person God the Son by the Person God the Father is in view.⁹³ Second, God is the God of the Son of God in respect to his human nature. The incarnate Son was “made of a woman, made under the law,” so God is his God as he is the God of all creatures. Third, in respect to his whole person, God and man, he was designated by his Father to the work of mediator. In this last sense, God is his God in the covenant wherein the incarnate Son is to be the Redeemer and Head of the Church, and God the Father is to sustain him and carry him through his work.

God takes delight in those whose character and actions reflect his character and actions. God's moral character is the standard for all morality. God's character defines the worth of the actions performed by all beings: they are “godly” or “ungodly.” Godliness in God's creatures is thought, will, and action that conforms to the standard set by the character of God. The Son is the perfect image of God. His character is such that what God loves, he loves; what God hates he hates; what God does, he does. Do not the Gospels tell us these things? Jesus said that to know him was to know the Father, John 14:9. Jesus said that he was working the works of his Father, John 5:17; 9:4. Jesus is the perfect Son in whom God has delighted. The incarnate Son conformed himself to the standard set by God; he is fully committed to righteousness. Therefore God has anointed him.

The expression, “therefore God, your God” is not to be read as referring in the first instance to the Son, and in the second to the Father. The dual reference to God refers solely to God the Father. The reduplication of the name of God is found in the Scripture:

- Psalm 50:7, “I am God, your God!”

⁸⁹ Brown, *Hebrews*, 56.

⁹⁰ This is why idolatry exists. Man is designed to worship. The sin nature rebels against God. Man the sinner fulfills his necessity to worship by creating a false god.

⁹¹ If God is Jesus' God, then is Jesus worshiping himself? Jesus' humanity is a nature, not a person. The issue is the subordination of the Person to the Father in his role as Mediator and Savior.

⁹² Owen, *Hebrews*, III: 185.

⁹³ Owen believed the term begotten indicated an eternal generation of the Person, Son, by the Person, Father. In the Trinitarian view of God, the one essence, deity, is self-existent and eternal in the three Persons; one God, three Persons in the Godhead. God the Son is a Person by communication of the one divine essence. The Son is consubstantial and coeternal with the Father and Spirit. Thus, in the Godhead, there is unity of essence (deity), distinction of Persons (Father, Son, Spirit), and subordination between the Persons.

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- Isaiah 48:17, "I am the LORD your God"
- Psalm 59:5, "You therefore, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel"
- Psalm 72:18, "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel"

The sense of the expression is plain. God is the one who anointed the Son, and the Son has appropriated God to be his God in a manner peculiar to their relationship. First, God is the only object of the Son's religious affections. Second, there is a special covenant between God the Father and the Son of God in his office as the Redeemer-Mediator. God has made the Son the Mediator, and the Son has accepted and fulfilled that office.

Having these thoughts in mind, we may discuss the anointing, "therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions." The consequence of the righteousness of Christ is that he was anointed with the oil of gladness. When I say "consequence" I mean his anointing is a result of the successful completion of his earthly ministry. Some commentators speculate that this anointing was at his conception, when his human nature was sanctified by the Spirit, Luke 1:35. Others believe the anointing was at his baptism, when the Spirit especially equipped him for the work of his ministry. Still others believe the anointing intended is from his ascension, when he received the promise of the Father to pour out the Spirit onto his disciples, to equip them for their ministry. Now, the above three events did take place, and were in themselves an anointing. Yet, they do not fulfill the intended meaning in Hebrews. This anointing is marked by a "therefore," which indicates it was the consequence of his loving righteousness and hating lawlessness. These moral acts are in the context of his kingdom (throne, scepter). Anointing was used in Old Testament times as preparatory to an event or celebration, so as to make the face appear cheerful, or to indicate an appointment, as to appoint a person as prophet, priest, or king. Compare Ruth 3:3; Psalm 23:5; Exodus 28:41; 1 Kings 19:16. The three anointing events mentioned above fall into the latter category, appointment to an office. However, they are also prior to the completion of Jesus' righteous works. The context of this anointing in Hebrews 1:8-9 is the throne, used here as a metonymy for his kingdom and rule over mankind. His righteous kingdom is in view, the time when he was made Lord and Christ, Acts 2:36, and that event is subsequent to his ascension. The anointing the Writer refers to is Jesus' exaltation to his kingdom, Philippians 2:9-11. The "oil of gladness" is a figurative means to express his exaltation, it is his crowning as king. He was a man of sorrows, despised and rejected, tried and afflicted. Now he is exalted.

The last thing to consider is that he was anointed "above his fellows." Much ingenuity has been expended to identify the fellows; or "companions," as the NKJV translates the text. The most reasonable identification would seem to be the angels. However, the Writer has expended considerable effort to place the angels in the subordinate position of servants and worshipers. Another possibility is his "brethren," 2:10-12. Believers are partakers in his kingdom, being co-heirs, but are not comparable to him. Note also, that Christ is anointed "more than" his companions. While believers share in the benefits of his exaltation, they are not themselves exalted as he has been. One must bear in mind that the Writer is using an Old Testament quotation. The quotation is not required to correspond in every particular to the context in which it is used. The identification of the companions is not truly relevant to the point the Writer is making. The better view is to understand that the Son is incomparably exalted above angels and men. All who serve him partake of his glory, but his anointing, i.e., his exaltation, is unique to him, setting him apart from and above all others.

In the final analysis of vv. 8, 9, we are assisted by Owen, who captures the intent of the verses: "It is Christ who is spoken to and denoted by that name 'O God,' as being the true God by nature; though what is affirmed of him be not as God but as the king of his church and people. [In this] we may consider what is assigned unto him, which is his kingdom; and that is described,

- By the royal ensigns of it, namely his throne and scepter
- By its duration, it is forever
- By his manner of administration, with righteousness
- By his preparation for this administration, he loved righteousness and hated iniquity
- By an adjunct privilege, anointing with the oil of gladness

Hebrews One

- Which [anointing] is exemplified by a comparison with others, it is so with him above his fellows.⁹⁴ God the Father designed and appointed the Son unto his work, sent him in the fullness of time, furnished him with the spiritual gifts and power to perform the work, and crowned him upon the completion of the work.⁹⁵

Excursus: The Hypostatic Union

The term "hypostatic union" is used by theologians to describe the result of God the Son joining humanity to his deity (a synonymous term is "incarnation"). The hypostatic union is the uniting of deity and humanity in one person, Jesus. The relationship between the two natures of Christ is complex, far too complex for a complete discussion in this excursus. In brief, a nature is not a person. For example, a person might be described as an introvert. To be quiet, alone, and reluctant to be noticed in public, is the natural habit of an introvert; but a nature is not the whole person. In a private setting the introvert may feel at ease being with others. A person whose nature it is to be generous is not immune from feelings and actions of thrift or greed. A person is not one nature but has many aspects to his personality that enable him, or her, to act appropriate to the varied circumstances of life. In a more complex way, the one person Jesus has two natures, deity and humanity. In the union of deity and humanity, the substance and properties of each nature remained unchanged and unimpaired. His deity remained deity and his humanity remained humanity. Acts proper to deity are often spoken of as performed by the man Christ Jesus. This is the scripture's way of telling us that his humanity was so interpenetrated by his deity that attributes properly belonging to deity acted through the humanity. However, there was no commingling, conversion, or equating of either the natures or their essential attributes. Though the attributes of deity acted through his human nature, the human nature was not changed by and did not possess the essence nor the attributes of deity. The attributes of humanity belong to the essence of humanity; the attributes of deity belong to the essence of deity. While the attributes of one may be communicated to the other, this communication cannot change or possess the other. To possess the attributes of humanity is to be human, and to possess the attributes of deity is to be God. The deity nature of Jesus remained deity and the human nature of Jesus remained human. In the Person Jesus Christ, the attributes of deity were communicated to the humanity in such a way that, without adding to the humanity or subtracting from the deity, the humanity became an instrument through which the deity could exercise its power. The true reality of the human nature of Jesus was not destroyed by its union with deity. Rather, the deity perfected the humanity (without elevating it to deity) so that his humanity possessed all things perfectly. He was one Person with two natures. When performing activities properly belonging to his divine nature, the Person who was (and is) the Son of God used his human nature as an instrument to carry out the activities of his divine nature. In this his human nature was exalted and glorified, but was not deified. Athanasius (AD 298-373)⁹⁶ in his, *Letter to Epictetus*, gives the following explanation:

- Christ is of the same substance as the Father according to his deity and consubstantial with his mother according to his humanity.
 - He is equal with the Father according to his deity and beneath the Father according to his humanity.
- In other words, Jesus the Christ possessed a genuine human nature and a genuine divine nature. He was fully God and fully man in one Person, the incarnate God-man. In his Person he was equal to the Father according to his deity and subordinate to the Father in his humanity.

These early arguments of the epistle to the Hebrews are based upon the exaltation of the hypostatic Person in his subordination to the Father. Thus Jesus is worship by the angels, and inherits a throne and a people.

⁹⁴ Owen, *Hebrews*, III:182.

⁹⁵ Owen, *Hebrews*, III:194.

⁹⁶ Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, 273. Chemnitz states "These points are not quotations but a summary of the whole epistle."

Hebrews One

10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.

11 They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment;

12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail."

The word "and" acts as a continuation of the theme: the Son is better than the angels. One should return to v. 8, "But to the Son he says," to catch the context. This was not said to any angel. The Person in view is the Creator. We have previously discussed the incarnate Son as Creator, v. 2. The angels were not "in the beginning" (to be in the beginning one must exist prior to the beginning). The quotation, which extends through v. 12, is from the ending verses of Psalm 102.

- Psalm 102:25-27, "Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak you will change them, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end."

In the original context, the Psalmist complains that his days are short, and he wonders if YHWH will bring prosperity and security to Jerusalem (by extension, Israel). He concludes that the eternal Lord will ensure the security of his nation and descendants, v. 28, "The children of your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before you." It is worth noting that Psalm 102 anticipates the calling of the Gentiles and the establishment of the kingdom (vv. 15-22).

In the original context of Psalm 102, it is clear the Psalmist is referring to God. The Psalm begins "Hear my prayer, O YHWH." The verses the Writer (of Hebrews) quotes begin with "of old you," i.e., the word "Lord" as found in Hebrews 1:10 is an interpolation by the Writer. The Psalm is addressed to YHWH; the Writer is identifying the Son with YHWH. Hebrews adopts this part of Psalm 102 to expand the theme of the superiority of the Son. How does this Psalm fit into the Writer's theme and context? The Son is not superior merely as the Messianic king, he is superior because he is YHWH, the Creator.⁹⁷ The preceding vv. 8-9, focus on God's throne in the person of Messiah the king. The word Messiah is not mentioned, yet, both Jewish and Christian interpreters understood Psalm 45 (cf. Hebrews 1:8-9) as referring to Messiah and his kingdom. The Writer will return to Messiah's kingdom in v. 13. In vv. 10-12 he ensures the reader understands that the God-man (of vv. 8-9), whose throne is forever and ever, whose kingdom is righteous, and who has been anointed (exalted), is the eternal God who created all things. The thought of the kingdom is not, then, restricted to the Messianic kingdom. In the Writer's time, conceptions of the Messianic kingdom varied from an earthly political revival of Israel, to the rule of God realized on the earth. Here, the Writer dissolves all doubt: the Messianic king is the Creator and Ruler of all things. His kingdom will outlast the heavens and earth. (Perhaps the Writer is thinking ahead to his arguments at 12:25-29.)

In keeping with the theme of Psalm 102, the Writer notes that the heavens and earth will undergo change. Man's time is short, but even in his lifetime he will wear out several sets of garments. Garments will perish, they will all grow old, a man will put them away (fold them up) and change to newer garments. Even so, the heavens and the earth are subject to change, deterioration, and dissolution. God will effect his will upon them. Biblical prophecy indicates the current creation will be dissolved and a new creation will take its place (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1). The Son of God does not change. "In his nature there is no change; in his duration, no circle to run—no space to be measured—no time to be reckoned—all is eternity, infinite and onward. Such is the plain meaning of this quotation."⁹⁸ The Son is always the same, Hebrews 13:8, he is eternal, and the destiny of creation and its creatures is subject to his will.

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?

⁹⁷ Genesis 2:4, 7, "YHWH Elohim made the earth and the heavens . . . YHWH Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground."

⁹⁸ Brown, *Hebrews*, 63-64.

14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

The “but” indicates a contrast. This is another contrast with the angels. The Son is Creator and Ruler. Angels are spirits who minister to believers. The quotation is from Psalm 110, “The Lord [YHWH] said to my [the psalmist’s] Lord [Messiah], ‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.’” This Psalm has a long history of interpretation as applying to Messiah. Jesus used it of himself, Matthew 12:41-45, and the context of that passage implies the Scribes understood it as referring to Messiah; see also Mark 14:62; Acts 2:35. The Son sits exalted and enthroned, waiting for the Father to present him with the kingdom (cf. 10:12-13). The Son’s sovereignty and absolute authority are stressed. The angels, because they are servants, are never invited to sit. Instead, they are “sent” to minister to those who are partakers and co-heirs with the Son. Note that “all” the angels are ministering spirits. Jews and Gentiles imagined an angelic hierarchy similar to the order and structure in which man makes ranks of rulers and servants. There is some truth to this view (e.g., Ephesians 6:12), but the writer is ensuring his readers understand that the Son is superior to those he created to serve him and his brethren (2:10-13). There may be an eschatological view to v. 14, i.e., the phrase “those who will inherit salvation” may look forward to the inhabitants of the Messianic kingdom. Whether or not this point of view is valid, the angels are not sent to bring salvation to mankind, but to minister to those who will inherit salvation, i.e., to believers current, present, and future. Evangelism is always the responsibility of saved men and women. Angels may further a believer’s evangelistic works in various ways related to helps, circumstances, and safety, but angels do not preach the Gospel.⁹⁹

This verse raises interesting questions about angels. Their office in relation to believers is “ministering spirits.” Why should these beings minister to mankind? They have never wavered in their fidelity to God; man is a disobedient sinner, and saved men continue to commit acts of sin. They are more powerful than man, for we see that when God the Son joined humanity to his deity he is described as having been made a “little lower” than the angels. They are always in the presence of God, while in this sinful flesh man cannot live in his presence. In every way the holy angels are better than mankind; yet God has assigned them to minister to believers. In the first instance, this shows the holiness, righteousness and faithfulness of angels. No task assigned by God is insignificant or unworthy of an angel. They are his loyal and obedient servants, bringing glory to every task he assigns. No task is small or demeaning, because their God—whom they perpetually worship and glorify—has assigned it to their labor. Second, God gives his servants, angels and man, opportunities to serve and obey. In man this causes spiritual maturity; in angels it allows them to exercise the graces of obedience and benevolence. Third, their work with believers manifests to them the glory of God’s grace; they are afforded the opportunity to learn about God and to glorify him in his works, 1 Peter 1:12. Finally, it may be that “God has assigned to them this ministry in order that there may be a closer bond between the different sections of his family.”¹⁰⁰ Even creatures preserved in grace from every sin require opportunities for spiritual growth and the exercise of spiritual virtues. They are creatures, therefore subject to change. If nothing else, their service exercised toward believers provides them the opportunity to grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

⁹⁹ Revelation 14:6-7 is the sole exception. This is because toward the end of the Tribulation period the Gospel witness by believers has been effectively silenced by the Antichrist’s unrelenting persecution and martyrdom of believers.

¹⁰⁰ Pink, *Hebrews*, 77.

HEBREWS TWO

1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

Verses one through four of this chapter form the first exhortation or warning passage in the epistle. The exhortation is plain: do not turn away from salvation in Christ. The argument is equally as plain: salvation in Christ is superior to salvation in the Law of Moses,¹ because, although the law was administered through angels, Christ is superior to the angels. "The main reason why the Son's superiority to angels has been so emphasized now begins to appear. The older revelation, the Law of Sinai, was communicated by angelic intermediaries, but God's final revelation was given in his Son and therefore demands correspondingly serious attention."² Salvation is a matter of eternal importance, a choice between eternal life or death; if one turns away from Christ, one turns away from life in Christ. The message given "in Son" is the only valid answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved," (Acts 16:30, 31).

The force and intent of the exhortation have been variously understood, starting with the first expositors and preachers of the epistle. The words, translated "give the more earnest heed," are the Greek *prosecho perissoteros*. This translation is an interpretation of *prosecho perissoteros* based on a comparison of the sinner's reaction to the Gospel versus Israel's reaction to the Law. Israel's neglect of the Law (v. 2) had grave consequences. In this view the readers of this epistle are exhorted to be more attentive to the Gospel than Israel was to the Law. However, the emphasis intended by the Writer may be superlative, rather than comparative. In that case, *prosecho perissoteros* may be interpreted as meaning "we must pay the closest attention." The weight of interpretive history supports the comparative interpretation, but the superlative interpretation should not be ignored. "Eternal issues are at stake and the Gospel by its very nature demands to be treated with the fullest seriousness."³

The Greek *mepote* is translated "lest at any time," by the KJV, "lest" by the NKJV, and "so that" by the NIV and HCSB. The words "drift away," are a translation of *parareo*. The basic meaning of this word is "to flow by," hence the translation "drift away." Some commentators relate it to a boat aimlessly drifting past its landing point.⁴ Others cite more ancient use to describe snow slipping off soldiers' bodies or a ring slipping from a finger.⁵ The idea communicated is that of inattention. For the original readers, the thought created by this word must have been, to be careful not to fall back to the old habits of the Law when pressed by persecution to abandon the Gospel. There were those among the churches, as there are in any church, who were enjoying the moral benefits of Christian association without a spiritual commitment to Christ. The Gospel was calling them to commitment. The world was calling them back into a life of sin, or applying the pressures of persecution to divert their attention away from the Gospel. Their need was to pay attention, lest the opportunity for salvation go by unheeded. An application may also be made to the Christian community. Keeping with the metaphor, the believer must maintain a secure anchor in the Gospel (cf. 6:19). Thinking upon the need to apply the *closest* attention to the Gospel, the following from John Brown comes to mind. "The Christian is embarked in his little vessel on the stream of life, and he is bound to the New Jerusalem. The winds of temptation, the tides of corrupt custom, and the powerful undercurrent of depraved inclination, all present such obstacles in the way of his reaching the desired haven, that he is in great apparent hazard of being carried past the celestial city, and of making shipwreck on the shores of the land of destruction."⁶ The believer is safe, because his safety depends upon the power and faithfulness of Jesus Christ. However, there are fixed moral laws in God's universe which apply to the believer also. Christians are kept by God,

¹ One may be more used to understanding the Law as "the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones," 2 Corinthians 3:7, and so it was in that it identified sin and required a sacrifice for every sin, versus the once-for-all sacrifice for sin Jesus made, and the eternal life faith in him gives. The Law, however, did provide the opportunity to exercise saving faith by the sacrifices, because the sacrifices of the Law looked forward to Jesus' propitiation on the cross.

² Bruce, *Hebrews*, 66.

³ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 73.

⁴ Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, 47.

⁵ Vincent, *Word Studies*, IV:393.

⁶ Brown, *Hebrews*, 74.

Hebrews Two

through their faith. They are saved by the Gospel, but they must remember it. They are kept from falling, but it is through living according to God's rules. They are partakers in Christ and joint-heirs with him, but they must hold fast the beginning of their confidence to the end (Hebrews 3:6). The unbeliever must give the closest attention to the pressing need and opportunity for salvation. The believer must give the closest attention to the instructions he has received for Christian living. The one who is inattentive and drifts away is deceiving himself about his (or her) salvation.

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

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

In referring to the "word spoken through angels" it is possible the Writer intends both the Law given at Sinai and God's continuing revelation, 1:1, given after Sinai through angelic announcement (e.g., portions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel). However, the Writer is probably referring only to the Law given at Sinai. This need not confuse us, for what is meant is that the Law, which originated in and from God, was published to the people through the ministry of angels. The thunder, lightening, fire, cloud, and earthquake, the sounding of trumpets, and the voice the people heard speaking the Law, Exodus 19:16ff, may have been produced, all or in part, by the angels. God also makes reference to the angel that accompanied the people, Exodus 23:20, cf. 14:19. The appearances of the angel of the Lord, e.g., Exodus 3:2, may be implied. However, the way and manner in which the Law was published is not in view, for the argument is that both Law and Gospel require one's attention. "What lies at the foundation of the Apostle's whole argument is, *God* spake both the Law and the Gospel. Both the one and the other are of divine origin. Therefore, it is not the origin but the *medium* of the two revelations which he contrasts. God made known his will by the ministry of angels in the giving of the Law. He makes known his will by the ministry of his Son in the revelation of mercy."⁷ The Gospel spoken in Son is as "steadfast" as the Law spoken through angels, and its "just reward" as certain. The Law required the attentive obedience of the people. Even more so the Gospel, God's final word delivered in the Son, requires the closest attention and obedience.

The "if" of v. 2 indicates certainty: angels were involved in the giving and administration of the Law; the Law was legally binding upon Israel, Exodus 24:7. The Old Testament record reveals that time and again every transgression and disobedience was punished. The Writer draws an analogy: since the Law delivered by angels required reward or punishment for obedience or disobedience (respectively), how much more the Gospel delivered "in Son"? Jesus is superior to the angels, so if the Gospel is neglected punishment is certain. The "if we neglect" of v. 3 indicates possibility: if anyone so neglects the Gospel, then they will not escape the punishment; if anyone heeds the Gospel, then they will escape the punishment. The nature and power, holiness and justice, dignity and glory of the One who through whom the Gospel came, and to whom all judgment is committed, makes absolutely certain the judgment of the person who rejects so great a salvation. But, the "if" of v. 3 is also one of hope, for it includes the positive as well as the negative. If a person does not reject "so great a salvation," then he or she shall escape judgment.

The warning against "neglect" of the Gospel requires more explanation. One must bear in mind that the warning passages in Hebrews are directed at those persons who had joined themselves to a Christian community, had gained some experience with Christianity, but had not turned that experience into saving faith in Christ. Their fault was that they were in danger of neglecting the means of salvation, which is the Gospel. When the Writer compares the punishment of "every transgression and disobedience" of the Law, to neglect of the Gospel, there are some things he is not saying. He is *not* saying that committing an act of sin disqualifies a person from salvation. The Law and the Gospel both made provision to save a person from their sins. It is only when the way of salvation is neglected that sins are not forgiven. He is *not* saying that some sins can be forgiven and others cannot. The Writer is warning the unsaved. There is no difference

⁷ Brown, *Hebrews*, 75 (emphasis is Brown's).

Hebrews Two

between their acts of sin, all unforgiven sins receive the same punishment: eternal separation from God. Under the Law every transgression and disobedience atoned for by a sacrifice was forgiven; every kind of sin can be forgiven under the Gospel. Although the Law made a difference between sins of ignorance and a presumptuous sin,⁸ that is not the Writer's subject in this passage, because he speaks of "every" transgression and disobedience. The Writer is *not* saying that in this Gospel age every act of sin requires a new application of the Gospel, because that would mean salvation could be lost, and found, and lost and found again and again. The Law required a new sacrifice for every act of sin because the atonement it made was limited by the means of atonement, the blood of an animal, which covered, but could not wholly remit, the guilt and penalty for sin.⁹ The Gospel means of salvation is the death of Christ, whose merits are wholly sufficient to permanently cancel the penalty for every sin, and is applied—not needing to be re-offered—for forgiveness and cleansing from acts of sin subsequent to salvation.

The comparison the Writer is making between Law and Gospel moves from the lesser to the greater. The Law was delivered through the administration of angels and it was effective against every transgression and disobedience. The Gospel was delivered by one greater than the angels, the Son of God, who (v. 2) "by himself purged our sins." The Law covered (atoned for) the guilt of sin, the Gospel wholly remits the penalty against sin. If the lesser was enforced, how much more the greater? If one could not escape punishment when he neglected the lesser, how much more is he deserving of punishment should he neglect the Gospel? The warning is clear: neglecting the way of salvation means one cannot be saved. The Writer's readers knew that to neglect the Law meant sins could not be forgiven. The Writer asserts the same is true of the Gospel. The Law is past, the Gospel is present, therefore a person cannot be forgiven if he or she neglects the Gospel. What the Writer does mean by "neglect" is that those who reject salvation in Jesus cannot be saved, because in this age of Gospel grace he is the only way to salvation (cf. Acts 4:12). By "neglect," the Writer of Hebrews is speaking of those persons who have a knowledge of the Gospel, but turn away from the Gospel in unbelief. The deliberate act of rejecting the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ confirms the sinner in his sin.¹⁰ This is a subject the Writer will return to several times in his epistle.

3 (continued) and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

The Gospel came "in Son," but was spread throughout the world by "those who heard him." The Writer's immediate reference is to the apostles and other brethren who heard the Gospel message from Jesus.¹¹ The Writer makes an understood comparison with the Law. At giving the Law at Sinai, God bore witness to Israel through "both signs and wonders" that he was the one giving the Law. As the original readers knew, the Gospel was also accompanied by signs and wonders. Furthermore, there were miracles performed by the Apostles, and spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit, the latter being in fulfillment of prophecy, Acts 2:17. All these things were given by God to confirm the Gospel and certify its witnesses.¹² The word spoken in Son is as sure as the Law spoken through angels. The communication of the Gospel through witnesses confirmed

⁸ A presumptuous sin was the rejection of God's Covenant with Israel as revealed in the Law of Moses. The revealed way to salvation—the content of faith at that time—was the covenant. To reject the covenant was to reject the way of salvation.

⁹ Does this mean the Old Testament believers lost their salvation with every fresh act of sin? See appendix one, Salvation in the Old Testament.

¹⁰ From an evangelistic point of view, when is the sinner confirmed in his sin? What is the spiritual moment in the life of the sinner when rejection of salvation in Jesus Christ becomes final, irrevocable? The answer is twofold. The believer's responsibility is to preach the message of salvation at every opportunity provided by the Holy Spirit. The sinner's responsibility is to believe the message and be saved. Salvation is of the Lord, evangelism is the believer's duty, and faith in Jesus as Savior is the sinner's duty. Only physical death confirms the sinner in his or her sin.

¹¹ This may be an unintentional confirmation by the Writer that he is not Paul, Galatians 1:11-12.

¹² Verse 4 is punctuated with a question mark because it is part of the sentence beginning at v. 3, "How shall we escape . . . ?" God did bear witness to the Gospel through signs and wonders.

Hebrews Two

by God is as sure as the original spoken "in Son." The divine origin (source) of the Gospel message is God speaking "in Son." The medium through which the Gospel was delivered to succeeding generations of sinners was "by those who heard the Son." Their testimony is a true and exact copy of the original, confirmed by the signs and wonders, which validated those persons as Christ's messengers bearing a true message from the source. God's witness, the "signs, wonders, miracles and gifts," confirmed that the repetition of that word through the Apostles (both orally and in writing) was as "steadfast" as the Law spoken through angels. The signs and wonders have generally ceased because there is an inspired written record of those activities that confirms the Gospel they preached.

5 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.

The opening word of the verse, "for," indicates a conclusion, a "because" drawn upon the preceding material. The question is, does the conclusion pertain to 1:5-13, or 2:1-4? The proposition that the conclusion is being drawn from 1:5-13 fits well into my theory as to the composition of Hebrews. If the practical exhortation in 2:1-4 has been added into teaching material drawn from Paul's ministry, then the logical conclusion of the 1:5-13 "Son superior to angels" argument is to connect it to 2:5ff. The warning of 2:1-4 is parenthetical to the main argument, although drawn from it, because it gives the experiential conclusion to the superiority of the Son over the angels: give the closest attention to possessing saving faith in the Son. The "therefore" of 2:1 looks back to the rhetorical question of 1:14: yes, angels are servants but the Son is God, Creator and King. The opening "for" of 2:5 also looks back to the exhortation of 2:1-4, to wit, that one must pay closest attention to the Gospel, because God has given a greater authority to Christ than he ever gave to the angels. Worship Christ, as do the angels, and have saving faith in him alone.

Chapter 2:5, then, starts a new paragraph that continues to develop the theme of "the Son is superior to the angels" by answering the skeptic's objection concerning the Son's humanity. This verse serves a number of functions. It introduces the next chain of Old Testament quotations. It connects 2:6-8, 12-13 with the theme developed in 1:5-13. Within the verse itself, the theme of Jesus' superiority to angels is continued in the thought that the administration of the world to come is entrusted, not to angels, but to the exalted Son. Although it may not be readily apparent, the subject of "the world to come" is developed from the exalted Son's Messianic reign 1:8-9, the coming new earth and heavens 1:10-12, and the thought of the Son conquering his enemies, 1:13. The subjection of the world to the authority of the Son is confirmed in 2:6-8. This verse, 2:5, forms a bridge between two related ideas: the superiority of the Son over the angels; the superiority of the Son maintained in light of the fact he became a mortal man. Other thoughts follow from these two: as a mortal man how can the Son be exalted over all creation; why did the Son become mortal? Why did he take on the nature of man, not the nature of angels?

6 But one testified in a certain place, saying:

The Greek text literally reads, "somewhere someone has testified, saying." "The vagueness of the formula of quotation is consistent with the strong emphasis throughout Hebrews on the oracular character of Scripture. Precisely because it is God who speaks in the Old Testament, the identity of the person through whom he uttered his word is relatively unimportant. A vague allusion is sufficient. It is the substantial authority of what is said, not its source, which is of primary importance to the argument."¹³

6 (continued) "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the Son of man that You take care of him?

7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands.

8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet."

¹³ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 46.

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The quotation is from Psalm 8:4-6 in the LXX version. In the NKJV the Psalm reads:

- “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the Son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.”

The original intent of the Psalm is praise to God, and the immediately context of the section quoted concerns the glory of God in his creation, 8:3: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained,” what is man, etc. The thought is of man’s seeming insignificance in light of God’s creative works. What is man in the context of the whole creation? What is man in the context of God’s glory as seen in his creation? The Psalmist’s answer is, as he exists today man is made, in the Hebrew version of Psalm 8:5, “a little lower than *elohim*.” The Writer of Hebrews, however, quotes the Greek LXX version, which reads “a little lower than *angelos*.”¹⁴ The word *elohim* is translated in the Old Testament as “God,” or “gods” depending on context. The word is used of God, heavenly beings, and man.¹⁵ The translators of the LXX understood *elohim* in Psalm 8:5 to mean “heavenly beings,” and accordingly translated the Hebrew *elohim* by the Greek *angelos*, a translation the Hebrews Writer accepts as agreeable to his context; the NKJV follows the Writer’s intent and argument. It is true that the NIV reading, “heavenly beings,” also fits the context of Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:7. However, since the only heavenly beings man is aware of are God and the holy angels, and the argument compares angels and the Son, it is correct to say with the LXX, the Writer, and the NKJV, that man was made a little lower than the angels.

In the context of Psalm 8, man is the one to whom God has given a dominion (Genesis 1:26; 2:19, 20) that is similar to and flows from God’s dominion, in partial fulfillment of the divine mandate, “let us make man in our image.” Part of that image is dominion over the earthly creation. Man’s position as “a little lower” has to do with his current earthly state. Man was made lower than the heavenly beings (*elohim*), in that his dominion was limited to the earthly creation. In the future, man’s dominion will extend over all God’s creation, including dominion over the angels, through his salvific relationship with the God-man Jesus Christ. Those saved out of mankind will share in that dominion because the believer is a joint-heir with Christ (Romans 8:17), whose dominion is over all, 1 Corinthians 15:24-26. The Psalmist recognizes man’s current state and future destiny. Now man is humbled, but then he will be exalted. The Psalmist’s question, “What is man?”, is answered by the Writer: God’s original purpose in creating man is to be fulfilled in the Son.

The Writer, therefore, applies the argument of the Psalm to Jesus. Since *elohim* may be understood as a nondescript “heavenly beings,” the Writer chose to make certain his theme of Christ’s superiority to the angels was clearly understood by using the LXX version of Psalm 8, man is a little lower than the *angelos*. The Psalm is addressed to the archetypical, or representative, man, and therefore is applicable to the God-man. The human nature God the Son joined to his deity made him a little lower than the angels. Man, in his original creation before his sin, was intrinsically (in his attributes) and positionally (as restricted to the material plane of existence) lower than the (unfallen) angels, who are spirit beings and incorruptible. Man in his fallen (having sinned) state is physically and spiritually lower than the angels, in that his physical mortality and spiritual separation from God are part of his humanity. The Son accepted the mortality, but not the sin, when he condescended to join human nature to his deity. Looking ahead, there was a salvific purpose in joining humanity to his deity, vv. 9-18. In the immediate context, vv. 6-8, the lower position of humanity in comparison to the angels is a temporary condition. Man will be crowned with honor and glory. God’s plan is for man to have dominion over God’s works, which includes the angels. The Son of God, Jesus, is the man in and through whom these things are to be fulfilled; “Jesus in a representative sense fulfilled the vocation intended for mankind.”¹⁶ The dominion of mankind over creation, through Jesus, awaits fulfillment at his second advent. The dominion is certain to be fulfilled because it is God’s will that it be fulfilled in Jesus. Thus,

¹⁴ The Greek text of Hebrews 1:7 is *angelos*, angels. The NIV uses one Old Testament meaning for *elohim* and interprets *angelos* as “heavenly beings.” The HCSB uses a different Old Testament meaning for *elohim* and interprets *angelos* as “God.” The NKJV translates the verse without interpreting for the reader.

¹⁵ Man: Psalm 82:6; Isaiah 41:23; John 10:34. The context of the use in the Psalm and John is the glory conferred on man by virtue of man’s relationship with God.

¹⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 47.

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the Psalmist's words may be understood as "You, God, have crowned the Son with glory and honor, and set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet." This exaltation is the reward of the Son for fulfilling his office as the Redeemer of sinners.

Why, then, is the Son said to be a little lower than the angels? Because of the temporary conditions of mortality imposed on his being during his time on earth. One must bear in mind that this lower status was not permanent: his humanity was to be (after his crucifixion and resurrection) exalted above the angels. This means that the act of incarnation was not the reason why he was lower than the angels during his time on earth. His human nature is permanently a part of his being. His exaltation included his human nature, for the whole person was exalted. So, again, the act of incarnation itself did not make him a little lower. He was "made" a little lower because of the mortal condition of his human nature, because human nature had been changed from the original breathed into Adam (Genesis 2:7, an *ex nihilo* creation). I am not speaking specifically of the sin nature, for the Son's human nature did not have a sin nature within it. However, Adam's sin caused the condition of mortality¹⁷ to become part of the human nature. Jesus mortal body and human soul suffered from certain effects of the condition of mortality. His perfect humanity does not appear to have suffered (as far as the Scripture tells us) from congenital defects or illness. His emotional state was not subject to sins such as pride or malice; nor was his mental capacity subject to diminution. He did tire, he did sleep, he was hungry and therefore ate and eliminated bodily waste, he did sigh, weep, groan, become angry, and experience amazement and happiness, he did suffer and bleed, and he died. All these things reveal that he endured all the common conditions of mortality that are apart from sin. In his assumption of humanity the Son became mortal to die physically.¹⁸ After death¹⁹ he was exalted, his resurrected humanity was glorified, and the conditions of mortality, which he had suffered, were forever removed. The mortality intrinsic to the Son's humanity made him temporarily, but not permanently, lower than the angels. To illustrate, if I break a bone, I am in a certain way temporarily less than my peers. The condition, not being permanent, does not affect my station in life. The intrinsic limitations of the Son's humanity were temporary because his exaltation was certain. The temporary condition of the Son's mortality did not affect his essential deity, the perfection of his humanity, the certainty of his glory, honor, and dominion, the exaltation of his Person, nor his status as the Son who has dominion over the works of God. Therefore, in his humanity the Son was and continues to be superior to the angels.

8 (continued) For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

9 But we see Jesus,

The conclusion to the argument. All things are not now, but are certain to be, put in subjection to mankind. In the Greek text, the encompassing character of "all" is seen in the double negative: God left *nothing* that is *not* under his control. Yet, mankind does not at this time exercise the dominion given him by God. This is an objection that the Writer recognizes, "But now we do not yet see all things put under him." The Writer's response to this objection is "But we see Jesus," which returns the reader to v. 5. The reason everything is not yet in subjection is that the promise refers to Jesus, who is the heir and ruler of the world to come.

The Writer at 2:7 does not use the two parts of Psalm 8:5 as the parallelism they are in the Hebrew text,

¹⁷ The condition of mortality is more than physical death. In Adam's descendants, Jesus excepted, it includes the physical, emotional, and mental defects and deleterious changes caused by sin, such as illness, pride, retardation. Mortality is the cause of every defect in man, every deviation from the perfect original creation.

¹⁸ Jesus was without sin, meaning his human nature was without sin, and that in his human nature he never sinned. Yet, the condition of his human nature as procreated from Mary was that it was mortal, so that his human nature was subject to certain conditions of mortality, including physical death. The resurrected and glorified body is not subject to physical death.

¹⁹ He also died spiritually: on the cross he "became sin for us," and thus he suffered a temporary spiritual death, i.e., separation from God, while on the cross.

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but as describing two different times in the life of the Son.²⁰ He was made a little lower than the angels; he will be crowned with honor and glory (cf. 1:1, appointed heir of all things). The Writer's focus will now be on why the Son was made lower than the angels. He has made his point concerning the Son's superiority over the angels. He has also made his point as to the incarnation, exaltation, and victory of the Son. He now turns his focus to the question, why was the Son made a little lower than the angels? The answer to that question will lead us to Jesus, the high priest who by himself purged our sins, and sat down at God's right hand, waiting for his enemies to be made his footstool. This is the first use of the name "Jesus," which is used 13 times²¹ in the epistle. The first use is significant, for it sharpens the focus to the Son's redemptive work.

9 (continued) who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

In the Greek text of v. 7, the phrase, "a little lower," is *elatto brachus to*, literally, "made lower a little some." In v. 9 the words are arranged differently, *brachus to elatto*, "a little some made lower." The key word is *brachus*. Some commentators understand this word to be a spatial metaphor, and the NJKV, NIV, translate accordingly, "a little lower." Others understand *brachus* as a temporal metaphor. The translation would then be, v. 7, "You made him a little while lower than the angels," and at v. 9, "For a little while [he] was made lower than the angels." As a spatial metaphor, the emphasis of *brachus* is on the Son's humiliation in assuming humanity. As a temporal metaphor, the emphasis of *brachus* is on the temporary nature of his humiliation, i.e., the mortality that was necessary to accomplish redemption is in view. For v. 9, the temporal interpretation seems the better view: "For a little while he was made lower than the angels." The temporal emphasis seems to me the best way to introduce the argument of 2:10ff. The assumption of humanity was necessary to redemption, but the Son's humiliation is temporary, a view that agrees with his exaltation. His humanity is not in view, but rather the things he suffered in his humanity. Thus, v. 9 should be translated,

- "But Jesus, made for a little time lower than the angels with the design that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man, we see crowned as victor with glory and honor because of the suffering of death."²²

Jesus, then, was temporarily made lower than the angels, not specifically in his assumption of humanity, but in the mortality that was part of his humanity. Jesus will never cease to be the God-man. The condescension of deity was in assuming humanity. The humiliation he endured was the suffering he experienced (12:2), which included death. That condition was endured by the Son "for a little while" that he might suffer death on behalf of mankind. Having suffered, he was then exalted: crowned with honor and glory. One should be careful to understand that Christ's death was not the immediate cause of his exaltation. His exaltation was part of his covenant with the Father to defeat sin and thereby redeem men.²³ Having fulfilled part one of the covenant, the propitiating death of the Redeemer, the next divine act was the fulfillment of part two of the covenant, the exaltation of the Redeemer (part three, the realization of the kingdom, awaits the second advent). In the words of 1:3, 4, he purged our sins, sat down at God's right hand, and obtained an inheritance.

The Son assumed humanity, and with it mortality, that through the design initiated by God's grace, he might "taste death" for "everyone." The word *pantos*, "everyone," may be either masculine or neuter. (Greek words had gender. Words with the same gender are grammatically connected, which affects how they are translated.) A review of ten translations indicates a common decision for the masculine. In the masculine, in the present context, "everyone" means all those saved through the death of Christ; a view confirmed by

²⁰ An allowable use. Compare Christ's use of Isaiah 61:1-2 with Luke 4:18-19. The Lord stops his quote in the middle of Isaiah 61:2 because the first half of the verse refers to the first advent, and the second half to the second advent.

²¹ Hebrews 2:9; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:10, 19; 12:2, 24; 13:8, 12, 20, 21

²² Wuest, *Hebrews*, II:59.

²³ Most conservative theologians who study the doctrines of salvation explain the acts of the Trinity in causing man's salvation thus: the Persons of the Trinity agreed that the Son would make a propitiation for sin, which the Father would accept as accomplished on behalf of sinners, and the Spirit would apply the benefits of the propitiation to sinners.

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the "many sons" of v. 10, the "brethren" of vv. 11, 12, and the "children" of v. 13. The words "taste death" (*geuomai thanatos*) range in meaning from the literal "taste," or "eat," to the metaphorical "to experience," "to prove," "to partake of." The context (cf. vv. 9, 10, 14-17) indicates its use here must mean "to die." The reality of Jesus' death is in view. God the Son assumed humanity with its mortality that he should suffer death to save sinners. Gouge's comment is worth pondering. "Behold here the wonder of wonders. Christ undertakes a task above the power of all the angels [man's redemption] and to effect it he is made lower than angels. If ever power was made perfect in weakness, it was in this."²⁴

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

The opening "for" answers two implied questions: it continues the reasons why the Son was made man; it tells why the Son suffered death for everyone. The answer to both questions is simple: because it was right that God should so do, i.e., the act was agreeable in every way to God's character. There was a necessity in it. Man the transgressor could not save himself. God was the offended party. The only fit mediator between the two was one who in himself could represent the interests of both deity and humanity. There was divine wisdom in it, for the joining of human nature with deity could not be proposed by man (Genesis 3:15). There was omnipotent power in it: the Son destroyed the power of death by becoming subject to death. Divine justice was satisfied in it. Justice required the sinner's death, but the sinner could never pay the penalty in full. In Jesus was a man who could suffer the infinite wrath of God and fully satisfy his justice. His humanity was enabled to endure through the strength of his deity. The truth of God is vindicated in it. God had said to man, In the day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall surely die. "How could God's truth have been accomplished in this threatening, and man not utterly destroyed, if Christ had not died in our nature."²⁵ The great mercy of God is seen in it: Jesus was made man to be a propitiatory sacrifice for man.

The words "for" and "by" are a translation of the same Greek word, *dia*. The variation in translation corresponds to the accusative and genitive cases in the respective phrases. The first use tells us that God is the reason why all things exist: his glory is the final cause for their existence. The second use tells us that God is the efficient cause of all things: he is the Creator. Uniting himself with humanity served the end-goal of creation, God's glory, and satisfied the responsibility God has assumed for the eternal welfare of his creation.²⁶

In the phrase "bringing many sons to glory," the Writer views God as the efficient cause of salvation. He is the one who brings men out of sin into salvation. This is the consistent witness of Scripture. Salvation is "of the Lord," said Jonah from the belly of the great fish. "Besides me there is no Savior" said the Lord through the prophet Isaiah. "Jesus Christ Lord and Savior" is the repeated witness of the New Testament. I am not denying man's responsibility to exercise faith. Salvation is a matter of God's sovereignty and an individual's faith: "God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the [action of the Holy] Spirit and [through your choice to exercise] belief in the truth," 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Ephesians 2:8-9 is agreeable to this view: God applies his grace to the sinner's soul, so that he or she can choose to receive God's gift of faith, and then exercise that faith to believe on Jesus Christ as "my" Savior.

God's means to man's salvation was "to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." In 1:9, 14 and 5:7-9 the Writer indicates that by suffering he means death. The Greek word translated "captain" is *archegos*. This word may be translated by a variety of English words, but the essential meaning

²⁴ Gouge, *Hebrews*, I:131.

²⁵ Gouge, *Hebrews*, I:135-136. The paragraph is developed from Gouge.

²⁶ As the Creator, God's bears a responsibility for the welfare of his creation. This does not mean he is responsible for the sin of angels or man. He governs his creation according to the standards of righteousness set by his own perfect character. He gave angel and man the power of choice, and as a faithful Creator he at the same time gave a knowledge of the consequences of wrong choices. In the redemption of mankind it seems apparent that God assumed a personal responsibility to rescue men from their wrong choices.

Hebrews Two

is “originator,” or “author.” Its first use in ancient Greek was to identify the “hero” or founder of a city, hence the word also carries the meaning of “captain.”²⁷ In the New Testament it refers to Jesus only (below are all occurrences, NIV translation, italicized) :

- Acts 3:15, “You killed the *author* of life”
- Acts 5:31, “God exalted him to his own right hand as *Prince* and Savior”
- Hebrews 2:10, “the *author* of their salvation”
- Hebrews 12:2, “Jesus, the *author* and perfecter of our faith”

In Hebrews 2:10, the HCSB translation “source” fails to account for the idea of leadership that is intrinsic to *archegos*. The NKJV translation “captain” captures the idea of leadership, but fails to clearly incorporate the idea of originator. On the whole, the NIV translation “author” is the better translation of *archegos*. (Other translations use “pioneer” and “leader.”) To fully express the meaning of *archegos*, one might translate that through Jesus, the originator and leader of salvation, God brings many sons to glory and honor.

Jesus accomplished his work as the author of salvation through his sufferings, being made *teleioo*, “perfect” through sufferings. The basic thought of *teleioo* is whole, complete. It means that nothing has been left out. In the present context, “God has qualified Jesus the Son to come before him in priestly action. He has done so by the suffering (2:10) in which Jesus confirmed his obedience, 5:8f.”²⁸ Jesus’ suffering was a necessary part of the whole work of salvation. Suffering qualified Jesus to come before the Father as the high priest of his people. Through suffering he became qualified to be the author of salvation. Nothing required to qualify him was left out. There is no sense in *teleioo* of something missing in the moral character of the God-man. The death of the Savior (2:14; 5:7) was a necessary part of the process leading to salvation. In order to open up the way of his people to God, he must endure suffering and death.²⁹ Jesus is priest, sacrifice and altar. His death was part of the process that qualified him to make the offering of himself. Moreover, the experience of suffering (death) brought his vocation as redeemer to completion; it fully identified him with his brethren who were subject to death (1:14); through death he gained a complete victory over sin and death.³⁰ Jesus also experienced obedience. Jesus did not learn to obey, for as a sinless human being righteousness was his joy, obedience to his Father voluntary. In his death he brought to full completion his work as Redeemer through the experience of being fully compliant to the penalty for sin, which is death. The experience of death made him the complete Savior—one who identifies with his brethren in all things (sin excepted), who sympathizes with them in their obedience, and can help them because he, through experience, knows exactly what help is needed.³¹ Through everything that he was and did, he became the *teleioo* Savior: nothing was left out.

11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

The Writer is articulating a general truth that he is applying to the Son. A priest is of the same nature as the people whom he represents. He who offers the sacrifice and those who bring the sacrifice must be of the same nature. The question is, regarding the Son, is he of the same nature with those who are being sanctified? The phrase “all of one” may be variously understood depending on whether the pronoun “one” is identified as masculine or neuter. If “one” is masculine in gender, then a person is supposed. In this view Adam (v. 14) or Abraham (v. 16) are proposed by most commentators, and a shared human nature is intended. Adam is proposed if “those who are being sanctified” means humanity. Abraham is proposed if the Jews are intended. The masculine view seems too general if Adam (all humanity) is in view, and too restrictive if Abraham (the Jews) is in view. Another interpretation is that a masculine “one” would indicate

²⁷ Kittel and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, I:487, 488.

²⁸ Kittel and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, VIII:83.

²⁹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 80.

³⁰ Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, 62.

³¹ Barclay, *Hebrews*, 27, 28.

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the Person of God. If the Person of God is meant, then a common spiritual origin is intended, meaning, all are of or from God. Mankind is not from God as to his essential being. First, God has no origin, he is a self-existent being, therefore God and man do not share a common spiritual origin. Second, God created man's essence from nothing, not from a part of himself. Man's human essence—the soul of each human person—is patterned after God because his personality is the archetype of all personal beings, man and angel. All personal beings are created in his image, although the content of that image may be different between man and angel. Third, a common spiritual origin seems unlikely, as the starting point is the incarnation of God in humanity, vv. 6, 9, and the end point is the physical death of Christ, vv. 10, 14, 15.

The identity of "those who are being sanctified" is established by the context as those who are being saved. The "everyone" of v. 9 is further defined as "many sons" in v. 10, as Christ's "brethren" in v. 11, as the "brethren" and the "*ecclesia* or "called out ones" in v. 12, and in v. 13 as the "children whom God has given the Son. (I will deal with v. 16, the "seed of Abraham" in its place.) The pronoun "one" must in some manner connect "he who sanctifies" with those who are being saved. If the pronoun "one" is neuter in gender, then its meaning is established by the organic connection between Jesus and those whom he redeemed. A propitiation for sin in the human nature requires a vicarious sacrifice in the same human nature. As Hebrews 10:1-14 teaches, an animal sacrifice, being of a different nature than the sinner's nature, could only cover, not permanently remove, the guilt of sin. But, "we have been sanctified through the once for all offering of the body of Jesus Christ," indicating he was of the same nature as those for whom he suffered. The best view, then, is to understand the "one" in 2:11 as in the neuter gender, and "to interpret it as relating primarily to the community of human nature which binds the incarnate Son to us."³² Verse ten declares the Redeemer could not be perfect apart from sufferings; v. 11 declares it is impossible for the Son to be the Redeemer apart from the incarnation.

Jesus, he who sanctifies, shares a common humanity with those who are being sanctified. To "sanctify" "to set apart from sin and dedicate to God." Sanctification has three aspects in the believer's life. Sanctification is first that moment in salvation when the righteousness of the Redeemer is imputed to the sinner, and the now redeemed sinner is declared holy and righteous before God. This describes the believer's standing in Christ before God: he is sanctified. The second aspect is the day-to-day process of being conformed to the image of Christ. The believer grows in the grace and knowledge of God, becoming scripturally knowledgeable and spiritually mature. His thoughts, desires, and behavior become more Christ-like, he becomes more godly in his manner of living; he is being sanctified. The first aspect is the believer's standing in the court of God's justice: declared guiltless and forgiven by the imputed righteousness of Christ, therefore permanently set apart from sin and dedicated to God. The second aspect is the believer's daily life: using the holy nature given him by God at his salvation to act righteously and be conformed to be like Christ. The third aspect of sanctification is when the believer's state equals his standing. This occurs when the believer's body is transformed and glorified at the resurrection.³³ Sometimes this is called total sanctification.

The meaning at Hebrews 2:11 may be sanctification in the sense of that particular standing one has before God at the moment of salvation. However, there is a distinct reference to "glory" in 2:10; God is bringing many sons to glory through the one Son, Jesus the Savior. The reference to glory is not to the general manifestation of God's attributes, but to the glory specifically associated with salvation. That particular glory is fully realized at total sanctification when the believer's body and soul are transformed and glorified by being made suitable for life in God's presence (Romans 8:19; 1 Corinthians 15:52-53; 1 John 3:2). Taking into account this end result, it seems best to understand "being sanctified" in 2:11 as meaning the total regeneration-to-glorification experience. The complete salvation "package" is in view, from the moment when faith in Jesus brings forgiveness, to the moment when the believer is brought to heaven to live in God's presence for eternity. As the originator, leader, and sanctifier, "Christ himself is the foundation, source,

³² Hughes, *Hebrews*, 105.

³³ For those who experience mortal death, their soul is transformed and glorified at mortal death, and their body will be transformed and glorified at their resurrection. For those who are raptured, the transformation and glorification of body and soul occur simultaneously.

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method, and channel of our sanctification."³⁴

Jesus is not ashamed to call the redeemed "brethren." The Redeemer and the redeemed are brethren not only through his incarnation, but also spiritually, specifically by their salvation.³⁵ Jesus' brethren are not the mass of humanity. Men are not brethren with Jesus because they have a human nature and he has a human nature. He does share a common human nature with his brethren, but what makes them his brethren is that he has sanctified them. Their sanctification is why he is "not ashamed." In this context, the word "ashamed" has to do with the relationship one has with God. For example, Hebrews 11:6, God is not ashamed to own as his people those who desire to live in his presence. In Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26, Christ will not be ashamed of those who confess him as their Savior. The sense of "not ashamed" in Hebrews 2:10 is that Jesus is willing to acknowledge as his brethren those among mankind whom he has sanctified. He can acknowledge them because they have come to him in faith, looking for and believing in that salvation made possible through his death and offered to sinners in his name. Jesus and his brethren are united in the same nature and position before God, in standing sanctified before God. If, as is the case, he is not ashamed to own us, let us never be ashamed to confess him. If we extend the thought but a little, believers are united with him in sufferings, in trials, and in dependency upon God, because they tread the path he first trod for them. Going yet a little further on this path, let us also never be ashamed to own as brethren all those whom he calls his brethren. There are many "irregular" people in the church, not merely socially, but saved out of every condition of the human spirit. Let us take care not to disdain any one of his brethren, for all believers are one in Christ.

12 saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to You."

13 And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."

Verse twelve is a quotation from Psalm 22:22. Verse thirteen is composed of two quotations. The first has been identified as coming from either Psalm 18:2 (cf. 2 Samuel 22:1) or Isaiah 18:17. The second quotation is clearly from Isaiah 18:18. The immediate question posed by these quotations would seem to be, when did the Son acknowledge believers as his brethren? Chronologically, that would be the day of the resurrection, John 20:17, "Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, '... go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.''" However, John's Gospel was written after the Hebrews epistle. Whether or not the Writer knew of this incident, he has shown his preference to use the Old Testament as his source material. The use here keeps the reader's attention on the various themes of Christ's superiority over the angels (v. 16), his deity and his incarnation, and his redeeming death. This last is most apparent in v. 12. Jesus owns believers as his brethren as a result of his crucifixion. Psalm 22 was used by Jesus as a Messianic Psalm, Matthew 27:46. The Gospel writers noted how certain details of the Psalm corresponded to the crucifixion. The quotation used here in Hebrews is appropriate to the Son and answers the question as to when believers became brethren. Note that in the Psalm, as also reflected in John's Gospel, believers are brethren after the Son's death on the cross, after the resurrection. In the Psalm, the Savior has cried out "save me, deliver me." The reader knows God has responded because the Son says, "You [God] have answered me [the Son]." The Son then replies to his Father, "I will declare your name, I will praise you."

- "But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! [Here the reader should imagine a pause as God responds, heard only by the Son. The Son then resumes his cry to God.] You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You."

³⁴ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I:145.

³⁵ The Writer gives at least one wonderful implication of this amazing fact, which is, the dominion of man through the God-man.

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The first use of Psalm 22, then, is to demonstrate that the Son does call believers his brethren. I believe that the Writer of Hebrews is also making the point that it became possible for believers to be his brethren only through his sanctifying death. Verses 14-17 state this conclusion. This, in turn, goes back to the underlying question, how can God die? The answer is that the Son is God and man, the God-man, whose death was necessary to salvation, v. 9. His human nature, demonstrated most clearly in his propitiating death, is "all in one" with those whom he has sanctified through his death. His humanity is seen, not as a weakness or detriment, still less as making him unworthy of worship, or as making him less than deity, but as a divinely purposed necessity in the plan of salvation. This, in turn, subtly addresses the first theme of the epistle, Christ's superiority to the angels. In his humanity he was a little lower, for a little while, than the angels, but he was then exalted, for it is in his resurrected, therefore exalted state, that he declares God to his brethren, and sings God's praises in the midst of the assembly. To declare "Your name" is to proclaim the message of the Gospel: the grace, reconciliation, and glory to be found only in the Son. Christ declares the Gospel message in the midst of the "congregation," the *ecclesia*, a word meaning "a called out assembly" and usually translated "church" in the New Testament. In the context of Hebrews, *ecclesia* does not refer only to the New Testament body of believers, but to all the believing congregation of the Lord, Old and New Testament. In declaring God's name and singing God's praises in the assembly, the Son is not ashamed to own God as his God, and those whom God has saved as his brethren.

The second quotation is "I will put my trust in him." This quote may be from Psalm 18 or Isaiah 18 (appropriate phrase italicized).

- Psalm 18:2, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, *in whom I will trust;*"
- Isaiah 8:17, "And I will wait on the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; *and I will hope in Him.*"

If the quote is from Isaiah, it is from the LXX version, "and I will trust in him." The source is relevant, because when the New Testament authors use or quote the Old Testament, the original context usually has some relationship to the New Testament context in which it is used. In the Isaiah passage, the original context is the unbelief of Israel versus the faithfulness of the believers. Israel as a nation has turned away from the Lord; Isaiah and the believers will trust in the Lord to deliver them from judgment to come. However, in Psalm 18 David praises God for deliverance from death. God is mighty on behalf of the believer, therefore, one may trust in him. Psalm 18 seems the appropriate source. Lane believes 2 Samuel 22 (same as Psalm 18) is the correct context, "The fact that Jesus' confidence was fully vindicated after he had experienced suffering and affliction assured them that they could also trust God in difficult circumstances."³⁶ Owen also held this view, "In all the troubles and difficulties that Christ had to contend withal, he put his trust in God. And this reveals him to have been truly and really one with his children, his brethren, seeing it was his duty no less than theirs to depend on God in troubles and distresses."³⁷ The point of the quotation, regardless of the source, is that genuine trust in God is the normal response of a sanctified human nature. The Son, in his preincarnate state, was not in circumstances requiring him to trust. In his sanctified human nature it was natural that he should trust in God.³⁸ His trust in God reveals a genuine human nature. Therefore, the Son has a genuine connection with humanity, the common human nature he shares with his brethren whom he sanctified.

The last quotation reads in the Old Testament, Isaiah 8:18, "Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me!" As noted above, the original Isaiah context is a remnant of believers trusting in the Lord, referring specifically to Isaiah, his children, and other believers. In the original, the believers are for "signs and wonders" in Israel. There may be a sense in Hebrews of a similar feeling of isolation, in that the original readers were experiencing persecution. In those circumstances, the relationship with the Son would be comforting. The primary thought in using this quotation would be the same as "I will put my trust in him."

³⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 60.

³⁷ Owen, *Hebrews*, III:429.

³⁸ Brown, *Hebrews*, 119.

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Comparing with v. 14, the word “children” seems to be key. This is the only time in the New Testament believers are referred to as Christ’s children. Thinking on the theme of persecution, Isaiah and his children were witnesses to the faithfulness of God. The very names of his children proclaimed their trust in God. Perhaps the use of the Isaiah passage in Hebrews is to communicate the bond between Christ and his people, and the witness found in his people. The idea of a common human nature is carried forward in the thought of the Savior’s spiritual offspring; compare “seed” in Isaiah 53:10. This fits into the idea of spiritual children found in Hebrews 2:16 (seed of Abraham). The sum of these quotations is just this, “The Lord Jesus, who is not ashamed to call us brethren, who hastened to declare to us the Father’s name after his resurrection, who during his lifetime exercised to the fullest extent faith in God, at the last shall acknowledge us as the children given to him of the Father.”³⁹

14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same

The words, “inasmuch then”, have the force of “therefore,” or “since therefore.” Since therefore the children have partaken of flesh and blood,⁴⁰ so has the Son. The word *koinoneo*, translated “partaken,” has the idea of “to have a share in common with someone else.”⁴¹ The children shared a common human nature. Although this is true of the mass of humanity, the word “children” indicates the focus is on those whom Christ sanctified, vv. 11, 13. In regard to this common human nature, Christ *paraplesios*, “in like manner,” *metecho*, “took hold of human nature.” The incarnation was a reality in which the Son joined to himself a genuine human nature. He fully participated in every condition of human nature, sin excepted. The “*metecho*,” in like manner, may also indicate the process of being born, perhaps with the virgin birth in view. More likely, it simply means that the Son fully participated in the human condition; “in the incarnation the transcendent Son accepted the mode of existence common to all humanity.”⁴²

In using *metecho*, to take hold of, not *koinoneo*, to share in common, to describe the act of the Son joining human nature to himself, the Writer is careful to preserve the distinction between the naturally procreated, therefore sinful human nature of mankind, and the miraculously created⁴³ sinless human nature of the Son. In addition, the two verbs, *koinoneo* and *metecho*, are in the perfect and aorist tenses, respectively. The change in tenses indicates “the children share permanently with one another a common human nature, and at a particular time Jesus himself also shared it with them.”⁴⁴ The aorist tense views an action as a completed in a moment in time. The aorist “emphasizes that the Son assumed human nature ‘at a fixed point in time, by his own choice.’”⁴⁵

that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

The Son assumed human nature that he might redeem sinners through his death in their human nature. Let us be certain we understand how this redemption was accomplished. Jesus “used death as a means of destroying the maliciousness of death. But the difference between his death and all others lies in the fact of

³⁹ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I:149.

⁴⁰ Some manuscripts read “blood and flesh.”

⁴¹ Wuest, *Hebrews*, II:62.

⁴² Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 60.

⁴³ There was no sexual activity in the procreation of Jesus. God created a viable male embryo in Mary through his supernatural power, Luke 1:31, 34-35.

⁴⁴ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 171.

⁴⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 60, quoting F. F. Bruce.

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his sinlessness. Death for him was caused by other men's sins."⁴⁶ In his sinless humanity Jesus was fit to represent the human nature. In his sinlessness he was fit to accept the imputation of other men's sins and experience the punishment for their sins. By unjustly experiencing death for the guilt of sin he suffered in his human nature, while his deity supported him and gave the value of infinite merit to his innocent person and guiltless death.

Through his death, he destroyed him who had power of death, that is, he destroyed the devil. Let us speak first of the power of death. In the Scripture, death is a word used to indicate the separation of the soul from God (spiritual death), or the separation of the soul from the body (physical death). What is in view here is physical death. The power of physical death is that it permanently separates the lost unsaved soul from God. There is no salvation beyond physical death; salvation is to be gained only in this present physical life. The unsaved are spiritually dead—separated from God, and at physical death that state continues for all eternity. Hence the need to be saved now, today, because physical death may come in any form at any moment, locking the soul into its current spiritual state for all eternity. The Savior experienced both a spiritual and a physical death in order that the power of death is destroyed for those who are his brethren. The preceding verses speak of the Savior's physical death as the reason (v. 9) he assumed human nature.⁴⁷ The spiritual payment Christ made for sin is not ignored, but the focus is on the physical. Only in this mortal life can sinners find salvation from sin and God's wrath against sin, because of what Jesus did on the cross. Jesus destroyed the power of death by bringing salvation. Those who are saved need not fear the power of death.⁴⁸

The devil is said to be the cause of death, because his self-origination of sin into God's creation caused the penalty of death to be applied. God did not create death because the devil sinned. God's moral law is an expression of his righteous character. Before the universe came into existence his law required death as the consequence for sin. The first application of that law occurred when Lucifer sinned. In effect, death did not exist prior to Lucifer's act of sin. Prior to the origination of sin, death lay dormant in the law as a potential penalty. Only after sin became a reality did death change from potential consequence to active application. When the first act of sin occurred, death, the penalty required by law, was executed. It is because the devil's sin activated the penalty that he is said to have the power of death. That is, the devil is not the one who directly brings death to each individual sinner—he is not the angel of death. Death is the consequence of breaking God's moral law, and as such God is the one who created the condition of death, and he is the one who applies that condition to individual men as merited by their sin nature (Deuteronomy 32:39; Luke 12:5; Revelation 1:18). If the real power of death did not reside in God, then he could not suspend spiritual death for the believer, and could not suspend physical death for the raptured church. The devil was simply the first sinner—the one who, through his sin, caused the penalty of death to be applied to all who sin. The devil himself suffers the consequence of his sin, which is spiritual death for eternity.⁴⁹ Mankind suffers the consequence of Adam's sin, which, because of man's material nature, applied the penalty of physical death as well as spiritual death.

When Jesus destroyed the power of death, he destroyed, in regard to the believer, that awful power that Lucifer had caused by his sin. The word translated "destroy" is *katargeo*, a word meaning "to render inactive, or ineffective." Jesus did not immediately eliminate death⁵⁰ in all its aspects. He immediately rendered inactive the power of spiritual death for those who have faith in God's plan of salvation. Physical death still exists for

⁴⁶ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 92.

⁴⁷ On the cross, Jesus suffered a temporary spiritual separation from God when the guilt of man's sin was imputed to him. Spiritually he suffered the wrath of God against sin, indicated by his cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" He then suffered physical death, as the culmination of his propitiation for sin, because the "wages of sin is death," a truth encompassing physical as well as spiritual death.

⁴⁸ The spiritual state of the saved soul—alive in Christ—is confirmed for eternity at the moment of salvation. For the saved soul, physical death is simply God's way of removing the resident sin nature from body and soul.

⁴⁹ The fallen angels do not experience physical death, but are irrevocably spiritually dead.

⁵⁰ In the plan of God, Jesus' saving death on the cross eliminates spiritual and physical death for the believer, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57. In the future, at the Great White Throne judgment, Revelation 20:11-15, death will be permanently confined to the Lake of Fire for eternity, in the person of all unsaved men and angels.

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the believer, but that is because the material body is not redeemed; it remains corrupted by sin, therefore still subject to the physical penalty of sin. Its power to separate the soul from God has been rendered inactive toward the believer. Instead, physical death is the believer's entrance to God's immediate presence in heaven, and it is the way in which God removes the resident sin nature from the believer's body and soul.

Was the devil "rendered inactive," or "ineffective" when Jesus propitiated the guilt of sin through his death? In the immediate sense, only partially. Satan is actively working in the world to persuade men to rebel against God. He is actively working to hide the truth of the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). He is actively working to cause the physical death of unsaved men, because physical death will confirm their state of spiritual death. However, on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus said, John 12:31, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (cf. 14:30; 16:11). The power of death was broken when Jesus suffered and died on the cross. The devil, whose sin brought the consequence of death to creation, is judged and waiting the execution of his punishment (permanent exile to the Lake of Fire). Since the power of death is broken (in those who are saved), in that sense it may be said that he whose sin caused the law of death to be applied is now ineffective. There are other ways in which the power of the devil has been broken. The sin nature that is in all men leads them to rebel against God. This also might be said to be the power of the devil (cf. Ephesians 2:2), for he uses it to accomplish his plans. In the saved sinner, the dominating power of the sin nature is rendered ineffective by the power of holiness God puts into every saved soul. In that deliverance from the power of sin, the power of the devil may be said to be rendered ineffective. On at least one occasion Jesus said that a person was bound by Satan though a physical illness, Luke 13:16. Satan uses the sin nature to work his will through sinners, and apparently some physical maladies are within his power. Jesus cast out fallen angels causing physical illnesses, and in this view one should note that the word "devil" may also be used as a plural, indicating Christ has broken the power of the fallen angels. The sense of Hebrews 2:14, however, appears to be primarily spiritual versus physical. Jesus delivers believers from the penalty of sin, death, and the power or dominion of sin, which leads them to rebel against God.

15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

It is a universal truth that all know they must die. It is also a universal truth that all (believers excepted) deny the cause of their death, which is their sin. Man fears physical death because he is uncertain of his existence, or the quality of his existence, after death. The word "bondage" is a translation of the Greek *doulei*, a word related to *doulos*, a servant. The word *doulei* means to be a slave. The fear of death made men slaves to fear. Fear became the master, the superior power keeping them in bondage to itself. All their lives men live under a continual expectation of death and damnation. Jesus took away that fear for the believer. He suffered the penalty for death, thus removing its power over the believer. He resurrected out of death, which is the sure indication that death's hold on the believer has been broken. No believer need fear death, because it cannot separate him from God. Jesus has made death the entrance to heaven for those who have faith in him.

16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

By "the seed of Abraham" is meant those who possess and exercise the same faith in God that Abraham possessed and exercised. Jesus made quite plain that the prerequisite for being Abraham's seed was faith, John 8:39, 56, as did Paul, Galatians 3:27. The precedent for this view has already been set in Hebrews 2:10-11. The meaning here is simply this, the Son became a man in order to save men and women. This is also the end of the theme, the Son superior to the angels, and the writer could not make his meaning more plain. God did not stoop to help the angels,⁵¹ but he did stoop to help man. God's sovereignty, his power, and his grace are clearly seen in this choice. In becoming man the Son did not become less than the angels, rather, in his condescension, humiliation, and exaltation he raised man above the angels.

⁵¹ There is here no sub-theme of salvation denied to the unfallen angels. Nevertheless, Scripture appears to teach that the unfallen angels will not be redeemed: the Lake of Fire was prepared for the devil and his angels.

Hebrews Two

17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The word "therefore" sometimes looks back and forward. Looking back, the Writer draws a conclusion. Jesus had to be made like his brethren, i.e., assume a genuine human nature to himself, in order to experience death and deliver them from sin. The Writer then looks forward to his next theme, which will start from the premise that the Son had to be "made like his brethren." Jesus had to be made like his brethren that he might be their high priest. In the Law, it was the high priest who offered the atoning sacrifice for the nation, and it is as high priest that the Son will make his propitiation for the sins of his people. Here, the Writer will be on familiar ground with his original readers. The original readers of Hebrews were completely familiar with the system of sacrifices and priests to atone for sin. What would seem to be out of place is Jesus in the office of high priest. Jesus was by birth of the tribe of Judah, but the Law required the high priest to be by birth of the tribe of Levi. The Writer will show that, having assumed a human nature, Jesus used that nature not only as sacrificial offering, but was also qualified by it to serve as the high priest.

The Greek word the NKJV translates as "had" is *opheilo*. The word is used of Christ only here. In 5:3 it indicates a priest is "required" to make an offering for himself and the people he represents. In 5:12 the Writer tells his readers that by this point in their Christianity they "ought" to be teachers. In these uses a moral obligation is indicated. Here, in 2:17, the meaning is that the Son had a moral obligation to be made like his brethren in all things, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest. Commenting on "*opheilo*," Robertson says, "Having undertaken the work of redemption, voluntarily, Jesus was under obligation to be properly equipped for that priestly service and sacrifice."⁵² The phrase "in things pertaining to God," literally means "with regard to God."⁵³ The phrase is used in several LXX applications, e.g., Moses representing Aaron before God (Exodus 4:16); Moses representing the people before God (Exodus 18:19); Israel's bad behavior in relation to God (Deuteronomy 31:27). A variety of translations helps us understand the meaning: "with reference to what concerns God,"⁵⁴ "in matters for which they [the priests] are responsible to God,"⁵⁵ "in the service of God."⁵⁶

The Son joined genuine human nature to his deity, experienced everything involved in living a human life (sin excepted), and suffered the trials, persecution, and even death inherent to humanity, in order that, in his priestly service toward God and on behalf of his brethren, he might be a merciful and faithful high priest. Two compatible views may be taken of "merciful and faithful." The first is that by enduring trials and suffering, the Son proved that he was merciful and faithful. The second is that through his humanity he experienced these things, qualifying him (*teleioo*) to be man's high priest, i.e., 2:10, he was made "perfect" through sufferings.

The Writer here introduces Jesus as "high priest." This idea was implied at 1:3 and 2:9-11. In Hebrews only in the New Testament is Jesus identified as a priest. There is some prophetic precedence, I Samuel 2:35; Zechariah 6:13. The Writer will not present Jesus as a priest in the order of the Law of Moses, but as the high priest from an older order, that of Melchizedek. He will contrast the priesthood of Christ against that of the Law, to make the point that priests under the Law were merely servants in the house of God, but the Son is the one true high priest over God's household.

Although Hebrews is the only place where Christ is identified as a priest, the Old Testament Scripture set the stage for this identification. The high priest under the Law was intended to be a type, i.e., a divinely purposed illustration, of the truth of Christ as the one who makes a complete intercession for all the sins of his people. The background is the duty of the high priest to perform a sacrifice for the nation once each year. This once a year sacrifice, the day of atonement (Leviticus 16; 23:27), was made for the sins of the people

⁵² Robertson, *Hebrews*, V:350.

⁵³ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 65.

⁵⁴ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 188.

⁵⁵ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 88.

⁵⁶ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 120.

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as a congregation before the Lord. Whatever sins the congregation may have committed during the preceding year were covered by this once a year atonement. This offering pointed to the once for all offering made by Jesus Christ, the sinner's high priest. The essential difference between the two is seen in the word "propitiation." The Levitical high priest made an atonement that must be repeated year after year, because it could only cover past sins. The Son made a one-time propitiation that once for all satisfied the guilt and penalty of all sin, past, present, and future to his crucifixion.

The reader may remember from the Introduction my proposed outline of Hebrews. Jesus is:

- The offeror who brings the sacrifice for sin
- The sacrificial offering for sin
- The altar (his body) where the sacrifice is offered
- The high priest who presents the sacrifice on behalf of the sinner
- God who accepts the sacrifice as full payment for the sin.

The Writer has already introduced (and will return to) the proposition that Jesus is the sacrificial offering for sin (2:9, 11-12, 14-15). The thought of Jesus as the offeror bringing the offering is has been implied and will be worked out later in the epistle. For now, the Writer will develop the theme of Jesus as the high priest who presents the propitiating sacrifice, and will take the bulk of the epistle (chapters 3-10) to demonstrate and prove his point.

18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Here is the corollary to the new theme. A priest must be able to empathize with the people he serves. That is a reason the Son joined human nature to his deity, and the basis for his work as high priest. The verse also subtly introduces the idea that his work as high priest includes a continuing ministry of intercession. The word *boetheo* is translated "aid." The essential meaning of this word is to run on hearing a cry for help, with the purpose of giving assistance. Jesus is actively involved in helping those who cry out to him for help. In the first instance this must refer to bringing salvation to those who cry out for help by confessing their sins and having faith in him as Savior. It must also include, however, his continuing help and intercession when the believer is besieged by temptation. Jesus knows the suffering of temptation; therefore he knows how to help those suffering temptation.

HEBREWS THREE

1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

At this point I diverge somewhat from other commentators. It is usual to understand the Writer as proving Christ is superior to Moses, 3:1-6, and then, beginning at chapter five, as superior to the Levitical priests. These things are true, but serve as the background for the Writer's two main themes in chapters three through ten. First the "rest" given in Jesus is better than the "rest" provided by Moses (and later Joshua). The second, is that Jesus is of an order of priesthood that is separate from, and higher in position before God, than the system of Levitical priests and sacrifices. Because he is a high priest who is in his Person and priestly work superior to the priests and sacrifices of the Levitical system, he is able to provide the completed salvation that the Levitical system could not provide: his once for all sacrifice versus the repeated sacrifices of the Levitical system. The original readers knew that Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, their Redeemer and Creator, was superior to Moses and the Levitical priests. The point to be demonstrated was not the worth of his Person, but the *teleioo*, the completeness, of the salvation he provided, the superiority of the Gospel delivered "in Son." The Writer will show that Christ as God's high priest provides a completed offering (propitiation) for sin and a completed "rest" for the believer. The first step will be to compare Moses' position in the house of God with the Son's position.

The Writer begins with an appeal to his readers to recognize their position in Christ. In the preceding chapter, he has demonstrated that those who know Christ as Savior have been sanctified by Christ. He "therefore" calls them "holy" brethren. He admits his confidence in their salvation and their sanctified status. He will have some hard things to say to them (e.g., v. 12), and he wants them to know that he is speaking to them in love as brothers in a common salvation, not as reprobates who have turned away from Christ (that is what he is encouraging them not to do). In this they are "partakers" of the heavenly calling. "Partakers" is not the *koinoneo* of 2:14, which has the meaning of sharing in common, but is *metochos*, a noun meaning to participate. It is the word translated in 1:9 as "fellows." The believers are participants in the "heavenly calling." What was this call from heaven? This is not just the initial and effectual call to repent and be saved, but must include the call to persevere to the consummation¹ of one's salvation; compare 3:6, "whose house we are if indeed we hold fast," etc., and 3:14; 4:1, 9, 11. The heavenly calling, then, is the entire regeneration-to-glorification salvation experience. This is a not so subtle reminder that they owe their salvation to Christ, not to the Law.

The word translated "consider" means to give thoughtful and careful attention. Focus your mind on Jesus Christ, apostle and high priest of our confession. By "confession" may be meant something in line with a creedal statement: Christ is the efficient author of the Gospel professed by these holy brethren. Or, it may mean the public declaration of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. Neither view need exclude the other. The Writer states that Christ is the "apostle" of our confession. This is the only place where the word "apostle" is applied to Christ, although the idea is present everywhere in the New Testament. The word *apostolos* has the meaning of "to send." An apostle is "one who has been sent," and implied is the thought of sent with a special message or on a specific mission. The question here is, was Christ sent as a messenger, or as an ambassador? Jesus referred to himself as one who was sent, John 4:34; 5:23; 6:38; 17:3 and many more similar references. However, it seems better to understand *apostolos* as indicating Jesus was sent on a special mission as God's "ambassador," a meaning that includes the message. When one is a messenger, it is the message, not the one sent, that represents the sender. For example, Daniel prayed to God and God sent an angel to help him understand the message given in response to his prayer. A messenger carries the message. An ambassador, however, directly represents the sender. He is sent to perform a specific mission on behalf of the sender, and possesses the authority of the sender to carry out that mission. The Son was sent to redeem men and possessed the authority to accomplish that mission: "when he had *by himself* purged our sins," compare John 10:17-18. His ambassadorial message was reconciliation with God, compare 2 Corinthians 5:20.

¹ Romans 8:23-25; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:21-23.

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Jesus is also the high priest. The term “high priest” relates to his propitiation for sin, as I discussed at 1:17. Looking to the opening word of chapter three, “therefore,” one can perceive that, taken together, these many terms “simply sum up the presentation of Jesus in 1:1-2:18 as the one through whom God proclaimed the definitive word of salvation and made propitiation for the sins of the people . . . the titles are parallel designations which view the accomplishment of Jesus in terms of divine authorization for his word and work . . . the coordination of the phrase . . . indicates the Writer is concerned to emphasize the indivisibility of the two offices.”² Jesus was sent as the ambassador of God to sinners, and brought men to God as the high priest of sinners.

One might compare Moses to Jesus in both offices. Moses was in effect an apostle, sent by God to Pharaoh and Israel. He represented God to men, faithfully giving them God’s word. In a limited sense he was the high priest of God, bringing Israel the law, teaching them the sacrifices, and anointing their priests, including Aaron the high priest, for their work. However, the Writer’s point of comparison is Moses the servant in God’s house versus Christ the builder of God’s house. In the view of the Writer, Christ was, v. 2, appointed apostle and high priest over the house of God that he was building; Moses was always a servant in Christ’s house, and indeed, was a part of the house, v. 3, that Christ built.

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

The faithfulness of Moses is made the point of comparison. This might seem strange to modern readers, to compare Jesus to Moses, rather than vice versa, but it made perfect sense to the original readers. Moses was considered by many Jews to have been the greatest person in their history. For some, Moses held a higher place than the angels because God spoke to him face to face.³ Some Jewish traditions thought Messiah would be the new Moses (based upon Deuteronomy 18:15-18). Before showing the differences between Moses and Christ, the Writer appeals to his reader’s attention by favorably comparing Moses to Christ. The basis for this comparison is probably 1 Samuel 2:35, spoken by the Lord to unfaithful Eli, and Numbers 12:7, spoken by God of Moses.

- “Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever.”
- He [Moses] is faithful in all My house.

The comparison is that Jesus is that prophesied faithful priest who is as faithful in his ministry to the congregation of the Lord, as Moses was to the congregation of Israel in the wilderness.

3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house.

4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.

The difference in glory, honor, and dignity between Moses and Christ is in part a difference of position, as the difference between the servant and the master. The Writer expresses this truth in terms of a “house.” The NKJV lists 1740 uses of the English “house” in the Scripture. A “house” can be a physical structure (Genesis 43:19), an individual family (Genesis 12:1), a group of families (Genesis 50:8), or a tribe consisting of all the families making up that tribe (Exodus 2:1). A house also describes a nation (Exodus 16:31), a congregation of believers (Numbers 12:7; 1 Timothy 3:15), and a structure where worship takes place (Exodus 23:19). The New Testament describes believers as a house of God, 1 Corinthians 3:9; 1 Peter 2:5. The “house” in vv. 3-6 in one sense refers to the entire congregation of Israel as led by Moses, and in another sense all believers in every dispensation as led by Christ. In a larger sense, “the point of comparison lies in the fact that Moses and Christ were both engaged, not as other divine messengers with a part, but with the whole of the divine economy. The prophets dealt severally with certain aspects of truth, the kings with a

² Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 75, 76.

³ Guthrie, G., *Hebrews*, 127.

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different area of life, the priests with another. But Moses and Christ dealt with the 'whole house of God'.⁴ Moses dealt with the economy of the Law, which was the foundation of faith and practice for many succeeding generations of believers. This was his "house." In reference to Christ, however, the dispensation of the Law was one room in the larger house of "saved by grace through faith," of which Christ is the builder. The Jewish and Gentile followers of Judaism believed in Moses as the builder of their house of faith. The Writer begins at the point of their confidence in Moses and reasons from the lesser to the greater. The faithfulness of Moses in dealing with the house of Judaism is used as the point of comparison with the faithfulness of Christ in dealing with the whole house of God, of which, the Writer will now declare, Moses and his followers were but part of the whole.

5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward,

6 but Christ as a Son over His own house,

The Writer quotes from Numbers 12:7, "He [Moses] is faithful in all My house." God is speaking, and the readers are thus reminded that the "house" which they commonly spoke of as Moses' house was in truth God's house which God had built. Moses was but a servant. A faithful servant, a servant who delivered the testimony of God, but only a servant. I do not want to minimize the work of Moses; indeed, his faithfulness in his work is an illustration of the work of Christ. If we understand Moses as a faithful servant, then we are able to understand Christ as God's faithful servant over God's whole house. The relative position of Moses to Christ is, however, crucial, for an illustration is not quite the same as the reality. Moses was a faithful servant "in" God's house. Christ is the faithful servant "over" his own house:

- "And Moses indeed was faithful in all God's house as a servant . . . but Christ [was faithful] as a Son over his [Christ's] own house."

The manner in which Moses served in Christ's house is seen in the Greek word translated "servant." The word is *therapon*. This word is used only here in the New Testament and only in a few places in the LXX, the most notable being Numbers 12:7. In common Greek, *therapon* was used to describe (quotes are from Trench⁵) "the physician's watchful tending of the sick, or a person's service to God." The *therapon* was different from the *doulos*. "The *doulos* was properly the 'bond-man,' one who was in a permanent relation of servitude to another, one whose will was completely subject to the will of another." The *therapon* "however, was one who served without regard to his state as a freedman or as a slave and without regard to whether he was bound by duty or impelled by love." The word *therapon* thus implies "that Moses occupied a more confidential position, offered a freer service, and possessed a higher dignity than a *doulos*. Moses service more closely resembled the service of an *oikonomos* (overseer) in God's house." A more modern word for *oikonomos* is steward or manager. Moses was a faithful manager in God's house, the house that Christ built. Extending the metaphor, and reasoning from the lesser to the greater: just as Moses was a faithful manager in his house, Christ is the faithful manager over the house in which Moses served.

6 (continued) whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

The ending phrase of v. 6 is the beginning of, or introduction to, the exhortation that follows in 3:7-4:13. The Writer has established that believers under the law are part of the house of Christ. They were obedient to Moses⁶ the faithful servant in the house of God. But, a greater than Moses has appeared, the One whom Moses was serving, the One to whom these original readers had pledged their faith and service. New Testament believers are part of the household of faith "if we hold fast," etc. The point of comparison is still

⁴ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 75.

⁵ Trench, *Synonyms*, 46.

⁶ Meaning, the plan of salvation delivered through and (first) administered by Moses.

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the faithfulness of Moses. The believer is to be as faithful in the house of God as Moses the faithful *therapon* was in the discharge of his duties. Only now, we serve not Moses (the Law) but the builder of the house, Christ. In other words, these former believers in the Law had left the Law for faith and salvation in Christ. They, and all New Testament believers, are to be as faithful to Christ as was Moses. The object of that faithfulness is to "hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of our hope firm to the end."

What that "hope" is will be explained in the following verses. To that hope one must "hold fast." Several meanings may be applied "hold fast:" to keep possession of; to follow a course; to remain secure; to continue to adhere to. The manner in which one is to hold fast is with "confidence and rejoicing." "Confidence" is the Greek word *parresia*, meaning "freedom or frankness in speaking."⁷ The word is used in the New Testament of speaking openly or plainly. Speaking in public is terribly fearful for most people. Thus the confidence to speak publically is notable. Speaking frankly (openly) is also uncommon. The type or kind or quality of confidence it takes to speak publically or to speak frankly is used to illustrate the kind of confidence one is to have in the things of Christ. When one has this confidence, then he or she is certain that the things believed to be true are true, and thus he or she will plainly voice those truths to others as sure and certain. In Hebrews *parresia*, hold fast, is also translated "boldness," 4:16; 10:19; and again as "confidence," 10:35. I find its use particularly appropriate to a group of people whose faith was being tested because they had spoken openly of Christ as the only Savior. In context, a believer must hold fast to this hope with the same manner or attitude he has in openly speaking the truth. One's "hope" is also to be held fast in "rejoicing." This word, *kauchema*, means "to boast," not arrogantly or pridefully, but in the sense taking pride in a task well done. Here the object of *kauchema* is "the hope."

What the Writer is speaking of by using *parresia* and *kauchema* is genuine faith. He is not saying that the proof of genuine faith is boasting about it publically. He is using these words to indicate one's state of mind about the object of faith. Together, these words imply a justified confidence in the object of faith. This is a mark of genuine faith: an unshakeable outspoken confidence in Christ.

This genuine faith in "the hope" is to be held "firm to the end." The word "firm" is *bebaios*, meaning "fixed, sure, certain." Figuratively it means "that upon which one may build, rely, or trust."⁸ The word is (in the New Testament) always used of objects, not persons, cf. 6:19. The "hope" the believer has is certain, and his or her faith in this "hope" is to be just as certain. One is to hold hope firm "to the end." This phrase means to maintain one's faith in "the hope" all the way through the end of life. It is common to speak of being faithful to death, but the New Testament always speaks of one's faithfulness while enduring death. This is because death is an entrance into heaven. Therefore, "to the end" means all the way through the conclusion of mortal life into the beginning of new life in heaven.

These attitudes of holding fast, confidence, rejoicing, being firm to the end, are to be practiced in connection with "the hope." Now "hope," in the regular and controlling sense of that word in the Scripture, is a steadfast assurance that the thing looked for will appear. What that thing is, to the Writer of Hebrews, is "rest." Chapter 3:7-4:13 describe how the believer may enter into God's rest. I will explain "rest" in the *Excursus* immediately below.

*Excursus: Epistle of Hebrews Doctrine of "Rest"*⁹

As an introduction to Hebrews 3:7-4:13, it will be helpful to understand the doctrine of "rest," as it applies to these verses. In the briefest of terms, "rest" is ceasing from one's works while living in God's land.¹⁰ Both parts of the definition are critical to an understanding of the doctrine of rest. First, what does it mean to cease from one's works? Usually we think of ceasing from one's works in terms of salvation. The believer is

⁷ Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 1124.

⁸ Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 331.

⁹ The background of this excursus came in part from "Experiencing the Old Testament Rest of God," in Kaiser, *Uses of the TO in the New*, 145-175.

¹⁰ "Rest" applies to both physical and spiritual contexts.

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to stop trying to gain heaven through his own works and accept the finished work of Christ on the cross as all-sufficient for him to be saved. Ceasing from one's works as to salvation is one part of the doctrine of rest. That is not, however, the part of the doctrine addressed in Hebrews. "Rest" in Hebrews begins with Genesis 2:2 (Hebrews 4:4), "And God rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done." God's rest does not mean he was tired and needed to stop all activity. It means that he stopped doing the specific works he was doing to create the universe. In other words, that particular part of God's plan was completed, and God moved on to other works in his plan. Man is always working to live in a certain manner in the world. The doctrine of "rest" never means to stop doing all work, it means to stop doing sin's works. Man enters into God's rest when he stops doing what he thinks is right and begins to do what God says is right. When one is in God's rest, he stops doing sin's works and does God's works. He lives in God's land according to God's rules for living.

"Rest" is ceasing from one's works *while living in God's land*. The second part of the definition requires an understanding of "God's land," which brings us to the subject of "the promise." The "promise" was God's word to Abraham and his descendants regarding living in God's land, Genesis 12:1-3. The fulfillment of this promise was so important that God took personal responsibility to fulfill it, Genesis 15:17.¹¹ He made an unconditional contract with Abraham and his descendants. Physically, the land was Canaan, i.e., Palestine. Entering into God's land required faith in God's promise. The Israelites failed to enter the land the first time (Numbers 14), because they lacked faith in God's promise to Abraham. God brought the succeeding generation into the land as he had promised, because they had faith. However, even when in their possession the land would remain God's land, Leviticus 25:23. The condition required to enter God's land was faith in God's promise to give them the land. The condition required to remain in God's land was their exercise of faith to live in it according to God's rules for living, Deuteronomy 30:15-20. Living in God's land according to God's rules for living is "rest." Individuals failing to live in the land according to God's rules forfeited God's blessing. If the failure of individuals became a national failure, then the nation would be removed from God's land.¹²

Now we have a full understanding of "rest." To "rest" is to live in God's land according to God's rules for living (the precepts and principles given in Scripture). The land is entered by faith, and one remains in it through faith. This explanation applies to the argument of Hebrews 3:7-4:13, concerning the first failure of Israel to enter the land, their subsequent removal from the land due to their failure to live in it according to God's rules, and the continuing promise of "rest" to the New Testament believer.

There is a spiritual application to God's rest. The land promised to Israel is not a type or illustration of life in heaven, but of the believer's life on earth; it illustrates his pilgrimage on earth as he journeys to the heavenly city. He enters the land through resting in Jesus' death on the cross as payment for his sins. He remains in the land by resting from his own works. That is, he does God's works while he is in God's land. He leaves God's rest when he commits an act of sin, for then he is doing his works, not God's works. He can be "removed" from God's land through sin, which spiritually is the breaking of fellowship due to an act of sin. He is restored to the land by doing God's works, 1 John 1:9, and living his life according to God's rules.

There is as well a future aspect to "rest."¹³ Messiah's kingdom is the literal, physical kingdom of God on

¹¹ Passing between the two halves of an animal carcass was the way in which a contract was "signed" in Abraham's culture. In his promise to Abraham, Genesis 15:4-16, 18-21, God made a contract with Abraham and certified the certainty of its fulfillment by passing between the halves by himself (the torch). This made it an unconditional contract (covenant), meaning, that individuals might perform acts that nullified the contract for them personally, but God was committed to ultimately fulfilling it for Abraham and his descendants.

¹² The ten northern tribes failed so significantly they were permanently removed from the land until Messiah's reign. Judah and Benjamin were temporarily removed (to Babylon) for their repeated failures to live in the land by God's rules. The Jews were removed from the land from AD 70 to AD 1948 due to their consistent failure to live in God's land by God's rule.

¹³ The current occupation of the land by the Jews is not the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of the return of Israel from the nations to the promised land. Those prophecies will be completed at the Second Advent when the Lord

(continued...)

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earth. King Jesus will rule from Jerusalem. Saved men and women, not resurrected but physically alive, will live in his kingdom. They will inherit the land promised to Abraham and his spiritual descendants through their faith. They will live in the land by faith, which means, the practical application of God's rules to their daily life. On the basis of this explanation, we shall be able to understand how the Writer applies "God's rest" to New Testament believers.

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice,

8 "Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness,

9 "Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years.

10 "Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.'

The "therefore" looks back to vv. 5-6 and the necessity of faith and faithfulness. The Writer quotes Psalm 95:7-11 to illustrate his point that faith is required, specifically, faith in Christ, 4:14. The Psalm speaks of the necessity of worship and the failure of faith. The point of the Psalm is made in v. 7, If we hear God's voice,¹⁴ then he is our God. If one hears God's voice, then he (or she) is part of God's people. To "hear" in the Scripture is almost always used in the sense of "to do." One hears what God has to say with the intent of understanding and obedience. The word "today" emphasizes the necessity of an immediate faith. The moral responsibility of man is to have faith in God upon hearing God's call. In the Psalm, the call is to hear that God is a "great God," a "great King," "our Maker," and "our God." Thus, he is so worthy that one should "worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord." If a person acknowledges God, that is, if he or she has faith in God as his (or her) God, then that person will be numbered with "the people of his pasture, the sheep of his hand."

Note that the Writer declares the Holy Spirit to have been the author of the Psalm, as an added emphasis to his point. The Writer doesn't acknowledge the human authors of Scripture. To him, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and therefore its authority is absolute. The Holy Spirit has a prominent place in Hebrews as the communicator of God's word. The English fails to communicate the dynamic quality of the reference to the Spirit. The word translated "says" is *legei*, and it is used in the present tense. The Writer's view is that, though the incident (the failure to enter the land) was about 1500 years before Christ, and the Psalm was written about 500 years after the incident, the Holy Spirit is speaking to the readers of Hebrews through the Psalm. The present tense of *legei* should lead to the translation, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit is saying, Today . . ." etc. "Consequently, the witness of the Scripture is brought from the past into the present. What was spoken or written concerning the desert generation centuries before has immediate relevance to"¹⁵ any reader of Hebrews.

- "For him [the Writer] as for the other apostolic authors, the message of Scripture is the voice of the Holy Spirit. It is plain, too, that, for this very reason, he regards Scripture not as a dead letter of a bygone period but as fully existential in its significance, so that what was spoken or written in the wilderness situation centuries before continues to have a dynamic applicability to the people of God

¹³(...continued)

establishes his millennial kingdom. Then Israel will live in the land according to God's laws; they will have God's rest in God's land, as unconditionally promised to Abraham and his descendants. About their current occupation, one may say that they might once again be removed from the land for repeated failure to live according to God's rules, or that it may be setting the stage for the fulfillment of certain end time prophecies. Only time will tell, and our faith should not be based upon the outcome.

¹⁴ To hear God's voice one must "know" God. To know God is less about knowledge (although that is important) than it is about relationship. To know God as your God is to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

¹⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 85.

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in his own day.”¹⁶

The word of the Spirit for today is the same as it was to ancient Israel and the Psalmist: do not harden your hearts, do not reject faith in God. The time for you to be saved is never tomorrow; in Scripture “today” is always the day of salvation. Tomorrow’s events are unknown—you may die in your sins; therefore today is the day when you should hear the voice of God and be saved.

The necessity of a “today” kind of faith is illustrated in the example of the Israel’s failure of faith in the wilderness. The example is from Numbers 14. God, through Moses’ leadership, had brought Israel to the border of the promised land. God had Moses send twelve men to investigate the land to determine its defenses and its fruitfulness. Why God did this is not stated. God may have intended to encourage the nation, for the first report was that the land “truly flows with milk and honey,” and Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people by saying, Numbers 13:30, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” However, God may have intended a testing of Israel’s faith. The “spies” were in the land for forty days, a period of time used in Scripture to indicate a testing of faith. Ten of the men brought back a negative report that discouraged the nation, Numbers 13:31-33

- “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.’ And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, ‘The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.’”

On the basis of this negative report, the people decided they could not enter the land. This was a direct contradiction of God’s promise. In fact, they blamed the Lord, saying, “Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims?” Moses interceded for the people, and the Lord did not destroy the entire nation for their sin (for the Lord had said he would destroy the entire nation and make of Moses a new nation). However, because of their unbelief, God prevented that unbelieving generation from entering into the land. One should understand that this particular incident of unbelief was the efficient reason, but not the only reason, God denied the land to that one generation. Their unbelief had begun before God brought them out of Egypt (Genesis 5:20, 21; 6:6-9) and had continued to that very moment of their rejection of God’s promise, Numbers 14:11-12, “Then the Lord said to Moses: ‘How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?’” They did not have faith, and therefore they forfeited their part in the promise. Their “today” passed them by.

One must take note that this faithless generation “tested” and “proved” God. Over and over again Israel disbelieved God, and called on him to prove himself faithful and powerful, a God worthy of worship. They “saw [God’s] works forty years,” yet they never developed faith in God. At the point in time when they rejected entry into the land, the nation had been in the wilderness for two years. The journey from Egypt to Sinai to Kadesh-barnea had taken two years. They had experienced two years of God’s grace, mercy, holiness, justice, miracles and divine provision. For the next thirty-eight years God continued to provide the nation—that faithless generation—with miracles, divine provision, and victory over their enemies. Yet, they never changed their minds, they never repented, they never found faith in a God whom they had seen at Sinai (Exodus 20:18-19) and had seen for forty years through his mighty works. Many today want to see God before they will have faith; that faithless generation saw God and never found faith. Faith is a matter of God’s grace and one’s decision to trust in his promises.

Returning to the “therefore” that began this passage, the lesson is that faith is required to enter God’s rest. Just as one generation failed to receive God’s promise and enter into his rest, because of their unbelief, even so every individual who rejects faith in God’s salvation in Christ will fail to enter into the rest he has provided in the Son. Faith and faithfulness of the kind and quality illustrated by Moses is required to enter into God’s rest.

¹⁶ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 141.

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11 "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

That particular generation of Israel failed to enter into God's rest because they failed in the first, most basic part of the doctrine of rest: faith in God; specifically in God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and made known to the fathers of the twelve tribes (Genesis 48:21; 50:24). One must have faith in God in order to do God's works. In their historical context, the nation (from twenty years old and older) failed to do God's work, which was to enter the land by having faith that God would give them victory over the land's current occupants. Their unbelief precluded their entering into God's "rest." God's promise to Abraham of a rest for his descendants was not broken, it was simply unavailable to those without faith. God's promise of forgiveness of sin and eternal life is available only to those with faith in Christ.

*12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;
13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

"The Writer is mindful of the fact that some of his readers were in danger of doing what the Israelites had done."¹⁷ Unbelief is a moral evil. It is a refusal to believe God that inevitably leads to a deliberate act of rejecting (turning away from) the living God.¹⁸ The contrast being made is between "those" who failed because of unbelief and "we" who have become partakers in Christ, etc. "Those" had an evil heart of unbelief, resulting in their loss of relationship with God. "We" are to beware lest the same thing happen to us. Their repeated rejection of God as their God resulted in hardness of heart.¹⁹ "A hardened state of mind becomes impervious to God's voice and leads to increasing ignorance of his ways, not because God does not make them known, but because the hardened mind has no disposition to listen."²⁰

This subject of a rejection of God will come up several times in the epistle, of which 6:4-6 is the most notable. It is important for you and I to understand that "the 'unbelieving heart' mentioned here is not a heart that is seeking faith, but a heart that departs from belief, 'a heart not firm in faith' (Aquinas), the evil nature of which is displayed in an act of wilful apostasy."²¹ This is not a heart that believes and then rejects God; this is a heart that rejects God without ever having had faith. Thus the severe warnings against apostasy in the epistle. "It is far more serious to commit apostasy after professing belief than never to have come to faith,"²² because apostasy is a "presumptuous sin." Some of the Writer's readers were knowledgeable about salvation, but had not committed to saving faith; spiritually they were standing between belief and unbelief.

The "today" of the Writer's time was the same as the "today" of the ancient Israelites and the "today" of the Psalmist. As used in regard to faith in God, "today" is the immediate moral requirement to exercise faith in the living God. The defining content of faith may change, but the moral necessity cuts through all boundaries of time and circumstance; *now* is always the time to possess, express, and practice faith in the living God. For the ancient Israelites on the border of the promised land, their "today" faith was belief in the law and the promises, demonstrated by leaving the old land for the land of God's rest. For the Psalmist "today" meant living in God's rest through belief in the law and the prophets, and he gave the example of Israel's national failure to underscore the moral necessity of faith, and the irrevocable punishment due unbelief. To the Writer of Hebrews, and his readers, "today" meant the necessity of gaining and holding faith

¹⁷ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 102.

¹⁸ The words "living God" would have been especially meaningful to a people who saw religion in terms of dead idols and a living God. A return to Judaism was to turn away from the living God in the Son. As to the ancient Israelites, they continued to reject the living God because they longed for their dead idols in Egypt.

¹⁹ The "heart" is a term in Scripture that refers to the personality: the seat of moral reflection, choice of the will, and pattern of behavior. The term includes all the mental processes, feelings, affections, and emotions, along with the internal motivations, leading to one's decisions and responses to life's situations.

²⁰ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 105.

²¹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 145.

²² Hughes, *Hebrews*, 145, quoting Spicq.

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in Jesus as Savior. The example of failure was as pertinent to them (and us) as to the Psalmist: an evil heart of unbelief is sin. Sin causes hardening of the heart and a departure from the living God. In the Writer's original context, unbelief, and its inevitable departure from God, meant turning away from faith in the Son to the old form of faith in the Law. Therefore, the Writer's "today" must also mean the content of faith for this age of grace. Today is the day to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. If we extend "today" into an application for the believer, it incorporates the evangelical necessity of witness to the unsaved, and the duty of being my Christian brother's keeper. "Today", meaning every new and fresh day, we are to exhort one another (cf. 10:24-25) to faith: to pray, intercede, encourage, rebuke, and love one another, that we might sustain and support one another in the trials of faith. (Compare Joshua and Caleb in their performance of this duty to their generation, Numbers 14:6-9.) "Today" is the moment of salvation in the New Testament age, but also extends to the promise of Christ's return. What ancient Israel rejected at Kadesh-barnea was the promise of God to bring them into his land of rest. To turn away from Christ (the original readers were in danger of turning back to the old forms of faith) is to turn away from God's promise of rest in the Messiah and his kingdom. Let all of us beware lest we are tempted to return to the old ways, and thereby miss God's rest.

14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Let us not, in our understanding of these verses, throw away other Scripture by putting the cart of Christian practice before the horse of saving faith. Holding one's confidence to the end does not make one a Christian. The mark of a Christian is that he perseveres in his faith to the end. The "beginning of our confidence" indicates from the time of personal salvation; "to the end" means through death into eternal life in heaven. What does it mean that we "have become partakers of Christ?" The word partakers is *metochos*. *Metochos* is used only in Hebrews (1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8) and in Luke 5:7. In Luke the word is used of Andrew and Peter's partners in their fishing business (James and John). In Hebrews 12:8 the word refers to being "partakers" of the chastisement God applies to his children. At 6:4 the word refers to those who have "become partakers of the Holy Spirit." In 3:1 believers are "partakers of the heavenly calling," and here in v. 14 believers are "partakers of Christ." The basic meaning of the word is "participant." All believers participate in the chastisement common to all sons of God. One indwelt by the Holy Spirit is a participant in the community of faith. All believers participate in the faith in Christ common to all believers. To be a partaker "of Christ" must refer to participation in that salvation which has Christ as to its origin and source. The call here is to become a participant in that salvation. The exhortation of vv. 14-19 is to those who have made a profession, but whose manner of living is not consistent with that profession. Therefore, "today" do not turn away Christ, as ancient Israel turned away from God. I believe the application is to persons who, like Israel of old, are standing at the border of the promised land, know the promises, have heard the report of the good and the bad, are hearing God's call, and must enter in or turn back.

*16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?
17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?
18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?
19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

A series of rhetorical questions, asked and answered, lead to the conclusion in v. 19. Those who rebelled were those who had experienced a miraculous deliverance from slavery. Not all who came out of Egypt believed in God, but all of them had an experience that should have led them to faith in God. They were all led by God's chosen redeemer, Moses, yet some did not have faith. Those persons sinned and died in the wilderness; they rejected the "rest" he offered them in the promised land. They did not obey God's command, because they did not believe in his promise. Individual, personal faith in God and his word is required to

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experience the fulfillment of God's promise. The Writer describes the ancient unfaithful Israelites: they rebelled, they sinned, they did not obey. Those who did not enter into the promised land were barred from entry because of their *apistis*, their "no-faith," or unbelief. The application of the argument begins at 4:1.

HEBREWS FOUR

1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

The "therefore" of this verse is of critical importance, for it seems as if the Writer is making an illogical leap that the failure of ancient Israel to enter their rest has made their rest available to his readers. In this logic, the opening words of the verse would read, "Since the ancient Israelites could not enter God's rest because of their unbelief, *therefore* that promise of rest remains unfulfilled." That interpretive conclusion is not correct. One needs to consider the historical circumstances of the ancient Israelite community, as well as the prophetic outlook of Psalm 95, in order to understand the Writer's logic. Historically, although the generation that came out of Egypt "could not enter [into the promised land/God's rest] because of unbelief," their children did enter into the land. The logical conclusion must be that the failure of some people to enter God's rest did not break the promise God made to Abraham. That is the Writer's logic and conclusion in v. 1. The promise of resting in God's land was available to every generation and every individual in Israel who believed God's promise. The opening of 4:1 should be understood as, "Therefore, since (their unbelief could not break the promise of rest) a promise remains of entering his rest." More simply, that generation could not enter in through unbelief, but any who have faith can enter into God's rest.

This view is confirmed by Psalm 95. The Psalm consists of a call to worship, a moral example, and a prophetic testimony.¹ The Psalmist uses the words (95:7c) "Today, if you will hear his voice," to introduce the moral example (95:8-11) as an exhortation to have faith and worship. When connected to 95:1-7b, the "Today" of 95:7c is a prophetic cry to any person reading the Psalm. "Today," says the Psalmist, "if you will hear his voice and not do as ancient Israel did (the bad moral example), then you too can be (the prophetic testimony) the people of God's hand, the sheep of his pasture." The Writer (of Hebrews) has used the moral example as a warning and exhortation in Hebrews chapter three, and the prophetic testimony as the encouragement and warning in chapter four. We have previously noted that the Writer understands the Psalm as having a forward looking aspect, because in chapter three he applied the "today" of the Psalm to his readers. The prophetic application of the Psalm is thus seen in 4:1, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering his rest, be careful lest you come short of God's rest." The unbelief of a generation did not break the promise, and the entrance of the next generation did not exhaust its fulfillment. Any person who leaves unbelief for faith can enter into the same kind of "God's rest" that the ancient Israelites forfeited by their unbelief. Looking ahead, 4: 8-11, the "rest" is further defined as spiritual in nature for the New Testament believer; being in the land did not exhaust God's promise of rest. The rest remaining, v. 9, 11, must be a spiritual rest that is accessible to every New Testament believer.

2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

The Greek *euangelizo*, usually translated "gospel," should here be translated in its more basic meaning of "good news." The "good news" preached to ancient Israel was the fulfillment of entering into the promised land of God's rest. The "good news" preached to New Testament believers is the same promise of rest, it is just presented in different words, which have a spiritual fulfillment. The Old Testament believers entered into God's rest by living in God's land according to God's rules for living. New Testament believers enter into God's rest by faith in Jesus as Savior and living the Christian life according to God's rules for living.² The Old Testament believers entered God's land by leaving the wilderness and physically stepping into the land of Canaan. They lived in God's rest in God's land by obeying the Law. The New Testament believer enters into God's rest by spiritually abandoning the works of sin and spiritually accepting the propitiation of Christ. The New Testament believer lives in God's land by living according to God's moral rules for living. The good news of entering into God's land and God's rest was preached to "them" and to "us." "They" did not add faith to

¹ Owen, *Hebrews*, IV:197.

² In words used many generations ago, the believer enters Immanuel's land by grace and lives in it by faith.

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God's promise, and failed to enter God's rest.

3 For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world."

The word "for" (*gar*) contrasts Israel's unbelief with the reader's faith. Because "we" believed, we have entered that rest. Notice the Writer says, "we who have believed," for he knows there are those among his readers who have heard the word, but have not yet mixed hearing with faith. He again quotes the Psalm, using the negative to accentuate the positive, i.e., "they" did not enter God's rest, but "we" by faith have entered into that rest.

The phrase "although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" introduces the thought of v. 4, God's rest on the seventh day of creation. Having spoken of God's rest, the question is the origin and source of that rest, which includes its nature and application. Bruce asks (and answers), does God's rest "simply mean 'the rest which I bestow' or does it also mean 'the rest which I myself enjoy?'"³ God's rest that he provides to his people is the rest that he himself now enjoys. Since the time when God finished his works of the foundation (creation, v. 4) of the world, he has rested. The "rest" which the ancient Israelites forfeited, and which those of faith enter into, is God's own rest, which flows from his cessation from his creative works.

4 For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works";

The origin and source of the believer's rest, as well as its nature and application to his or her soul, lies in God's rest from his creative works. What is notable in the account of creation, is "that Moses mentions an end of each of the first six days, but not of the seventh day . . . the seventh day does not have an evening."⁴ As I noted before (*Excursus: Epistle of Hebrews Doctrine of "Rest"*), God's rest means that his creative works were completed. "Consequently his rest has been in existence since the foundation of the world . . . the promised rest does not refer in the first instance to some future reality prepared for humanity, but has primary reference to God's own repose, which precedes and stands outside human history."⁵ Therefore, "when we read that God 'rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done' (Genesis 2:2), we are to understand that he *began* to rest then: the fact that he is never said to have completed his rest and resume his work of creation implies that his rest continues still, and may be shared by those who respond to his overtures with faith and obedience."⁶ As noted in the *Excursus*, to rest is to cease from one's works and do God's works. God's rest from his original (creative) work does not mean he has stopped working; his activity in human affairs is a witness to his continuing works. Just as God rested from his original work, even so there is a rest for sinners from their original work, the works of sin, and an entrance into the rest of God. "God's rest" has been available to man from the moment of his creation. The believer is to enter the land and do God's works. His rest is available to every person who accepts it by faith. The New Testament "generation" enters through faith in the saving work of Christ.

5 and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."

Because the ancient Israelites did not have faith in the promise, they did not enter into the rest prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The necessity of individual faith is seen as imperative. The "rest" had existed from before man was created. The rest was always available to the ancient Israelites. The availability of, or at least the opportunity for, rest had been made clear to them in the promise to Abraham.

³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 106.

⁴ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 159.

⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 99.

⁶ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 106.

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God's salvation (for so we may speak of "rest" in its spiritual context) is not a promise to be applied universally to humanity. The promises of God are applicable only to those who have a full and complete faith in God. By "full and complete" we mean a faith that includes a working (active, personally applied) belief in God's testimony concerning himself, man's state as a sinner, salvation according to God's plan, resulting in a life lived according to God's rules for living. "What must I do to be saved?" must be the cry of every sinner, and faith in Jesus must be the response of every individual in this New Testament generation. Though salvation has existed since the foundation of the world, each sinner must accept and apply that plan to himself; otherwise, "they shall not enter my rest."

6 Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience,

7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts."

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.

9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

One might call this passage sanctified spiritual reasoning. As I stated above, the unbelief of a generation did not break the promise, and the entrance of the next generation did not exhaust its fulfillment. The Writer's argument in vv. 6-9 reaches this same conclusion. Those to whom (in Israel) this rest was promised failed to enter into God's rest. That did not break the promise, because the promise was unconditional (Genesis 15:17). The terms and conditions of the covenant must be accepted by each person by faith in order to be partakers in the covenant. The first offer was unfulfilled because of unbelief—those who did not believe did not become partakers because they lacked faith in the promise (but Joshua and Caleb did believe and therefore did receive the promise). The promise always remains available for any to enter into God's rest through faith. The reference to "in David" is a reference to Psalm 95. Psalm 95, as I have argued, has a prophetic reference: God's rest is available to all who turn from "no-faith" to faith in God's promise of rest. The Writer points out that the promise and offer of rest in the Psalm was made in light of the fact that Joshua had led the next generation into God's land of rest. Their occupation of the land did not exhaust the promise and offer of entering into God's rest. Therefore, there remains a rest that is offered and available to every one who exercises faith in God's promise.

One must note, in this continuing offer of "rest," that the rest now being offered is spiritual in nature. I am not denying that there is a physical component to God's rest. The promise to Abraham, of his descendants literally dwelling in the land, was not cancelled by Israel's failure to rest in God while dwelling in his land. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, will return and set up his kingdom of God on the earth. Israel will be called from the four corners of the earth to dwell in the land under his rule (Deuteronomy 30; Ezekiel 36). They will truly experience God's rest in God's land. However, the promise offered to the New Testament believer is not a promise of literally dwelling in the physical land of promise. Psalm 95 makes that clear. The Psalmist does not speak of entering God's land, but of entering God's rest. Granted, the original readers of the Psalm thought in terms of God's rest being centered in God's land. But, as we have seen, the Psalm applies to future generations, and therefore it has a spiritual intent or meaning that is applicable to any believer in any place and at any time. When applied to those who do not have a connection to a physical inheritance in the land of Canaan, then the meaning must be a spiritual connection. The Psalm acknowledges this, indeed it is prophetic in this sense as applicable to any believer. Those who believe in the God manifested in vv. 1-7b will enter into God's rest and become his people, even as he is their God. In a spiritual sense, i.e., as applied to the New Testament age believer, "God's land" is salvation, and God's rest is ceasing from the works of sin. Believers are pilgrims in God's land, on their way to an eternal rest in the eternal city of God (11:9-10).

10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

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This (vv. 10, 11) is the place to which we have been going, and the thought which I have been echoing in my interpretation of this chapter. To “rest” is to believe in Christ as Savior and live the Christian life according to God’s rules for living. “Entering the rest of God is the ceasing from self-effort, and yielding up oneself in the full surrender of faith to God’s working.”⁷ It is this part, this “not doing my works but doing God’s works,” that Christians have so much trouble believing and doing. The Christian wants to know God’s will so he can do God’s works. He forgets, however, that it is God who works in us to will and to do, Philippians 2:13. He forgets that “I also labour, striving according to his working, which works in me mightily,” Colossians 1:29. How is this, “according to his working,” to be accomplished in my life? Far too often, when Christians ask, What is God’s will for me? they are really asking, “What is God’s future for me?” It is not for me to know the future. Knowing God’s will, that I might do his work, is not about knowing the future. The only way to know God’s will, and therefore do God’s work, is to live in the present according to his rules for living: God’s commands, and the values derived from them, are his will for me.⁸ It is when I am applying Scripture precepts and principles (God’s commands; his rules for living) to my daily life, that he is able to work in me both to desire and to do his will. Living in the present according to his rules for living is the “rest” of God, it is the will of God, it is the only way to do the works of God.

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

The “example of disobedience” is ancient Israel’s unbelief in God’s promise. The exhortation is, do not turn away from God’s promise of rest, for turning away is unbelief. For these New Testament believers, God’s promise of rest was the forgiveness of sin and the new life one gains in trusting Christ as Savior. To turn away from God’s promise of salvation in the Son, even if one turned back to the Law that originated in God (as administered by angels, and diligently managed by Moses), was to exercise the same disobedience so clearly condemned by the Psalmist. The word translated “unbelief” (3:12) is *apistis*, which literally means “no-faith.” The contrast or opposite of unbelief is faith. The word spoken “in Son” was the word of salvation that fulfilled and superseded the Law. The diligence required was, v. 3, to mix faith with the promise of the salvation spoken “in Son.” I stated at 3:6 that the “hope” was God’s rest. God’s rest, as applied to the New Testament believer, is resting in the propitiation wrought by Christ for sin; in a word, salvation. Entering into God’s rest is salvation.

What is faith?⁹ The faith required here, 4:11, about which one is to be diligent, is in effect saving faith, because the promise to be believed is salvation in the Son. We are his “house,” if we “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope to the end,” 3:6. The Son has made “propitiation” for the sins of the people, 2:17, he has tasted death for “the children,” 2:14, the “seed of Abraham,” 2:16, and has sanctified his brethren, 2:11. Saving faith is to “put your trust at once and once for all in the Lord Jesus.”¹⁰ As a sinner, you are trusting to yourself to get your soul to heaven. You are trusting in your works to merit eternal life. You think God will accept you into heaven because you are not as bad some people, and much better than others. God says that nothing you can do is acceptable to him, because all your works originate out of your sin nature. Even the best of man’s works are like filthy rags¹¹ before him. Christ accepted the guilt for sin and endured the penalty due sin, when on the cross he suffered God’s wrath against sin, and then he physically died on the cross. His resurrection proved that God accepted his death as payment in full for the penalty for sin. Faith is believing God’s promise that Christ’s death for sin can be effective for you, that it fully paid the penalty due your sin. Faith is taking the eternal destiny of your soul out of your hands, and placing it in

⁷ Murray, *Holiest of All*, 152.

⁸ Meadors, *Decision Making*, 91, 92.

⁹ The definition of faith in 11:1 applies more to life after salvation than in gaining salvation. Faith in 11:1 is the unshakeable assurance that the promise of eternal life in heaven with God is certain, therefore the believer’s life on earth is to be lived in the context of God’s rest.

¹⁰ Wuest, *Translation*, 315. This is Wuest’s translation of Paul’s answer to the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:31.

¹¹ Isaiah 64:6. The Hebrew is literally a cloth used by a menstruating woman.

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Christ's care, by trusting that his saving death will save you from the penalty of sin, and give you the eternal life promised by God. Having and exercising this faith to the saving of your soul is what is meant by "be diligent to enter that rest." God is the one "bringing many sons to glory," 2:10, but the sinner is the one who must repent of his sins and diligently apply to God for salvation. Then, once salvation has been accomplished, the believer is to continue¹² in God's rest by daily living his or her Christian life according to God's rules for living—the principles of a holy and righteous life as stated and exemplified in Scripture.

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Now the question is, does one have faith or no-faith? Unbelief cannot be hidden from God. The opening "for" has the force of "because." One is to be diligent to enter God's rest because no thought or intent can be hidden from God's sight: God knows when you have faith or no-faith. The background to vv. 12, 13 is Psalm 95. The Writer of Hebrews has used the Psalm to examine the spiritual condition of his readers. The Psalm, the word of God, is personified in the super-natural power of its words to expose faith or no-faith.¹³ The words "soul and spirit," "joints and marrow," "thoughts and intents of the heart" are in a relationship the original readers would recognize as the Hebrew poetic form of parallelism. The words "piercing" and "discerner" (NIV: penetrates and judges) bind these descriptions to one another. The sum of these words indicates that God sees to the core of a matter, to the indivisible and absolute truth. Outwardly, I might hide a true thing from others; inwardly I might hide the truth from myself. God's word sees through these layers of falsehood and lays bare that true thing as it really exists in its uncluttered, absolute, singular form. The word spoken in Psalm 95 reveals to the reader whether or not he has faith or no-faith. When one has faith, his faith is shown in that he takes an action that is the result of his having faith. One either believes in the God described in vv. 3-5, and acts out his faith according to the forms described in vv. 1-2, 6-7b, or one does not, and hardens his or her heart against God. This word is so living, so active, so effective, so powerful, so penetrating, and so judges, that the spiritual condition of the soul must and will be exposed.

The metaphorical use of the words "soul and spirit," "joints and marrow," must be grasped if one is to understand the spiritual work of God's word in discerning the "thoughts and intents of the heart." The word of God is not literally a sword. It does not literally divide the joints and marrow of the human body. Nor, therefore, does it literally divide soul and spirit. "Joints" and "marrow" were figures of speech in the Hebrew language that were well-known to the original readers. "Joints" and "marrow" are being used a metaphor to represent the whole person. Joints are the bindings that hold the several parts together, 1 Chronicles 22:3; 2 Chronicles 18:33; Daniel 5:6; Colossians 2:19. The word "marrow" was used of the rich foods served at a sacrificial feast or celebratory banquet. The Old Testament world understood that "marrow" was the inner core of the bones. A fat and moist marrow indicated healthy bones. The literal observation became a metaphor for spiritual prosperity and health, Job 21:24; Psalm 63:5; Isaiah 25:6.

I believe the figurative meaning of "joints," in the context of the figurative meaning of marrow, is to indicate the soul of man (possibly the body, but soul seems more likely). The "division of joints and marrow" would then be parallel to the "division of soul and spirit." Together, the thought is that the word of God judges man to the very essence of his being. What is that essence of being? I believe a person is body and soul, Genesis 2:7. The spirit of man is that faculty (ability, function) of the soul by which man is able to

¹² Not continue in the sense of working to maintain one's salvation, but continue in the sense of living out the salvation one has in Christ, Philippians 2:12-13. When a believer does break God's rest by an act of sin, he or she re-enters that rest by repentance and confession, 1 John 1:9, *not* by a new salvation experience.

¹³ God's word exposes the truth in two ways. One, the words themselves are so clear, uncompromising, and true that their literary power is to pronounce truth and expose all contrary words as lies. Second, the Holy Spirit uses God's word to cause spiritual conviction concerning the truth the word states.

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perceive spiritual realities and thereby commune with God. In the unsaved man that faculty is rendered grossly inactive by sin; it is "dead," meaning the soul cannot commune with God. In the saved man, his faculty for communion with God is regenerated; he is made spiritually "alive." To penetrate between joint and marrow, soul and spirit, means the word judges (reveals) the spiritual faculty of a person's soul as being capable or incapable of communion with God; as being alive or dead. The observable reaction of a person to the truths of the word of God will indicate spiritual life or spiritual death. Spiritual life is an indication of genuine faith. Only the application of the word of God can reveal the true thoughts and intents of one's heart in matters of faith and no-faith.

The word of God reveals the true spiritual condition of a person: alive unto God or dead in trespasses and sins. As a divider between joints and marrow, soul and spirit, the word discerns the true thoughts and intents of the heart, revealing the spiritual condition of a man as saved or unsaved. In the context of Hebrews 4:6-10, the Writer is saying that the personal application of the truths of Psalm 95 will reveal whether or not a person is one who believes God's truth about salvation (rest) in Jesus, or is an unbeliever in God's promise and hardens his heart just like the ancient Israelites. Verse thirteen views God as the efficient cause of the discerning power of the word. God sees and knows everything. Nothing is closed to him. His word is the instrument by which he reveals his knowledge of a man's spiritual condition to the man himself. Everyone must give to God an account of his spiritual condition. Therefore, let us be diligent to enter his rest.

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

This verse returns to the theme begun at 3:1-6, Christ the high priest of our confession, from which the Writer diverted for 3:7-4:13. That exhortation and warning explained how to enter into the hope of salvation-rest in Christ. Having now found his place in God's rest by faith in Christ, the believer can hold fast his confession, 3:6, because the Son is the sympathetic, faithful, and successful high priest, 3:14ff, who is able to help him maintain his place in God's rest. One can see that the "hold fast" of 3:6 is used in 4:14 and 10:23 to form an *inclusio*: "hold fast our confession," and "hold fast the confession of our hope." The *inclusio*¹⁴ gives structure to one of the main sub-themes of Hebrews, that the Gospel delivered in Son fulfilled and superseded the Law. The main effort to prove this proposition is to show that Christ is the one and only fit high priest who could, in his own person and work, fulfill and supersede the Levitical system in both its means (sacrifice) and end (salvation). The Writer has previously indicated this in 3:2-6, in that the "house" of Moses—the house of the Law—was a single room in the whole house of salvation-by-grace built by Christ. The first-born Son over the house is also the high priest of the house, representing sinners before God, mediating salvation to them through his Person and work. However, the main theme of the epistle, which the sub-theme described above supports, is the one indicated by the *inclusio*, which is, the believer is to hold fast to his faith in Christ. More simply, the end or goal of the epistle is to impress the reader with the need to go on to maturity of faith in Jesus Christ.

The believer can enter into rest because he has a "great" high priest. The Greek word is *meGas*, which is used in Scripture both literally and metaphorically. Here the essential meaning is to have superlative power and authority, or, looking ahead, as being superior in rank (position, status) to the high priest of the Levitical system. The believing sinner can enter into God's land and remain in God's rest because his high priest, Jesus the Son of God, has the position and authority necessary to accomplish his redemption and assure his eternal life. The believer has a great high priest who has "passed through the heavens."¹⁵ The Writer is probably including the act of Jesus ascending into heaven, Acts 1:9-10, but his focus is on that which was accomplished by his ascension, Hebrews 9:24, to present himself and his completed work to God. The Levitical high priest must come to the earthly temple with his sacrifice year after year, 9:7, 25, but our great

¹⁴ An *inclusio* can be likened to bookends. An *inclusio* is a literary device that frames a section by placing similar material at the beginning and end of the section.

¹⁵ The plural "heavens" probably means no more than his entry into the third heaven where God manifests his presence, Revelation 4, 5.

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high priest brought his sacrifice to the heavenly temple (9:11) once for all, 9:26-28; 10:11-13. In his "having passed through the heavens," he has completed the work of redemption. The believer's rest is assured because his redemption is completed. Entering into God's rest is a matter of believing that salvation in Christ applies to me personally. The entrance into God's land of rest has been made by our great high priest. I need but follow. Then, Christ being now in heaven, where he forever lives to make intercession for me (7:25), I am enabled to remain living in God's land doing God's works. "Had not his sacrifice been acceptable to God, he would not have passed through the heavens; and if his sacrifice has been acceptable, and has been proved to be so by his passing through the heavens, then there can be no reason to fear that his continued [intercession] in our behalf shall be unsuccessful."¹⁶ We have, then, a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, and he is "Jesus the Son of God." This is the third of thirteen uses of the name "Jesus" in Hebrews. The name is usually connected in some way to his redeeming work. Here, used with the terms "Son of God," and "high priest," the thought is his fitness to be the high priest for man before God. As man, Jesus the Christ was fit to do all the works of service and suffering that were to be done and endured by a priest; as the incarnate Son he had the divine dignity, authority, and special relationship to God required to effect a complete redemption; "by this it appears that our priest was both God and man, able and fit for that function. Hereby is Christ distinguished from Aaron, and from all other priests."¹⁷ Verse fifteen picks up the thought of his sympathy with man as one who suffered in man's nature.

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The Writer of Hebrews is the perfect teacher. In this verse he summarizes the essential points made in chapter 2:17-18, then uses these points to introduce v. 16, below. Verse 16 serves as the introduction to the next section concerning the qualifications and work of the Son as high priest, which expands on the theme first introduced at 2:17-3:1. The discussion of 5:1-9, 7:1-28, is to demonstrate that Christ is qualified to be a high priest. The point of that argument, and the ensuing discussion of his priestly work, 8:1-10:18, can be summarized thus:

- 5:7-9, Christ can be compassionate toward us, having endured suffering like us.
- 7:24-26 Christ is a fit high priest to deliver sinners from sin.
- 10:11-14, Christ has sanctified his people forever.
- 10:23, because of Christ's priestly work the believer can "hold fast the confession of our hope," 3:6, 4:14.

There is, of course, much more to be said, but these are the "sign posts" to guide us along the path.

This is the first time the Writer has stated that Christ was without sin. The idea is found everywhere in his discourse of chapters two and three. Since Jesus is the Son of God, then he could not have had a sin nature. However, the reality of a genuine human nature in Christ, of his physical death, and of his being tempted (2:18) allows the question as to sin in his human nature. This is only the second mention of sin in Hebrews (the first is 3:13), but the mention is appropriate here at the beginning of the demonstration of Christ as fit to be man's high priest. A priest offers the sacrifice for his sins, as well as the sins of the people (9:7). In a sense, that is one way in which a priest is shown, to the people for whom he mediates, that, being just like them, he is suited or fit to represent them before God. He has their best interests at heart, for his interests coincide with theirs. Christ in his human nature is sympathetic to man's temptations, because he himself has suffered temptation. Being like his brethren in this point, he is suited to represent them. The problem, though, with the earthly high priest, was his personal sin. The sacrifices he offered could not "make him who performed the service [sacrifice] perfect in regard to the conscience" (9:9). If I might state it thus, the merit of the sacrifice was expended to cover the past sins of himself and his people. He remained a sinner, therefore the sacrifices he offered were of limited value; an ongoing atonement was needed, year

¹⁶ Brown, *Hebrews*, 228.

¹⁷ Gouge, *Hebrews*, I:336.

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after year, sacrifice after sacrifice, for the sins of himself and his people. The merit of Christ, being sinless, gave eternal and infinite merit to his sacrifice for sin, making it effective to propitiate all sin. Christ, to be a fit high priest, must be able to sympathize with his brethren, therefore he suffered temptation; but he must be able to make a completed offering for sin for his brethren, which required that he himself be sinless.

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Because Jesus understands and withstood temptation, he is able to help those who are being tempted. In the context of the passage, this encouragement is given for those who are tempted to turn away from God's promise of rest. The promise of mercy and grace indicates that help is available to withstand temptation, and to recover those who have given into temptation.

Excursus: The Merit of Christ, the Demerit of Sin

The question of the difference in the effectiveness of the propitiation made by Christ and the atonement made by the Levitical priest is resolved by the merit of their respective sacrifices. The merit (spiritual worth) of a sacrifice made for sin is the value given it by God. The blood (death) of bulls and goats, by God's decree, had merit to cover the penalty due sin, so that God did not see the sinner, but saw the death of the substitute on behalf of the sinner. The animal sacrifices were not given sufficient merit to permanently take away (remit, cancel) the penalty due sin, so that Christ might have the preeminence in this as in all other things. Only the Person Jesus the Christ had intrinsic merit sufficient to fully satisfy the guilt and penalty for all sins. His sinless life prevented the merit of his death from being applied to himself, thus all the merit of his sacrifice was applied to the sin God imputed to him. His humanity supplied the necessarily unblemished, therefore sinless sacrifice; his deity gave infinite merit to his sacrifice. The merit of the sacrifice offered by the Levitical high priest was limited and fully expended on the sins of priest and people. The merit of the sacrifice offered by Jesus the Son of God was unlimited, was not needed for himself because he was and is without sin, and was (and always will be) more than sufficient to satisfy the guilt and penalty of sin.

The punishment of sin is eternal but the demerit (guilt) of sin is finite. Eternal punishment is due the unsaved sinner who dies without Christ, because the unsaved sinner has zero merit with which to pay in full the penalty due his or her crime of sin. On earth, each crime has a penalty assessed for the person found guilty of the crime. The penalty must be paid in full before the criminal can be released from prison. Sin is a crime against God, and there must be punishment for the crime. Since punishment is required until the penalty is fully paid, and since the unsaved sinner has no merit with which to pay the penalty (in fact, he has much demerit), then punishment is eternal for the unsaved sinner who dies without Christ. However, the demerit of sin, its guilt, is not infinite. Sin is not some evil force existing in the universe attacking innocent human beings. Sin is an innate part of human nature: sin exists in the sinner. Since the sinner is a finite being, then the demerit of his sin is finite. The finite demerit of the sinner can be overcome by the application of a greater merit. In every age of man, from Adam forward, God's grace has caused a greater merit to be available. The greater merit is applied to a sinner seeking forgiveness and salvation by means of faith in God's historically revealed plan of salvation. It is because the demerit of sin is an innate part of the sinner that the greater merit must be personally applied by the sinner in order to overcome his or her guilt-demerit. The means by which the greater merit is applied to save the soul from sin's demerit, is by faith in God's promise of salvation through the greater merit. The historical means by which the greater merit was applied is simply the content of faith revealed during some particular period in the history of redemption. In every age of man from Adam forward faith in the revealed means of faith was saving faith. Under the Mosaic Law the promise of salvation was communicated by God's word of saving faith: an animal sacrifice, brought by faith, with repentance, and confession, in which the sinner trusted God's word that his demerit was imputed to the sacrifice, such that the animal died in place of the sinner. The content of faith—God's plan of salvation as revealed to those under the Law, was that the merit of an animal sacrifice was sufficient to cover (make

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atonement for) the demerit of the act of sin for which the sacrifice was offered. Fresh sin required a fresh atonement. The merit of Jesus Christ, however, is sufficient to remit the demerit of all sin, including the sins covered (atoned for) by the Old Testament sacrifices. (As previously discussed, Christ's propitiation was decreed as the basis for all salvation, and is the reason why the animal sacrifices could be efficient to cover sin and save the soul.) The relationship of the sinner's finite demerit to the infinite merit of Christ is illustrated by the relationship of a drop of water to an entire ocean. The infinite merit of Christ's propitiation satisfies all the guilt and all the penalty of all the saved sinner's sins for eternity.

Excursus: Could Christ be Tempted?

Could Christ be tempted? Hebrews 4:15 states that Jesus was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." A temptation is a solicitation, an offer to do evil. To be tempted is not sin. If one acts on the temptation and does the evil, then he has sinned. In the human soul, a temptation can be effective in causing one to perform an act of sin, because there is a corresponding desire to sin within the human soul. The sin nature in the human soul strongly desires to respond positively to temptation. Because there is a responsive sin nature in man, temptation is said to be real. That is to say, because man has an inclination to turn a solicitation to do evil into an act of evil, temptation is said to be real or genuine in man. Upon this basis, some have theorized that Christ could not be tempted. Since Christ did not have a sin nature, he had nothing within himself that would respond positively to temptation. He had no inclination to turn a solicitation to evil into an act of evil. Therefore, some say, a temptation offered to Christ was not genuine, because he could not respond to it in a positive manner. Since no demand could be made upon Christ to give in to temptation, therefore, says this view, Christ could not be tempted.

This view misunderstands the nature of temptation. It views temptation as a demand (requirement, irresistible force) to cause someone to sin. Temptation is not a demand, it is an offer. Adam was tempted by the offer to sin. The devil could not demand, require, or force Adam (or anyone else) to commit an act of sin. Adam was created without a sin nature. His holy human nature had a positive inclination toward holiness and a positive disinclination toward sin. He in fact did not have to sin, was under no pressure to sin, and could have, without an inward struggle, turned away from the offer to sin. The offer was genuine, but there was nothing within his nature to incline him to accept the offer. Furthermore, he was not deceived, 1 Timothy 2:14, he knew what was being offered. He knew he was being asked to disobey God. Therefore, the offer to sin was genuine. The reality of temptation has nothing to do with the ability or inability to respond to it. An offer exists on its own merits. Temptation is an offer of evil. One can genuinely experience the offer without experiencing a demand to accept it. Therefore, Christ could be tempted. He experienced the same offer to sin that all men experience.

The bridge between temptation and sin is choice. The power that keeps men off the bridge is grace. Christ chose not to respond to temptation. What accounts for the difference between Adam and Christ in their choices? One would not be wrong in stating that the divine nature in the God-man prejudiced his human nature against sin. Additionally, the Holy Spirit had been given to Christ without measure, meaning the Spirit's power, control, and guidance in Christ was limitless. On the other hand, one should not automatically discount the effect of grace in Christ's human soul. Jesus lived his life as a Spirit-filled man. The grace that accompanied that filling of the Spirit withheld him from responding to temptation. The same grace was immediately available to Adam, but he did not avail himself of that divine aid. Even so, the saved sinner, being freed from the dominion of sin, can also experience an offer to sin and choose not to sin. Because of his salvation in Christ, a believer has the capability when tempted to make a choice not to sin. That capability is the strengthening grace of God applied by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The devil can make the offer of sin, he can make sin seem easy, desirable and without consequences, he can make an appeal, provide an opportunity, and give a rationale as to why Adam or anyone else should respond to temptation and commit an act of sin. But he cannot demand, require, or force a person commit sin. To resist the offer of sin we only need do what Christ did and Adam didn't, apply to God to "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

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1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

This verse picks up the thought expressed in 4:14-15 (cf. 3:17.) A high priest is appointed by God to represent his fellow-man before God by offering gifts and sacrifices for sins.¹ His humanity shares their weaknesses, and therefore being in sympathy with them, he can have compassion on them. The end of the argument is that Christ was appointed by God, v. 5, shares the humanity and therefore the weaknesses of his people, v. 7, and is thus qualified to be God's high priest representing man to God. This verse states a common truth concerning the office of priest as the basis for its argument and immediate conclusion concerning Christ. The conclusion of the argument will be used at a later point, 7:1-10:18, to contrast the differences between the unique priesthood of Christ and the Levitical system (an exhortation, 5:11-6:20, intervenes between 5:10 and 7:1).

2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.

3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.

Every high priest appointed by God for men is tempted in the same manner as are all men. Those appointed from among men are also subject to the sin nature, so they also sin, and so they must also offer a sacrifice for themselves as well as for their brethren. The word translated "have compassion on" (NIV: to deal gently with) means "forbearance and magnanimity on the part of people who are subject to great provocation and who could, if they wished, give way to unmoderated anger and meet the provocation with the utmost severity. A high priest could not make fitting expiation for sins which filled him, at that very time, with feelings of indignation and exasperation against those who were guilty of them."² The sins in view here are those committed ignorantly, versus presumptuous sins. The phrase "who are ignorant and going astray" should probably be understood as "those who go astray through ignorance."³ The law made provision for those who gave into the moral weaknesses common to all men, Numbers 15:28. Thus, "with those who erred through ignorance the high priest might well sympathize, for he was prone to the same weaknesses himself."⁴ Jesus is the same in sympathy, but not in sin, 4:15. "It is by enduring the common weaknesses and temptations of the human lot, not by yielding to them, that Jesus has established his power not only to sympathize with his people but to bring them help, deliverance, and victory."⁵

4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

A priest is a mediator between God and man. There are three qualifications a mediator must meet. He must be acceptable to both parties; he must be able to represent the interests of both parties; and he must be appointed to the office by competent authority. As concerns the spiritual issue of salvation, of which the Writer is speaking, the acceptability of the mediator to men is a matter of personal faith. The qualification to represent the interests of man and God was fulfilled in Aaron in two respects. One, his human nature was the qualification required to represent the interests of mankind. Two, in the appointment of Aaron to the

¹ The phrase "for sins" indicates that the phrase "gifts and sacrifices" is viewed as a general expression for offerings for sin. The Writer's ultimate focus is the offerings made on the day of atonement, 9:7.

² Bruce, *Hebrews*, 120.

³ A figure of speech known as a "hendiadys." Robertson, *Hebrews*, V:367; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 120.

⁴ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 121.

⁵ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 121.

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priesthood, God declared Aaron was fit to represent his interests in spiritual issues.⁶ God was also, then, the competent authority by which Aaron obtained the authority of his office. Aaron was acceptable as high priest because his human nature and God's appointment qualified him to mediate between God and man. To show that Jesus is a qualified high priest, the Writer must give evidence that Jesus meets the necessary qualifications. He has done this previously, e.g., 1:3; 2:14-18, and will do it again, e.g., vv. 7-9, below. What has been missing in his argument is Christ's call to the priesthood. He will state this call in 5:6, 10 and will demonstrate it in chapter seven.

5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You."

6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek";

Here is the call of the Son to the office of high priest. There was a twofold aspect to the call. First, through the Son's incarnation, 1:5, God qualified the Son to represent the interests of man. Second, God appointed the Son as his high priest. Jesus meets all the qualifications to be the high priest. He was qualified in his humanity to represent the interests of man and in his deity to represent the interests of God. His authority *to be* high priest is from his appointment by a competent authority, God. His authority *to perform* as high priest is given him by God. Perhaps the most important thing to notice in these two verses is that God supplied himself with a qualified high priest. No man has the authority or qualifications to act as his own or another's priest. Therefore, a high priest must be appointed to act on man's behalf. No sinner, v. 3, could fully represent the interests of God, for his sin requires him to act in his own interest. Therefore, to offer a completed sacrifice for sins, God must appoint a high priest acceptable to himself. The Son was appointed a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, because the Levitical order of the high priest suffered from their own sins, disqualifying them to serve the eternal interests of God and man.

The "order of Melchizedek" is found in Psalm 110:4. The verse reads, "The Lord has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" The Psalm is clearly a Messianic Psalm, and in the Psalm the thought of Messiah as both king and priest is presented,

- Psalm 110:1-2, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!"

The order of Melchizedek is that of king and priest. Melchizedek is mentioned only in Genesis 14:18, Psalm 110, and Hebrews (5:10; 6:20; 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17, 21). Hebrews focuses on the priestly aspect of the order. The connection between Jesus and Melchizedek is made only in Hebrews. This connection is justified, however, if one accepts that Jesus is the Messiah (1:8, 13; 2:5, 8), for Psalm 110 makes the connection between Messiah and the priestly order of Melchizedek explicit. The explanation and consequences of the Melchizedek order of priesthood will be presented in chapter seven. For now, it is sufficient to see that the Son was qualified to be high priest by virtue of God calling him to be high priest.

7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

The Writer briefly returns to the human qualifications of the Son to be the high priest. He had introduced this subject in 2:10, and this is the last time he will deal so explicitly with the subject. In 2:10 the Writer discussed that, through suffering death, the Son became fully qualified to be the Savior. Here, the Writer presents an incident in the earthly life of the Son that clearly reveals his humanity. The incident is that visit to the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus prayed concerning his soon-to-be accomplished suffering and death

⁶ Aaron's representation of the interests of God was strictly regulated by the Law. He was limited by the law in what he could do as a mediator.

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on the cross. One must interpret Hebrews 5:7 according to its immediate context. What is of concern to the Writer is not the Son's death, but how this example of the Son suffering temptation reveals that he is qualified to be high priest, 2:17-18; 4:15-16; 5:2. His humanity was genuine. In "the days of his flesh," that is, when he was subject to the weaknesses and temptations of all mankind, the Son was seen to have actually suffered from those weaknesses and temptations, proving that he had a genuine human nature, thus qualifying him to be man's high priest.

What was on the mind of the Savior on the eve of his suffering and death on the cross is open to speculation. Some, looking to Scripture such as Luke 12:50, believe Jesus felt his body could not withstand the physical stresses of the upcoming trials and scourging. Therefore, in this view, he prayed that his flesh might be strengthened, so that he would not die before reaching the cross. However, the strength of his physical body to endure to and through the cross seems a given, considering it was the will of God that he go to the cross to endure the spiritual suffering and physical death necessary to propitiate God for sin. Note also John 10:17-18; 19:30, Jesus had the authority to continue or end his physical life at the appropriate time. It seems unlikely that the stress he suffered in Gethsemane was from fear he would die too soon. What is more likely in view is the spiritual stress he was suffering in knowing that he would shortly endure God's wrath against sin. The details given in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke indicate he was almost overwhelmed with sorrow (Gr. *ademoneo*). The more likely explanation of his sorrow is twofold. First, the knowledge of the physical suffering he was about to endure, on his path to the cross, was most likely almost overwhelming in its emotional intensity. Second, he was almost overwhelmed with sorrow from the knowledge that his communion with the Father, unbroken from his conception,⁷ would be severed during that period of time when sin was imputed to him and he suffered God's wrath against sin. In his cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" we see the distress that caused him beforehand to "offer up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death." It was not his impending physical death, but it was the temporary spiritual death he was about to suffer that brought forth the supplications and tears of Gethsemane. The Writer provides his readers with the perfect example of Christ enduring weakness and temptation (cf. 4:15). He experienced the extremes of physical suffering, both on the path to the cross and while on the cross. He endured and overcame the temptation that would have him avoid the spiritual suffering of the cross. He endured and overcame both weakness and temptation to accomplish everlasting salvation for those who believe.

Jesus response to temptation and weakness was most human. He offered up prayers and supplications (petitions, appeals). He earnestly cried out to God, strong cries accompanied with tears. These are the natural actions of the spiritual man. The spiritual's man's response to temptation and weakness is seen in Jesus' vow, "Luke 22:42, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." This appeal to God (prayers and supplications) and submission to God's will in the midst of temptation and weakness is what is meant by "godly fear." God heard, i.e., he gave attention to and made a response to Jesus' prayers (Luke 22:43), because of "his godly fear."

The Writer's point is that Christ was qualified in his humanity to be high priest. Part of that qualification is that he "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." This is in parallel to "though he was a Son." To be a son does not exclude obedience nor learning obedience. Jesus was said to have "increased in wisdom and stature," a process of growth which includes learning and discipline. The Writer later acknowledges that all sons must learn, 12:5-7. Therefore, it is not the fact of son-ship the Writer here addresses, but the kind of son the Son was. He was God's own Son, the one who was the express image of God's own being. He was not, however, just God. He was the God-man. The intrinsic nature of his Person required he must grow and learn. What is intimated is that the Son must endure the thing spoken of in order that he should become qualified to be the high priest between God and man.

⁷ It is tempting to view the spiritual separation of the Son of God from God the Father (Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46) as the separation of God the Son from God the Father. However, since the divine Persons of the Trinity are consubstantial, it seems better to understand that the incarnate Son experienced a spiritual separation, resulting in a loss of communion, but the communion that is intrinsic, and therefore necessary, to the Godhead was maintained. Certainly the Holy Spirit continued to empower the Son in his hour of trial.

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What then, is meant by "he learned obedience by the things he suffered?"⁸ This does not mean that learned his duty, or what was required of him. Before he assumed humanity to himself he knew the work he was to do in the discharge of his office and the performance of his work. By the age of 12, at the least, he had some knowledge of his work to come, Luke 2:49. Nor does, "he learned obedience" mean that he learned how to obey. The grace given to him, which was always in and with him, inclined, directed, guided and enabled him to do everything that was required of him. At no moment was he at a loss as to what he was to do and how he was to accomplish his work, and at no moment did he lack that perfect readiness of will or mind to accomplish his work. The only way in which it can be said the Son "learned" is that he came to understand the content of obedience through the experience of being obedient to all that was required of him. We may draw an illustration from 2:9. The Savior, being the Lord of life and death, always knew what death was. But by undergoing death he experienced what was in death. By submitting to temptation and weakness, he experienced what was in these things. Our finite comprehension struggles to understand. Perhaps we can say that, through the actual experiencing of these things, he came to know the emotional, physical, and spiritual content of temptation and weakness as suffered in the human nature. In enduring suffering in the common human nature he shared with his brethren, he came to know the dynamic content of faith and spirituality experienced by the suffering soul. He experienced in himself the difficulty and victory of being submissive to the will of the Father. As the perfect Son of God he knew obedience in the notion. Through his submission to the things required to qualify him to be a complete (perfect) high priest, he learned obedience in the fullness of doing it. In submitting to God in a suffering condition, he understood the difficulty of obedience, the opposition made to it, how great an exercise of grace is required in it, and thereby gained the full experience of it.⁹ He qualified himself for his great work by undergoing the common human experience, and by it he is able to "sympathize with our weaknesses," and give us relief when we come to his throne of grace for help in time of need.

*9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,
10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"*

The word translated "perfected" is the same *teleioo* used at 2:10. As I noted at 2:10, the meaning is to be complete, whole, to lack nothing that is required. The temptation, weakness, suffering, obedience, submission, and death that Christ experienced fully qualified him to be the originator and leader of salvation to all who obey him. The obedience of men in relationship to the "author" of salvation is to believe him to be the author of salvation. To obey him is to personally apply by faith the saving benefits of his death for sin. In that perfection of his mediatorial and redeeming offices, the Son is called by God to the office of high priest, a priesthood that is according to the order of Melchizedek. The order of Melchizedek is a subject the Writer will shortly explain, but now he deems necessary a stern exhortation.

11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

The passage consisting of vv. 5:11-6:20 is one of the exhortation passages of the epistle. This exhortation is marked off by the *inclusio* formed by the words "according to the order of Melchizedek," in 5:10 and 6:20. The burden of the exhortation is spiritual maturity. The Writer is wondering aloud "how to express truths in a manner which is within the grasp of the readers."¹⁰ They had grasped the first principle of faith, "Jesus saves." Many of them had not progressed beyond that point. The Writer has much to say about Melchizedek. What he has to say of Melchizedek will be difficult for this readers to comprehend, since their spiritual perception is "dull." The word translated "dull," (NIV: slow) is *nothros*. The word means slothful,

⁸ Owen, *Hebrews*, IV:524-525. The thoughts in this passage were suggested by Owen's views.

⁹ An illustration may help the understanding. When I was 15 I knew how to drive a car in the notion. When I was 16 I learned to drive.

¹⁰ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 133.

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sluggish, dull. The word was used in non-biblical literature of a slave who was not obedient to his master, because his ears were 'stopped up' by laziness. It was used to describe an athlete who was out of shape, lazy, sluggish. One brother used this word to describe his older brother as negligent to fulfill his responsibility to build a tomb for his sisters. *Nothros* "connotes culpable negligence or sluggishness in some aspect of life."¹¹ These original readers of Hebrews had neglected their responsibility to go on to spiritual maturity.

Mature spiritual perception is the result of a soul in fellowship with Christ. Some individuals, perhaps the larger part of the group, had begun to entertain doubts about Christ, so their fellowship was lacking, and their spiritual condition at a low ebb. Some had failed to apply themselves to understand spiritual truths, i.e., their lack of diligence to study, learn and apply the Scriptures had left them unprepared for the "hard to explain" spiritual truths associated with Melchizedek. Some had made a profession of faith, but their *nothros* was an indicator that their profession was lacking, i.e., they had failed to move from tasting Gospel truths to applying the truth of salvation in Christ to the need of their soul.

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

In essence, the Writer is saying to his readers that much time had passed since their first profession of saving faith in Christ. By now they should have progressed in understanding beyond the elementary teachings of Christianity. They should be teaching these "first principles" of Christianity to new believers. Yet, they were so weak in understanding, that they still needed to be taught the basics of the faith. They had not progressed in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ beyond their initial profession of faith. The word translated "principles" is the Greek *stoicheion*. The word means "the basic parts," the "A, B, Cs" of Christianity. The Writer lists some of the "basic parts" in 6:1, 2. The "oracles of God" is a direct reference to the Scripture, which includes both the Old and New Testaments (based on the Writer's use of the Old Testament and his declaration of New Testament truth in 2:3, 4). The illustration of "milk" and "solid food," is a clear figure indicating the difference between one who is a baby in the faith and one who has grown enough to chew and process the solid food of Scripture knowledge. The "first principles" are where one begins his or her journey to grow in grace and knowledge.

The first principles of truth, in the Writer's context (cf. 6:1-2), are not the beginning of truth, they are the result of truth. The first principles are statements of truth derived from the whole, the distillation of an ocean of knowledge into a single drop. The first principle that "Jesus saves" is distilled from the ocean of truth concerning the nature and condition of man's soul; the corruption of sin, the sin nature, and the punishment due sin; the character of God and the outworking of God's holiness in justice, mercy, love and grace; the means and result of salvation; and the Person and work of the Savior as God-man, Mediator, Redeemer, and Intercessor. The Writer of Hebrews wants his readers to swim in the ocean of knowledge. In a different metaphor, the first principles are like doors and windows constructed by the wise to let one see into and enter in the house of truth. The simple first principle that "Jesus saves," is a door into a mansion, a palace with many rooms and much furniture. The Writer desires to lead his readers into a few of the rooms in the house of truth. Some of his readers are still looking in through the windows; others are still standing at the door. He is chiding them for not having entered in and taken up residence in the house of Scripture knowledge and truth.

13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

A universal truth understood by all men: babies require milk because they cannot process solid food. The metaphor illustrates the difference between the spiritually mature and immature. The word "righteousness" indicates the Writer is addressing more than knowledge. Knowledge is important, for knowledge is the foundation on which righteousness is built. The immature Christian is unable on his own to make the right

¹¹ Guthrie, G., *Hebrews*, 201-202. The preceding examples are from Guthrie.

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application of Scripture knowledge to change his life to conform to Christ.¹² He may hear knowledge, but its use is not always clear. Only through the right application of knowledge is one able to make his life righteous, a godly life, a life lived according to God's rules for living. One must, then, both know and understand the rules in order to apply them. When one is a baby, an "adult" applies the rules. When one is mature, he applies the rules on his own. Moving from metaphor to reality, these Christians had not used the Scripture to make necessary changes in their lives. They had not used the means of prayer and the practice of God's rules to grow in their Christianity. Some of the rules, being more than milk, were not accessible to them. Some of the knowledge of Scripture, being solid food, was not comprehensible to them.

14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The spiritually mature believer has knowledge and understanding of the Scripture. He is able to use this knowledge to live by God's rules for living. He is an active participant in the Holy Spirit's work of conforming his life to the image of Christ. That is what is meant by "of full age." The phrase "those who are of full age" is a translation of *teleios*, a word related to the *teleioo* of 2:10. *Teleios* means "that which has reached its goal," therefore it is full and complete. In the present context, it means grown up, i.e., mature. Now we may view the other side of v. 13, "unskilled in the word of righteousness." What is meant by "skill" in the word of righteousness is twofold. The word "righteousness" indicates the mature believer has gained the spiritual maturity to understand and apply the Scripture to his everyday life. The result of that skill is a godly life, a life lived according to God's rules for living. The other skill implied of the spiritually mature, and lacking in the spiritually immature, is the ability to join Scripture with Scripture to identify and understand truth in its fulness and complexity.¹³ The Writer sums up maturity in the skill to discern good and evil. The understanding and application of Scripture to one's life is what the Writer intends by the phrase "by reason of use," and "their senses exercised." To "discern both good and evil" is not some extraordinary ability. It is the maturity to know, understand, and apply the Scripture's precepts and principles—which are God's rules for living—to one's life. To discern good and evil is to know what is right and what is wrong. In its practical application it is ethical or moral maturity, i.e., to live according to what is right and reject that which is wrong. It also must mean, in the context of 5:11, the ability to identify and understand true doctrine and reject false doctrine.¹⁴ If the readers had been applying themselves to the truths that had been given to them at the beginning (of their Christianity), then they would not have been tempted to leave Christianity for their old religion. This epistle to the Hebrews might, then, have been an entirely different letter. As it was, their spiritual condition indicated they needed the Writer to teach them.

¹² A general truth, to which one may find exceptions, but the notability of exceptions proves the general application.

¹³ "Solid food" is not the esoteric, furthest logical end result of complicated doctrines. A hamburger and fries is as much "solid food" as prime rib and baked potato. Babies progress from milk, to "baby food," to solid food.

¹⁴ In the context of the upcoming discussion of the order of Melchizedek, "solid food" was understanding that Christ had abolished the old Levitical order.

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*1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,
2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.
3 And this we will do if God permits.*

The structure of this chapter is a wonderful lesson in writing and teaching. The Writer moves smoothly from one subject to another on the basis of a single word of transition, leading his readers through the necessity of spiritual maturity, and preparing them for the very discussion he said, at 5:11, that they were unprepared to hear. He is the best of teachers; he ends his digression at the place he began, with his "students" better prepared for his lesson. In this first section, 6:1-8, the Writer opens the exhortation begun in 5:11-14, by reminding them of their salvation, subsequent obedience and service to God, and their hope in a future life through resurrection. The certainty of "eternal judgment," vv. 2, 6, is illustrated in a figure, vv. 7-8, as a warning that whosoever does not go on to faith in Christ faces certain judgment. He then, in vv. 9-12 looks to judgment in a positive aspect to reassure the true believers among them that God has a reward for their faith and diligence. That reward is described as "inheriting the promises," a word which transitions the reader to vv. 13-18, which describe the promise to Abraham as the basis for their "hope." Their "hope" is the transition to vv. 19-20, which return the reader to the original subject, Jesus Christ a high priest of the order of Melchizedek.

The "therefore" of the passage connects the current section with the argument of 5:11-14. They have been believers for some time, and should have advanced in knowledge and maturity beyond the first principles of the faith. However, instead of saying "I must continue to feed you with milk,"¹ the Writer invites them to come and learn with him. The phrase, "let us go on," (Greek: *phero*) literally means, "let us be carried forward,"² or let us press on,"³ because he knows they are capable of much more than milk.⁴ In vv. 1-2 the author lays out the elementary principles of Christianity. The word translated "elementary principles" is *arche*, the same word used in 5:12 and there translated "first principles." The *arche* are, in this context, the beginnings of a life lived by faith. The first principles are the foundation of the Christian life, the things belonging to the beginning of grace and knowledge in the Lord. The Writer is not minimizing the first principles in his desire to move on to "perfection" (*teleiotes*⁵), i.e., to spiritual maturity. He knows that the first principles are the building blocks of further learning; that they are as essential at the end as they are at the beginning. The Writer's own spiritual maturity informs him that by now his readers should have erected a better structure on the foundation; they should by this time have "grown up," have passed from milk to solid food, and he encourages them to come and learn with him.

There are two major views on the interpretation of vv. 1-2. The grammatical connection between three words is involved. These words are *apheimi*, *arche*, and *Christos*. The word *apheimi*, means "leaving," and as with most deceptively simple words it has a wide range of use, such as "send away, forsake, dismiss, leave, permit, leave behind." Here the best meaning is "to leave behind," based upon its connection with *phero* and *arche*. The second word, *arche*, I discussed above, and the third word is *Christos*, variously translated as Christ or Messiah. In the grammatical form of *Christos* lies the choice of interpretation. The noun *Christos* is in the genitive case. The genitive indicates possession, as in this verse, "*Dia apheimi ton tas archas tou Christou logon*," which translated is, "Therefore leaving the words of the beginning of the Christ." The question is whether the genitive is in this instance in the subjective, "the word spoken by Christ," or the objective, "the word spoken about Christ"? Many commentators and some translations take the "objective" point of view, the word spoken about Christ (so the NIV and HCSB). In this view, the *apheimi* . . . *archas tou*

¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 138.

² Hughes, *Hebrews*, 194.

³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 138.

⁴ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 139.

⁵ This word emphasizes the accomplishment of the goal. The goal is to develop the first principles into greater knowledge and practical Christian living; to use them to gain a greater, deeper understanding of the doctrines in Scripture.

Christou understands the “beginning (elementary) teachings” to be “about Christ,” referring the list of “beginning teachings” to be the Old Testament teachings about Messiah. The interpretation based on this view is, “they had to leave once and for all their ties with the Old Covenant, with Judaism, and accept Jesus Christ as Savior.”⁶ In other words, the believers have accepted the message that Jesus is the Messiah, but have not accepted his Person and work as Savior.⁷ The commentators holding the objective genitive view reject the subjective genitive because the subjective, in their view, requires the beginning teachings “of Christ” to mean teachings spoken “by Christ.” The New Testament, according to this view, does not show any direct teaching by Christ on the six items (repentance, faith, baptisms, etc.), of vv. 1-2.

However, each of the six first principles is either mentioned or demonstrated by Christ in various discourses and acts. Therefore, I and others take the view that the subjective genitive is the correct interpretation. From the beginning of his epistle, the author has used the Old Testament Scriptures to illuminate New Testament teaching, showing his readers through that method that their faith in Christ's Person and works has a sure foundation. However, his focus is *not* on the Old Testament, but on the New Testament message that faith in Jesus saves, 1:3d; 2:3-4, 9-11; 3:1, 6, 14; 4:11, 14-16; 5:12-14. The *arche* of 5:12 are the same as the *arche* of 6:1-2. The *arche* are illuminated by the Old Testament revelation, but they are distinctively New Testament doctrine. The emphasis of the Writer has always been on the New Testament revelation that Jesus alone saves fully, completely, and eternally. The subjective genitive “by” or “of” Christ does not require that Jesus directly taught these first principles (*arche*), only that they were derived from his teaching. The Gospels show that each *arche* is in some way mentioned or demonstrated by Christ in his various discourses and acts. Each of these teachings has a direct bearing on New Testament faith in Jesus (as I will show), and evolved from the teachings given by Christ through his Person, words, and works. They are the first simple presentation of the Gospel message, which the apostles took and studied, Acts 6:2, and from them developed the more advanced instruction found in their epistles (a veritable school of theology), which advanced teachings the readers of the epistle to the Hebrews were neglecting to their peril.⁸ Allow me to illustrate. Nowhere does Jesus say this sentence: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said these words, Acts 2:38, because they were an accurate conclusion drawn from the words and teachings of Jesus.⁹

The genitive “of Christ” should be understood “broadly of Christian teaching in continuity with the Old Testament and possibly also with contemporary Jewish teaching.”¹⁰ The beginning teachings “would therefore be the initial understanding of the Christian position which differentiated it from Judaism.”¹¹ What, then, are these beginning teachings, these elementary principles? They are the building blocks of salvation and the beginning of the normal Christian life. These elementary principles of Christianity are:

- “The foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.” This is salvation. The human side of salvation is the process of confessing one's sins (dead works) to the Lord. Confession is agreeing with God that I am a sinner, resulting in a strong desire to turn away from sin, which is repentance, and turn to faith in God (Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19; 17:30; John 6:28-29). Faith in God is confidence in his promise of salvation based upon the propitiating death of Christ on the cross. In other words, Repent! and place your faith in Christ for salvation. This is the beginning of eternal life.
- “The doctrine of baptisms.” This is obedience. Baptism is the first act of Christian obedience, Acts 2:38, and continued obedience should follow. The Writer uses the obedience of baptism to indicate the whole life of obedience to God required of the believer.
- “Laying on of hands.” This is service. The laying on of hands has two uses in Scripture. In the first

⁶ MacArthur, *Hebrews*, 136.

⁷ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 195, n. 33, explaining the view of another commentator.

⁸ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 195.

⁹ Matthew 3:11; Luke 11:13; John 7:39; 20:22; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3, 5; Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47.

¹⁰ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 312.

¹¹ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 137.

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instance, it was an act of identification with an object or person. In the Law, the offeror laid his hands on the offering to identify the offering with himself as his sin-bearer. In the second instance, laying on of hands was a recognition that an object or person had been set aside to fulfill God's purpose, Acts 13:3. It is this second use that is prominent here. The Writer is using this act to indicate the call to Christian service. This is not the particular call to be a pastor, but it is the general call given to all believers to serve the Lord. Serving the Lord is the natural result of obedience.

- "Resurrection of the dead." This is exactly what it says. The resurrection of the dead might not seem, at first look, to be an elementary principle, but it is. The resurrection of the believer is a foundational principle of Christianity. If one does not believe in the resurrection, then he is of all men most pitiable, see 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.
- "Eternal judgment." The fact of a judgement with eternal consequences is foundational to the Gospel message. Unbelievers are judged for their sins; believers are judged on their Christian works. It is the believer's works that the Writer has in mind, because his readers were still spiritually immature in their faith.

This not a comprehensive list of Christianity's beginning principles. The Writer has selected those that fit his purpose. They are, however, foundational and essential to salvation and the beginning of Christian living.

The ending note to this paragraph, "and this we will do if God permits," is highly significant. This is more than lip service to the notion of "if God wills," which careless believers mouth without understanding, or an intent to obey. The Writer is saying he wants to move away from the elementary principles to his argument concerning Christ as high priest of the order of Melchizedek. However, some of his readers may not be ready to move ahead. One cannot move beyond first principles until one has experienced them and puts them to practical effect in his life. More simply, the Holy Spirit will not guide the sinner into deeper spiritual truths until he or she has mastered the truth of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Writer's readers could enjoy a better understanding of Scripture truth only if God permitted, a condition of deep significance to each person. Therefore, the thought of eternal judgment and the will of God for the individual are joined as the basis for the next sections, vv. 4-8; 9-12.

Excursus: "Doctrine of Baptisms" and "Laying on of Hands"

There is much division over the meanings of "doctrine of baptisms" and "laying on of hands" in the context of Hebrews. Those commentators who take the genitive objective view understand these phrases as indicating the Levitical exercises of the Law, as opposed to the grace of the gospel. Yet, as I understand the Writer's words and intent, these things are not in direct reference to the Law, but are "the elementary principles of Christ" (emphasis mine). It has been obvious throughout chapters one through five that the Writer is using his reader's familiarity with the Old Testament to illuminate his New Testament teaching. So, let us further examine the doctrine of washings and the laying on of hands in the light of Old Testament Scripture.

The word *baptizo*, baptism, is found in the singular throughout the New Testament, except here where it is the plural *baptismos*. This could simply be an exception to the rule. However, it is spoken of as the "doctrine" of baptisms, indicating more than a simple baptism. The word *baptismos* in 6:2 should really be translated as "washings." The "doctrine of washings" refers to the Old Testament religious practice of ritual cleansing. The references are too numerous to list here, and one example must suffice (emphasis mine),

- Exodus 30:19-21, "Whenever they [the priests] enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall *wash* with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the Lord by fire, they shall *wash* their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come."

Other uses may be found with the aid of an exhaustive concordance, or by simply reading Exodus and Leviticus, and examining each use by noting the context of the word. The "doctrine" of washings is a way of referring to the requirements of the Mosaic law in the matter of ritual cleanliness. For example, the man who released the scapegoat was to wash. Most washings were also intended to accomplished physical

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cleaning (e.g. after a bodily discharge, touching a dead body or animal carcass), but even in those cases the primary purpose was religious, a ritual cleansing so the individual could remain in fellowship with God in order to approach God for offerings and worship. Looked at in this light, it will be seen that "washings" were preparatory to religious service. In many instances, the one who failed to wash was "unclean until the evening," meaning, he could not engage in religious services until the beginning of a new day (a new day began at sundown). His failure to wash made him ritually unclean. The New Testament act of baptism is as much a symbol of ritual cleanliness as it is a symbol of unification with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. Symbolically, the "old man" of sin is washed away and the "new man" of Christ is now available to serve God. In the Old Testament, washings were necessary to indicate the believer as cleansed and thus available to serve God. In the New Testament baptism is necessary as a witness that the believer is cleansed by Christ and is thus available to serve God. Today, we tend to concentrate on the "cleansed" (saved) part of the symbol as an evangelical witness, but in truth baptism is the first witness by which the believer is known to be Christ's servant. The Old Testament washings were required obedience preparatory to serving God. The New Testament baptism is also a required step of obedience prior to serving Christ, and I have in this manner interpreted the "doctrine of baptisms" in Hebrews.

What about "laying on of hands?" This also was an Old Testament religious practice. The phrase does not occur in the Old Testament, but the practice is seen in the sacrifices; two examples must suffice (emphasis mine):

- Leviticus 1:4-5, "Then he shall *put his hand* on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him."
- Leviticus 16:21-22, "Aaron shall *lay both his hands* on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness."

These practices did not literally cause the sins or guilt of the offeror to be transferred to the offering, but spiritually the guilt and penalty for his sins were imputed to the animal, so that the animal vicariously bore the guilt, and thus paid the penalty, on behalf of the sinner.

The act of laying hands on the sacrifice identified the sacrifice with the sins and guilt of the sinner. This symbol of identification transferred into other practices. I have already given the example of Acts 13:1-3. In Acts 8:18, the laying on of hands did not impart the Holy Spirit to those new believers. Rather, when the apostles laid their hands on these new believers, they publically identified those persons as believing the apostle's message and possessing the saving faith in Jesus the apostles had proclaimed. The newness of Christianity required this "sign" of faith (cf. Hebrews 2:4) and that is why the Spirit did not indwell until that sign, the laying on of hands, was given. In its main New Testament use, however, the laying on of hands became symbolic of a call to ministry. Those who were already known as being active in service to Christ laid their hands on one whom, upon his reasonable testimony and demonstrable competence, they recognized as having been called into the service of Christ just as they had been called; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6.

The context of Hebrews 6:1-2 is the first or beginning principles of Christ, including the doctrines of leaving dead works for faith, resurrection, and eternal judgment. In this context the Writer speaks of the doctrine of washings and the laying on of hands. Though these have an Old Testament background, they are a New Testament practice. Together, in the company of the current context, they indicate the requirement for obedience and service to Christ as two of the first principles of Christianity.

*4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,
5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,*

In vv. 4-6 the Writer states a general principle, which he further illustrates in vv. 7-8. The general principle is, salvation from the penalty of sin is a once for all, one time work of God in the sinner. One cannot

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be saved twice from sin's penalty. To lose one's salvation would indicate that Christ's death on the cross was not a true propitiation (full payment for sin's penalty). That Christ's death was a true propitiation is demonstrated by his resurrection, a fact given by the apostles as absolute proof that he fully satisfied the penalty for sin. (e.g., John 11:25; Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:17; 1 Peter 1:3). Let me remind you that "propitiation" means that through his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus fully satisfied the penalty for sin: by himself he purged our sins. His sacrifice was a "perfect" sacrifice, because nothing else was required to satisfy God for sin; Jesus paid the full penalty, 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 1:3; 10:10-18. One of the main arguments of Hebrews is that the Old Testament sacrifices could not take away sins, but the offering Jesus made on the cross fully and completely remits (cancels) sin's guilt and penalty, so that "by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified." Therefore, the argument of this passage *cannot* be that a saved person can lose their salvation. Rather, the author is addressing the truth that a believer cannot lose his or her salvation. The opening "for" reveals the Writer's position. He is leaving the beginning teachings of Christianity, because if one was saved he had passed beyond the beginning, and if one wasn't saved, he could not progress past the beginning; and he believed they were saved, v. 9.

I believe the opening words of v. 6, *kai parapipto*, "and falling away," state a hypothetical condition¹² that is in agreement with this view. I believe the proper meaning of the opening *kai* is a "what if" condition. What if one has known all these things (of vv. 4-5) and then falls away from Christ?¹³ The answer is, "if" the "what if" condition could be fulfilled, then it would be impossible to be re-saved. The logical conclusion is that "what if" cannot happen, because salvation occurs one time, is efficient for all time, and continues throughout eternity. One is either saved, or is not saved, there is no in-between state, there is no going back from salvation, there is no going forward if one is not saved. This view is supported by the contrasting "but" of v. 9 which reveals their true spiritual state. The Writer is not saying his readers could fall away; the reverse is true, he is *prima facie* accepting their profession of faith as genuine, and the hypothetical condition of v. 6 as not applying to them at all.¹⁴ Therefore, to understand this passage, we must apply the subject the Writer has in view (5:11-14), the larger context of the whole epistle concerning the nature of the offering made by Christ, and the context of the entire New Testament concerning the propitiation made by Christ, to the immediate context. This is what I have done, and how I have arrived at my interpretation of the passage.

The key thought, then, to keep in mind throughout this passage, is to remember that the author is setting up a hypothetical case (as to why the Writer would set up a hypothetical condition, see below and at v. 6). He is not saying that all the things of vv. 4-5 can be true and the believer lose his salvation, v. 6. He is saying that when all the conditions of vv. 4-5 are true that the person is a believer, and believers cannot lose their salvation. His purpose is to assure his saved readers of their salvation (for in their Old Testament experience every new sin required a new sacrifice; not so when one is "in Christ"). However, the Writer probably also had *an application* in mind to help his believing readers identify any among them who were not saved and might turn to apostasy. *As an application*, his words were a warning to those who knew about Christ, but had rejected or might reject saving faith in Christ. One may be knowledgeable about salvation, but not committed to saving faith; spiritually these seekers looking for saving faith are standing between belief and unbelief.¹⁵ We may then, *as an application*, understand these words as describing a worst case scenario for those who had not mastered the first principles, i.e., who were not saved. They could come so close to salvation in their

¹² The word translated "if" in v. 6 is the Greek *kai*, a conjunction usually translated "and," but which may be translated "also, even, or, but, them, that, yet, for, when, (or) if" as appropriate to the context. E.g. Luke 15:4, "if (*kai*) he loses one of them," setting up the hypothetical condition of a lost sheep.

¹³ In its context the "what if" argument can be understood as a harsh warning against potential apostasy to those who have not turned their knowledge of Christ into saving faith.

¹⁴ My unshakeable conviction is that the New Testament epistles were written to and for believers. Therefore, though the Writer of Hebrews might allow for an application of his argument, his words should be interpreted as written to believers.

¹⁵ The careful Bible student will note that, in the Gospels, Christ bestowed healing on his disciples and also upon those about whom nothing is said concerning their faith. Many that he healed tasted the benefits without coming to saving faith.

knowledge of and participation in the benefits of the Gospel that they might appear to be saved. And yet their unbelief would cause them to fail the final test, which was to have that quality of faith¹⁶ that results in salvation. However, in my view the key thought of the passage is the interpretation not the application. The descriptions of vv. 4-5 describe a believer. He is not saying that all the things of vv. 4-5 can be true and that saved person, v. 6, can lose his salvation. He is saying that when all the conditions of vv. 4-5 are true that the person is a believer. The consistent testimony of all New Testament Scripture is that a believer's salvation is eternally secured by the merit of Christ, which merit extends for an eternity into the past, and an eternity into the future, propitiating God for all my sins. A believer cannot lose their salvation: Christ is holding onto me, John 10:30.

With these thoughts in mind, let us more closely examine the passage. The Writer speaks of those who were "once enlightened," of their "having tasted the heavenly gift," of their having "become partakers of the Holy Spirit," of having "tasted the good word of God," and "tasted the powers of the age to come." The word translated "enlightened" is *photizo*, meaning "light." The word *photizo* is used metaphorically to indicate understanding. This word is also used at 10:32 where it is translated "illuminated" and in that context must refer to believers. The meaning here is that these readers do have a spiritually efficient understanding of the first principles of Christ. The word translated "tasted" is the same word, *gueo* used at 2:10. At 2:10 Christ tasted death, meaning he experienced a genuine human death. Here, in 6:4, it means a genuine experience of the "heavenly gift." Some commentators understand "enlightened" as indicating baptism and "tasted the heavenly gift" as referring to the Eucharist (Lord's Supper). The Christians of the second century did call baptism enlightenment. Those who were baptized would naturally have participated in the Eucharist. However, *photizo* is used in v. 4 in a metaphorical sense, and *gueo* is used in a metaphorical sense in v. 5. The most sensible view is that *gueo* is being used in a metaphorical sense in v. 4. The "heavenly gift" is not the Eucharist. The most likely interpretation of the heavenly gift is either the experience of salvation, or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Seeing that the Holy Spirit is the subject of the next phrase, the better view of "tasting the heavenly gift" is to understand it as experiencing the blessings God bestows to the believer in Christ.¹⁷ The next phrase indicates that these believers "have become partakers of the Holy Spirit." The word translated "partakers" is *metochos*, the same word used in 1:9 (*companions* of Christ), 3:1, 14 (*partakers* of the heavenly calling; *partakers* of Christ), and 12:8 (*partakers* in chastisement). The word means the same in every use: to be a participant. The believers in 6:4 are participants of the Holy Spirit in the same way they are participants in Christ. The Writer could be referring back to 2:4, those who were "partakers" of the sign gifts and miracles imparted to the early church, indicating his readers were also participating in sign gifts and miracles from the Holy Spirit. A better view is that he is referring to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through whom these other things in vv. 4-5 are experienced, and this is my view. Believers have also, v. 5, "tasted the good word of God." Again, *gueo*, tasted, means to experience. This could be as simple as reading the word, but in association with these other conditions of the salvation experience, *gueo* must mean spiritually comprehending the word of God. This is seen to be correct view when one considers that it is the "good" word of God they have tasted. To those who believe, the word of God is the good word leading to life.¹⁸ The last descriptive is that they have "tasted the powers of the age to come." By "powers" the Writer may be referring back to 2:4. However, the "age to come" is the age of the Messiah, compare 2:5 and see my comments on that verse. That age is an age of righteousness and salvation, the age of the kingdom of God upon the earth. This phrase is a distinct reference to salvation, for the saved experience the spiritual benefits of the Messianic kingdom prior to its official inauguration, compare 10:16; 12:22-24, 28.

The meaning, then, of these six descriptions of the character and spiritual experiences of the readers of Hebrews, is to indicate the Writer's view that they are indeed saved. (A view that agrees with his comments in v. 9.) If this is the correct view of the passage, and I believe that it is, then the *kai parapipto*, "and falling away," of v. 6 must be hypothetical in nature.

¹⁶ See the paragraph at 4:11, beginning with the words "What is faith?"

¹⁷ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 209.

¹⁸ Compare 2 Corinthians 2:16. The word of God is an "aroma of death" to those who do not have saving faith.

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If, then, as I have suggested, the passage is hypothetical in nature, as to “falling away” from the Lord, what is the significance of the warning for the original and subsequent readers? I believe the primary application (the significance) of this passage to believers is as both an encouragement and a warning to persevere in their faith. The doctrine of perseverance, much neglected in these modern days, requires the believer to consistently continue in the faith to the end of life. For those who would point to this doctrine as proof a believer may lose his or her salvation, it is only necessary to point out that one cannot persevere in something one does not already possess. The God-ward side of this doctrine is the grace that preserves God's people in their faith, securing them in the infinite merit of Christ. He is holding on to me ever so much more securely than I could hold on to him. The human side of perseverance is the requirement that the believer use the means of grace that God provides in order to remain steadfast in the faith—to “hold fast” our confidence, as the Writer states in 3:6. If one reviews all the warning passages,¹⁹ one discovers the common theme is to pay attention to the requirements of faith. The specific meaning of this passage is “do not deceive yourselves about your faith.” Genuine faith has certain characteristics that mark it as genuine. In this passage, vv. 1-5, 9-11 indicate the positive characteristics, whereas vv. 6-8, 12 indicate the negative.

6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

As noted above, the word translated “if” is the Greek word *kai*. The word “if” is an allowable translation, not only because salvation once possessed cannot be lost, but also because the Writer has set up a hypothetical circumstance to better illustrate that the salvation found in Christ is “better than” the salvation found in the Law. Under the Law,²⁰ the atoning sacrifice was sufficient to cover the act of sin for which it was offered. Every new sin(s) committed after the last offering must be covered with the blood of yet another offering. The offering of Christ, in contrast to the sacrifices of the Levitical system, is of such spiritual worth that it completely remits all sin—past, present, future—that it is applied to by faith. What sin could I commit that was not paid for by Christ? One is not required to remember to bring a sacrifice for each new sin; God has brought for himself the sacrifice that remits the believing sinner's sin.

Under the Law every new sin required a new sacrifice. Salvation in Christ means every sin is paid for, i.e., a new sacrifice for a new act of sins is not required. The sin has already been forgiven because of Christ. What is required under the New Covenant (of faith in Christ), is not a new sacrifice, but the continuing application of Christ's once for all sacrifice through confession and repentance, 1 John 1:9. Confession and repentance is not a new sacrifice, that was already given once for all. Confession and repentance is not a re-application of the blood of the sacrifice: the Old Testament illustrates the rule, the blood of a sacrifice was spilled once and applied one time only. Confession and repentance is the disobedient child asking his heavenly Father for restoration to fellowship *because* sin was forgiven. Confession is the necessary act of the disobedient believer acknowledging his sin and his faith. Repentance is the necessary act of turning from sin to the source of his faith, God in Christ. Sin is a crime against the Ruler of the soul. The debt of guilt from that crime must be satisfied by an appropriate payment—and it is! The payment was made in the propitiation of Christ, when the believer exercised faith once and for all on Christ as his Savior. For acts of sin future to salvation, one need only apply the merit of that propitiation through the means of confession and repentance. For the saved person, when he after salvation commits an act of sin, his act of confession and godly repentance are divinely ordained to apply the merit Christ's propitiation to satisfy God's justice and give forgiveness and cleansing. Salvation in Christ occurred once, and need not and cannot be repeated, and the

¹⁹ The list varies somewhat, but 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 10:26-31; 12:25-29 are considered by most as containing the warning passages.

²⁰ Salvation is always by grace through faith, and the one who had faith in God's means of salvation would be saved. Does this mean for the Old Testament saints that their personal salvation was lost if they sinned but failed to cover that sin with a sacrifice? No human being is perfectly obedient, and that includes the perfect obedience required to bring a sacrifice to cover every sin. God's grace is the “mediator” between imperfect obedience and a secure salvation. All who have been saved by grace through faith are kept secure in their salvation by grace.

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merit of that propitiation remits the penalty of all sin to which it is applied by faith.

"If" an unsaved person one is considering salvation, and then knowingly, deliberately, presumptuously turns away, then there is no other way for them to be saved.²¹ Christ was crucified only once in a once for all offering of himself. His death was one time only and effective once for all because God declared the spiritual worth of his offering to be more than sufficient to pay for the guilt and consequences of man's sin, 1 John 2:2. His once for all death for sin is of sufficient spiritual worth that it needs be applied one time only to save a sinner from the eternal penalty of sin. The spiritual worth of Christ's Person and work makes it impossible to apply it again, because to do so would be to subject him to the charge of being an insufficient Redeemer, a failed Mediator, and a false Savior. God's act of saving a soul from sin, death, and his wrath, into new life with himself, need not, and therefore cannot, be repeated. An unsaved person cannot turn from Christ and be saved, because his once for all offering for sin is the only full payment for sin.

Let me state this in a positive view to make the case clearer and stronger. Christ's propitiation was of such spiritual worth that it paid for all sin, past, present, and future in temporal relationship to his death on the cross. Therefore, when the merit of Christ's propitiatory death is applied to the individual sinner through personal faith, that propitiation covers all the past, present, and future sins of that sinner. All sins of any believer at any time in the history of the world were either temporally past, or present, or temporally future, in relationship to Christ's propitiation. In the moment of personal salvation, therefore, all the sins of every believer were covered by Christ's propitiation. If the guilt of all one's sins, including all future sins, have been fully paid for by Christ, then the believer can *never* again be placed in jeopardy by them. Therefore, he cannot "fall away," by losing his or her his salvation. There are those who say a believer can choose to deny his salvation, and thus become unsaved. That would be a sin, and that sin was paid for by Christ, who will not allow his children to fall away from him intentionally or unintentionally. But, consider this: the indicator of genuine saving faith is constant perseverance in that faith. The one who walks away from Christ, who never again wants to hear his name, read a Bible, or fellowship with God, who chooses to engage in all his sins, and has no guilt, and no repentance: that person was *never* saved. The *kai parapipto* of v.6 is purely hypothetical in the case of the believer, and a horrifying warning to the unbeliever who has the potential to knowingly turns away from faith in Christ. As noted at the end of v. 5, the application toward believers is perseverance in the faith.

7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God;

8 but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

Here is the clarifying illustration. The illustration has some similarities to the parable of the sower. The good ground bears good fruit; the bad ground bears thorns and briers. The sinner who receives with faith that good word of salvation in Christ is saved from his sins. The sinner who receives that same word but does not mix it with faith is not saved from his sins. Let us remember the Writer's (primarily) agrarian culture. Good ground always brought forth good fruit. The person who turns to Christ for salvation will be saved and his salvation is secured by Christ. Bad ground—ground that was packed down from traffic, or was stony, or the soil was poor—could not be changed (modern methods and fertilizers were not available). Bad ground could never bear good fruit. The sinner who turns away from salvation in Christ cannot be saved, for only Christ can supernaturally turn the soul from sin; if one rejects Christ, then one rejects salvation. Verses 1-8 mean that once a believer is saved, his salvation is secured in Christ; but the unbeliever who hears the Gospel and rejects Christ, cannot be saved.²²

²¹ The view expressed is the common interpretation of the passage. Most commentators view this passage as a Jewish person experimenting with the Christian faith and turning back short of salvation.

²² As I stated in a previous footnote, that moment of final and therefore irreversible rejection of Christ cannot be known by you or me. Our responsibility is to continue to present the Gospel message, even when humanly speaking it seems futile. With God, all things are possible.

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9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

The “contrasting “but” is the confirmation of the argument. The Writer’s audience are not of those who “are falling away”; they are not apostates. Their lack of progress in spiritual knowledge and maturity, 5:11-14, does not mean they are not “beloved.” The writer believes them to be saved. The fact that he will shortly continue his teaching on Melchizedek confirms this view, for unless they had been spiritually enlightened by salvation, they could not understand this truth. He speaks a harsh word of exhortation, to stir them out of their complacency, to remind them of their spiritual benefits and responsibilities, but he considers them beloved brethren. The “better things” he thinks of them implies their ability to be diligent in their salvation. By that I mean they must engage in that hard work required to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. They must daily endeavor to be like Christ, to add practical godliness to their character and thus to their actions. Spiritual maturity does not just happen, it requires intention: a strong desire to master knowledge and gain understanding; a willingness to temper understanding with experience that one might gain wisdom. This is the same as Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Paul meant they were to be diligent to attain the goal of Christianity, which is to be conformed to the image of Christ. The Writer of Hebrews has the same thought in mind: they were capable of “better things” than they had accomplished; yea, there was a God-mandated necessity to accomplish those “better things” in and with their Christian life.

Through personal perseverance and trust in God’s grace Christians are to maintain and improve the grace and gifts given them to serve Christ. These privileges and gifts are the better things that “accompany salvation.”²³ Salvation is not an end in itself. Salvation is the door into God’s house through which the sin-sick soul enters into spiritual health. Once inside God’s house the saved soul is to work and serve God. The Writer mentions this in a general way in v. 10 as “your work and labor of love,” and “in that you have ministered to the saints.” The entire panoply of spiritual gifts and responsibilities is in view. Many Christians act like someone who has decided to earn a degree as a medical doctor, but then idly forsake their responsibility to learn and practice that knowledge. To apply the illustration, some recipients of spiritual healing (salvation) are willing to extend some comfort to others based on their salvation experience, but are doing nothing to actually practice and improve what they have learned. In the epistle of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit is exhorting his readers to start working and serving and improving the spiritual blessings God has bestowed upon them.

10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

The point of vv. 10-19 is, diligence in the outworking of your salvation is noted and rewarded by God. The Writer will encourage them with God’s “promises,” v. 12-18, and the “hope” that comes from the promises. The word “hope” leads to God’s presence, which was behind the “veil,” v. 19, in the Old Testament economy, but through which Jesus has entered because, v. 20, he is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Let us, for now, focus on the spiritual truths in vv. 10-12. In the context of the Writer’s confidence in his reader’s, he expresses, as an encouragement to them, that God has noted their Christian love and service. Their willingness to minister to fellow believers—their work and labor of love—is an indicator of a believing spirit. The authenticity of their service as born out of the grace of their salvation is seen in that it was performed “toward his name.” That is, they were obedient to the command, not as being forced to it, but as volunteers in the service of God, Psalm 110:3. In ministering to the saints they did their work as unto the Lord, as laboring to glorify God in their expression of love toward their spiritual brethren.

11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,

²³ These might be brought together thus, “saving knowledge, justifying faith, patient hope, sound repentance, new obedience, humility, sincerity, constancy, and all other sanctifying graces, and perseverance in them” (Gouge, *Hebrews*, 1:413).

12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Their diligence in ministering to the saints needed to be applied to other areas of their spiritual life. The thought of diligence returns the reader to the exhortation of 3:6, 14, and 4:11. God's servants are to be faithful in all their spiritual duties. "He said *to the end* that they might know they had not yet reached the goal, and were therefore to think of further progress. He mentioned diligence that they might know they were not to sit down idly, but to strive in earnest."²⁴ As a further inducement to diligence he reminds them of their spiritual fathers, whose faith and patience in their own spiritual struggle against a world of sinners qualified them to be the heirs of God's promises. They did not give up but pressed on. "The way of God's heroes . . . unto their rest and glory, unto the enjoyment of the divine promises, was by faith, patience, long-suffering, humility, enduring persecution, self-denial, and the spiritual virtues generally reckoned in the world unto pusillanimity [contemptible timidity], and so despised."²⁵ Even so, modern believers are to have the same faith, patience and diligence toward God and his promises. For we too have promises to inherit, the same promises of eternal rest in Christ, of endless blessing and victory. If those who had gone before had accomplished the goal, then it is attainable to all who are diligent in faith and practice.

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you."

The Writer follows his usual method and uses a word from the preceding verse as the subject of the succeeding verse; in this instance the word "promise." The immediate goal was to assure his readers of their part in the inheritance, as a further encouragement to their diligence. The means applied to that end was a reminder of the fidelity of God. The reward of the reader's diligence, the surety of their inheriting the promises, is the immutable word of God. God made an unconditional promise to Abraham. That is what the Writer means when he says that God "swore by himself," i.e., he took an oath, the fulfillment of which was secured by own person. The covenant on which the oath is based is in Genesis 15. The ratification of the covenant is found in Genesis 15:17.

- "And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces."

For those who may not understand Genesis 15:17, I will explain its significance to Abraham. In his culture, a contract was "signed" (ratified, confirmed) when the principles of the contract walked together between the divided carcass of an animal. God had told Abraham to set up this "contract signing" ceremony in 15:9-10. In 15:12-16 God stated the terms of the contract between himself and Abraham. In 15:17 Abraham (in a dreaming vision) sees God as a burning torch, walking by himself between the animal carcasses, thus "signing" the contract. Because only God "signed" the contract, God alone was responsible for its fulfillment. The scene illustrates what the Writer of Hebrews plainly states, God swore by himself to bless and multiply Abraham, he swore by himself to fulfill all the terms and conditions of the contract (the Abrahamic Covenant.) God takes it upon himself to fulfill his promises. The terms and conditions of the promise to Abraham applied to Abraham's children, which includes his spiritual children, those of like faith with Abraham. God's oath, concerning the fulfillment of the covenant, is found in Genesis 22:16-18. When Abraham demonstrated his faith in God's promise of an heir by being willing to sacrifice Isaac (cf. Hebrews 11:17-18), God confirmed the covenant with him by an oath. In this example of God's faithfulness, the Writer of Hebrews is assuring his readers that their partaking in the promise was certain, if they remained diligent in their faith and practice, like faithful Abraham. Diligence must be focused to ensure an inheritance in the promises; one must diligently practice his faith. Therefore, the first requirement to inherit the promise is

²⁴ Pink, *Hebrews*, 336.

²⁵ Owen, *Hebrews*, V:211.

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saving faith; the second requirement is perseverance in faith and practice.²⁶ If you are saved, then God has secured the fulfillment of his promises toward you through his oath based in his own character as a just God. He will accomplish the promise, and by his grace and power he will ensure every genuine believer receives his inheritance and reward. The believer's part is stated in v. 15.

15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Abraham patiently endured his struggles in the world, his spiritual defeats and victories. He never lost sight of the goal, the fulfillment of the promise, and he never took his eyes off of God. The fact that he did not personally inherit the land only meant that his heirs would. His task was to remain faithful so that the promise might pass, through the testimony of his faith and practice, to the next generation of believers. As we have stated, Abraham did not obtain the promise of inheriting God's land. The Writer states this at 11:13, 39. Here, in 6:15, he states that Abraham did obtain the promise. What Abraham did obtain was God's rest in God's land, for the promise itself was his certain portion of the earthly inheritance. He "rested" in that promise, by which I mean his faith in the promise never wavered. Therefore by faith he did receive it. Moreover, Abraham did live in the land of God's rest, and his physical heirs did enter the land, and did live in it for as long as they lived in it by faith. The promise remains in effect for Abraham's physical and spiritual descendants who will rest in the promise, for they are his heirs. Abraham, through his heirs, has received the promise, for the promise was also of a seed, Christ, in whom all the nations would be blessed. All who believe in Christ as Savior have received the promise with faithful Abraham. Therefore, his faith in God secured the promise for him personally, for by his faith he entered into God's land and God's rest.

16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.

17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,

18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

The Writer states a general condition. An oath (promise, agreement, contract) settles a controversy or issue. God condescended to man's sensibilities and gave his oath, assuring the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and his heirs. The "two immutable things" are God's promise and God's oath.²⁷ God's promises and God's oath are grounded in his character. God is holy, so he cannot be immoral—he cannot lie; God is just, so he is equitable; God is all-knowing, so he foresees all possible barriers to his promise; God is all-powerful, so nothing can defeat his will and nothing can force him to act contrary to his will; God is perfection, so his character need not change; God is immutable, so his character cannot change. God's promise cannot fail because God's oath cannot be changed or broken.

The most important part of this small paragraph is found at the end of v. 18, the refuge believers find in the promise. This is expressed as a refuge in "the hope set before us." Note also, v. 19, that "this hope" is described in two figures: as the anchor of the soul; as entering behind the veil. Two things require explanation: the refuge; the hope. The Writer includes himself when he says that "we" have "fled for refuge." The purpose of fleeing, and therefore the great object of the refuge, is to "lay hold of the hope." Where then, or to whom then, does the believer flee for refuge? and why? The most reasonable view of vv. 17-20 is that the believer flees to God for refuge, and the hope he finds there is the assurance of God's promise. We are back to the thought of "God's rest." A refuge is a place of peace and security, in a word "rest," in the midst of trials, troubles, and persecutions. The believer's refuge in his struggles against sin and the world is God's rest. In this context, God's rest is the grace and power of God energizing the believer's spiritual nature to resist sin and accomplish God's works. Sin is overcome only by the power of God, a truth that everyday

²⁶ By "faith and practice" is meant the practical outworking of one's beliefs in daily life.

²⁷ The oath to Abraham and the oath to the Son in Psalm 110 have also been suggested as the "two immutable things" (Brown, *Hebrews*, 318).

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experience most plainly proves. The believer's only route of victory against sin is to turn away from sin to the Lord. How one actually performs that spiritual action is a matter of individual personality and character, but that spiritual action is (in general terms) the act of "fleeing for refuge."

In Hebrews 6, the refuge one must flee into, in order to endure the spiritual storms of life, is the assurance of God's promise, which promise is "the hope." The spiritual act of fleeing is exemplified in v. 15. Abraham believed God and through his faith obtained the promise. The promise was not some far away refuge. The promise, the hope of which the Writer speaks, is "an objective reality to be seized and also a subjective reality to be personally experienced."²⁸ The place of refuge is the presence and power of God active in the believer's life. Although it is mystical, it is not mysterious; it is the super-natural at work in the believer's born-again human nature. The mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16) is the power of God actively working in the believer.²⁹ If the refuge is God, and it is, then the hope is God's promise of rest (cf. Matthew 11:28). It is through faith and diligence, vv. 11, 12, that we enter into God's rest. This is not contradictory if one remembers that God's rest is ceasing from one's own works while living in God's land; it is to stop doing sin's works and do God's works. Rest means one is to live his life according to God's rules, using God's spiritual power to accomplish God's works. God's works are faith in him, the things we do for him, and the things he does in us.

To live according to God's rules through the spiritual power of God is, again, not mysterious. It is life lived through a power that is above man's nature, thus super-natural. How to do this has been expressed in various Scripture and through the experiences of devout men and women. One must reckon and yield himself as dead to sin and alive to God. One must "practice the presence of God." I cannot give you a formula as to how to accomplish this. I can only tell you that at every point in your life when you would look to your knowledge, your wisdom, your skills, your ability, your power and your authority, in order to live according to God's rules for living, and to serve God by doing God's works—that in looking to yourself you are not resting in God, you are not practicing faith, you have not fled to God, and you have not laid hold of the hope. The essence of sin is to ignore God and look to self; the essence of faith is to turn away from self and look to God. God may chose, often does chose, to use your skills, abilities, knowledge, power, etc. But unless the origination of guidance and the source of spiritual power is from God, it is not his rest, it is not his hope, and your refuge is the empty chasm of your soul, not the overflowing power of God's rest. The refuge, then, is God himself; the hope, then, is the rest for the soul that God has provided in Jesus Christ. The diligence one must practice in order to gain the full assurance of that hope is the constant turning away from self toward God. Abraham believed God, and in that act of belief he received the promises.

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,

20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

"This hope" is an anchor because it rests in the immutable oath and promise of God. The Writer uses an anchor as a metaphor to describe hope. I cannot describe the "anchor" that is "hope" better than the old hymn:³⁰

- We have an anchor that keeps the soul,
steadfast and sure while the billows roll.
Fastened to the rock that cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love.

Because the "rest" of God is faith in God not faith in one's self, the "hope" one has from God secures the soul in the steadfast assurance of the fulfillment of the promises of God. Putting one's trust in the certain

²⁸ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 153.

²⁹ Is this not, 1 Timothy 3:16, "God manifest in the flesh" as regards the believer? Yes, this is godliness.

³⁰ Refrain from *Will Your Anchor Hold*, Priscilla J. Owens, b.1829 - d.1907.

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fulfillment of the hope secures one's soul in life's storms, all the way through that final storm, death, and into hope's final resting place, eternity in God's land. The "anchor" is for here and now, for only in the here and now is faith troubled by the storms of sin and persecution; it holds the believer securely in the place of God's rest. But for the hope to be sure and steadfast anchor the believer must give him (or her) self over to it completely. The habitual and steady course³¹ of the Christian life must be "I believe! and therefore I will be diligent to do as God commands."

The Writer now speaks of the "veil." He does not mix metaphors but changes the metaphor from hope as an anchor, to hope as a personification: "and which hope enters the Presence behind the veil." The metaphor of "hope" as a personification is not Jesus, but is the "hope" itself seen as leading the believer into the presence of God. If a believer can understand "this hope" as "having faith in God's promise of rest," then he can understand how faith in the hope leads him into God's presence. Faith in God always brings the believer into the presence of God, because the essence of faith is turning away from all else in order to be in the presence of God. Since "the hope set before us" is an immutable promise of God, then faith in the fulfillment of that promise brings one into God's presence. You must understand that faith is not a passive noun lying idle on the ground. Faith is a verb, vigorous, active, and dynamic, demanding our attention and changing our life. Faith in the hope means life lived in the reality of the hope—to believe all that the "hope" represents will not only come to pass, but faith in it urgently demands an immediate response to live the fulfillment of the hope as a present reality. Since the hope is God's rest in God's land, the believer is to rest *now*; he or she is to live in God's land *now*. The future literal reality of habitation in the physical land God has promised³² does not prevent God's rest in God's land from being a spiritual reality in the here and now of everyday life. In the here and now God's land is salvation and God's rest is living according to God's rules. Faith makes all things God has promised a present spiritual reality right now.

The significance of the veil is not the veil itself, but rather who is behind the veil, and that person is God. The veil was the curtain in the Jewish temple that separated the holy place from the most holy place.³³ In the holy place sat the ark of the covenant and into the holy place only the high priest could go, and that only once each year, bearing a sacrifice for the sins of his people. Symbolically the ark, overshadowed as it was by representations of the cherubim (cf. Isaiah 6:2; Ezekiel 1:4-28; Revelation 4:6-8), and containing as it did the tables of the law, the pot of manna, and the living rod of Aaron, represented God's throne. Once each year, on the day of atonement, the Levitical high priest entered and sprinkled the blood of the sin-offering onto the lid covering the ark. The lid was known as the "mercy seat," because it was the place where atonement was made and thus God's mercy dispensed to the sinner. The ark behind the veil was the place where God met man and accepted his sin-offering as an atonement for the people. Hope in God's rest for the sinner is what has brought us into God's presence. Faith in Christ takes us behind the veil into the Presence.

The metaphor of 6:19 leads to Jesus, for he is the One through whom the hope has been brought to men. Jesus has entered into the presence of God, with his own blood, to make propitiation on behalf of the sinner. He is called the "forerunner" because he has gone before, as the originator and leader of salvation (2:10), into the presence of God; faith will follow him, Hebrews 10:19-20. He was qualified to enter behind the veil with his blood, on behalf of sinners, to make a propitiation for their sins, and cause the promises to be applied to believing, saved sinners, because he is a high priest according to the highest and oldest order of priesthood, the order of Melchizedek.

³¹ We all have doubts from time to time, but to doubt is to look to self; faith in God overcomes doubt.

³² Genesis 12:1; 13:14-15, 17; Deuteronomy 30:3-5; Ezekiel 20:33-37, 42-44.

³³ In the old covenant the veil symbolized the barrier sin put between the sinner and God. Hebrews 10:20 says the believer enters the holiest place "through the veil, that is, Christ's flesh." The author's view in 10:20 is of the offering for sin made in the flesh of Christ. When his offering for sin was accepted, the barrier of sin was torn away, Mark 15:38.

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*1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,
2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "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, remains a priest continually.*

The Writer now resumes the subject of the priesthood of Christ, which he had begun in chapter five. His purpose is to demonstrate that Christ is priest of an order of priesthood that was divinely intended to supersede the priesthood established by the Mosaic Law. He begins with a comparison between Melchizedek and Christ that will explain the character of Christ's priestly office. The key to understanding this analogy comes at the end of v. 3, where it is said that Melchizedek was "made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually." In what way was Melchizedek "made like the Son of God," and in what way does he "remain a priest continually?"

The place to begin to answer these questions is the historical account of the person Melchizedek. He is described as someone whom Abraham met and interacted with in the context of historical events.¹ Melchizedek was the king of Salem (possibly the future Jerusalem), and in that city he was not only king but also priest of the same God whom Abraham worshiped. Melchizedek's purpose in meeting with Abraham was to bless him with God's blessing, and in the company of Abraham to worship the God who had given the blessing. Melchizedek's act of worship was the offering and sharing of bread and wine in the name of "God most high, possessor of heaven and earth."² In the context of the physical necessity of Abraham and his troops, one might argue³ Melchizedek was providing the troops a generous offer of needed rations. However, the notation in Genesis 14:18 (in connection with the bread and wine) that Melchizedek was the priest of God most high, indicates this was not just a simple logistical supply for hungry troops.⁴ The sharing of food, especially bread, was a well-known act in Abraham's culture that indicated hospitality and community. Bread itself was considered a gift from God, and to share it was in some contexts a religious act. In the relation to Melchizedek's priesthood, the offering of bread and wine was probably intended as a thank offering to God. In response to Melchizedek's appearance, offering, and blessing, Abraham gave him a "tithe"⁵ of all. Melchizedek is identified by the Writer of Hebrews as king of righteousness and king of peace, and he takes these titles directly from the Genesis account. The word "Melchizedek" means "righteousness. The title "peace" derives from the Hebrew word *shalem*, i.e., Salem.

In Hebrews 7:3 Melchizedek is said to be "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." Obviously, since Melchizedek is presented in Genesis 14 as an

¹ See Genesis 14.

² A title with significant meaning to Abraham, who had been promised earthly and spiritual descendants and title to the land of Palestine.

³ Leupold, *Genesis*, 463 (many others take the same view).

⁴ On the other hand, one should not try to anachronistically force the Lord's Supper into this historical event occurring 2000 years earlier.

⁵ In ancient times, long before Abraham, a ten percent tax was taken to support government and religion. Sometimes one tax supported all; sometimes king and priests took separate taxes. The things to be taxed were often identified by law, but in agrarian societies were from field and flock. The spoils of war and human captives might also be tithed. See Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage*, pp. 126, 128, 160, 161, 214, 232-233, 362, 363. This ancient tax was uniformly identified as a tenth. "While taxation often took the form of a tenth, the amount might vary, less or more, though the name . . . was retained . . . Why a tithe or tenth should have been fixed on so generally is not clear, but probably it is connected with generally primitive views about numbers, or with methods of counting, e.g., by fingers and toes" (James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, XII:347). Abraham's tithe was a normal and culturally appropriate act, one that he had almost certainly practiced toward the pagan gods of Ur, and now took the opportunity to practice toward the one true God.

historical person, he had a father and mother, and he was born, lived, and died.⁶ For those who might doubt or downplay the historical reality of Melchizedek from this description, let us note that the point of comparison is with Christ ("made like the Son of God"), who has a Father and mother, was born, lived, and died. The analogy made between Christ and Melchizedek is valid because both were historical persons. The historical reality of Melchizedek's priesthood underlies the historical reality of Christ made a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Two points are in view. First, unlike Melchizedek, the Aaronic priests under the Law depended upon their genealogy for eligibility to be a priest.⁷ The order of Melchizedek does not require a genealogy; the call of God to the Son has established the Son as priest of the order. Second, the comparison of Melchizedek to the Son establishes the nature of Melchizedek's priesthood. Melchizedek is "made like" Christ (not Christ made like Melchizedek). The Greek word is *aphomoiomenos*, occurring in the New Testament only here, and meaning to resemble or be made similar to. "It is because Jesus Christ is of the order of Melchizedek that the representative of the order is seen to be a model of the true. In other words, it is Christ's priesthood that is the standard, not that of Melchizedek."⁸ The eternality of the Son justifies the Writer's interpretation of the order of the Melchizedek priesthood as continuing and unchanging.

Melchizedek suddenly appears in Scripture, and just as suddenly disappears. From the point of view of Scripture he simply was and continues to be as he was. No beginning is noted as to himself or as to his priesthood, and the same is true of an ending. Thus, it is the order of priesthood that Melchizedek represents, and not the man himself, that is eternal in nature. This is exactly how the Psalmist understood Melchizedek, for David wrote concerning the Messiah, Psalm 110:4, "You are a priest forever *according to the order of Melchizedek*" (emphasis mine). The reader may remember the Writer used this same interpretive method in 4:4-6. There, the "rest" of God was viewed as though it had not ended. The historical fact of the "rest" of God is used as a figure for the "rest" of the believer in Christ. In the same manner, the apparently unending character of Melchizedek's priesthood is being used to explain the eternal character of the priesthood of Christ. "Therefore," David says in Psalm 110:4, "You, Messiah, have an eternal priesthood that corresponds to the representation of Melchizedek in Scripture, as eternally a priest of God."

By combining all that the Writer says concerning Melchizedek, we can see that a picture or illustration of Christ's priestly office is being developed, based upon the Scriptural presentation of Melchizedek and his priesthood. Was Melchizedek the king of righteousness? So is Christ (1:9). Was Melchizedek the king of peace? So is Christ (Isaiah 9:6; Ephesians 2:14). Was Melchizedek called to be a priest of God? So is Christ (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 2:17; 3:1). Is the Melchizedek order of priesthood without end? So also does Christ's priesthood continue eternally. The writer will return to these thoughts in a few verses. Now, his main point will be to show that Christ, as priest of the order of Melchizedek, has a priesthood which is superior to the priesthood of the Mosaic Law.

*4 Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils.
5 And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham;*

Melchizedek the priest was positionally superior to Abraham the worshiper in that Melchizedek was God's representative to Abraham. The tithe to Melchizedek was, in part, a recognition of that superiority. Since the Writer is reasoning from the Law, we may use the Law to illustrate the point. Under the Law the eleven tribes tithed to the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi served in the temple, being divided into those who maintained the temple and those who were priests. The Levites who serviced the temple gave to the priests a tithe out of the tithes they had receive from the other eleven tribes. The priests did not give a tithe. They were in a

⁶ Some commentators believe Melchizedek was Noah's son Shem. If this identification were true, then the Writer's argument would break down. "For if Melchizedek were Shem, Levi was in *his* loins as well as in loins of Abraham" (Bush, *Notes on Genesis*, 1:234).

⁷ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 156.

⁸ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 157

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religious position that was superior to all their brethren the Levites and the eleven tribes. That was because they were the direct representatives of God to Israel. Their positional superiority is highlighted in that, even though those who gave tithes and those who received them were brethren—all of them coming from the loins of Abraham, all of them heirs of the promise, and thus all of them equals in the inheritance—nevertheless, the law of the tithe made the sons of Levi positionally superior to their brethren. “The tithe,” states Leviticus 28:30, “is the Lord’s.” The tithe was received by the Lord in the person of his representatives. Thus, the one who received the tithe was in a position that was superior to the one giving the tithe. In giving “this man” Melchizedek a tithe, the patriarch Abraham demonstrated that Melchizedek was his superior in their mutual relationship toward the Lord. Even though to Abraham was made the promises, Melchizedek represented the God who had made the promises to Abraham.

6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.

That Melchizedek received tithes indicated that he was a priest, for a priest receives tithes on behalf of God. The point being made is the existence of another order of authorized priesthood that was separate from that of the sons of Levi. To the act of receiving the tithe the Writer adds, from the Genesis account, that Melchizedek pronounced upon Abraham the blessings of God. Based upon these facts, the Writer draws his readers to the conclusion that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, because the lesser is blessed by the greater. If Melchizedek was the greater, then Abraham was the lesser, even though he was the great patriarch of Israel. If the Writer had simply stated this fact at the first his proposition would have been rejected, for in the Jewish mind none could be greater than Abraham. His reasoning, however, taken from the very principles of their Law, is inescapable.

8 Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.

9 Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak,

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

The Writer is thinking ahead to v. 11, forcing his readers to consider the imperfect nature of an ever-changing priesthood. The immediate context, however, is the superiority of the Melchizedek order of priests over the priesthood of Levi, as symbolized by Melchizedek receiving tithes from Levi through the person of Abraham. In making his argument, the Writer notes that the Scripture testifies Melchizedek is a living priest. The interpretation of the Writer is, “that Melchizedek is presented only as a living personage, and in this respect he serves as a figure or type of Christ whose priesthood is permanent because he continues forever (v. 24) . . . no mention is made of his death, not because he did not die, but because he symbolizes a priesthood that abides eternally.”⁹ If we cast an eye toward Psalm 110:4, the interpretation of these things is, that the one who is made priest in the order of Melchizedek is a priest forever. The ever-living priesthood is superior to the ever-dying thus ever-changing priesthood of Levi. Moreover, the tithe given by the dying priesthood (Levi) shows that the living priesthood (of Melchizedek) is superior.

How then, can Levi be said to have given a tithe to Melchizedek, when the man Levi was three generations removed from Abraham (Isaac-Jacob-Levi), and the Aaronic priests were several generations removed when they began to receive tithes under the Mosaic Law? The doctrine here is that of representation.¹⁰ In the biblical view, Abraham was the representative of his descendants. God’s covenant with Abraham, for example, was also a covenant with his descendants (Genesis 15; Galatians 3). The primary example of representation is that of Adam. All of Adam’s descendants are guilty of his sin, Romans 5:18. The

⁹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 253.

¹⁰ The original readers may not have been familiar with Paul’s arguments regarding representation, but the idea of family connections through multiple generations, of man’s indebtedness to his past, and his responsibility to future generations, were cultural norms (cf. Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 159-160).

same representation is true of Christ. Christ is the representative of all who by faith in his saving death have a living relationship with God. The acts of the head are imputed to his descendants, whether of Adam and mankind, or of Abraham and his physical (and spiritual) descendants, or of Christ and his spiritual "descendants" (for so we may speak of all who have been "born again" through faith in him as Savior). That the sovereign God has chosen some to be the representative of their physical and/or spiritual descendants is simply a fact of Scripture, a doctrine that the believer is to accept, understand, and apply. Therefore, when Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek, those who were in his loins, both seminally and by representation, also tithed. One sees that the Writer recognizes the difficulty of this argument, for he says, "so to speak", i.e., Levi did not pay the tithe directly, but might be said to have paid the tithe through his ancestor Abraham. Thus, in this doctrine, the priestly order of Levi is recognized to be positionally inferior to the priestly order of Melchizedek, both by reason that the priest of the Melchizedek order is ever living, but all other priests die, and that the inferior pays a tithe to the superior.

One should note that the thought of the Aaronic priest paying a tithe would have great impact on the Jewish readers. Under the Mosaic Law, the eleven tribes paid a tithe to the families of the tribe of Levi. All of Levi served the temple, providing daily maintenance and other services required to preserve the temple and conduct its many activities. Levi had no area of land as did the other tribes (they had a few cities and some land surrounding their cities), thus their agricultural efforts were limited. Levi subsisted on the tithes given by the other eleven tribes. The tithe was not money, it was a tenth of the agricultural produce of the land, i.e., of the sheep/goats, cattle/oxen, grains, fruits/nuts. The many non-priest families in Levi in turn gave to the one priestly family of Aaron a tenth out of the tithe they (the non-priests) received from Israel. The family of Aaron did not pay a tithe. To whom could they have tithed? They were the representatives of God. In the Mosaic Law there was no one positionally higher than the priests, therefore there was no one to whom they might give a tithe.¹¹ The Writer's logic is inescapable: if Levi, out of whom came Israel's priestly order, tithed to Melchizedek, then the Melchizedek order of priesthood was intrinsically superior than that of the Aaronic priesthood in Levi.

11 Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?

12 For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.

The priests of Levi received tithes, but they died, showing that they were (positionally) no better than those whom they served and that they were less than he (the Melchizedekian priest) who lives. Therefore Melchizedek, who received tithes, and of whom Scripture testifies that he lives, is of an order of priesthood that is not imperfect. Thus, a priest of this order is superior to the priests of the order of Levi. Based upon this conclusion, the Writer reasons that the death of the priests in the order of Levi proves the imperfection of the Mosaic Law that established their order. For if their offerings had made them perfect, then another, ever-living order of priest would not have been required. Neither the Law nor the priests of the Law were perfect, in that neither it nor they could make themselves or others perfect. Therefore, there was a need that a priest of a different order should arise, a priest who served a different law, therefore a priest and a law that could make the comers thereunto perfect. God met this need by calling a priest of another order, a living order, occupied by a living priest, one who receives tithes but does not give them, one who does not die but continues: Jesus Christ. The conclusion is that, since a new order of priesthood has been established by the calling of God, there has been a corresponding change in the Law. God made this other order of priesthood to serve a different law, the law of life in the death of a Savior, in whom he made a new covenant (8:10-13), a covenant that gives life, not a reminder of death.

¹¹ This is one of the many reasons why a tithe in New Testament times makes little sense. A tithe requires a priesthood, but all New Testament believers are priests. Rather, believers are to support the physical structure of worship, maintain its services, and support those who work at the altar, as all Israel did when they brought their sacrifices and offerings. See Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 for the proper teaching concerning New Testament giving.

13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.

The Scripture here is plain and I can add little in the way of explanation. Jesus came out of the tribe of Judah; the priests came out of the tribe of Levi. Therefore, if Jesus is a priest, he must be a priest of an order other than that of Levi.¹² Moreover, he must be a priest serving a different law than that of Levi, since under the Mosaic Law there is one authorized priesthood. One must note that this change in the priesthood and the law could not have been completely unexpected. Psalm 110, accepted by the Jews as a Messianic Psalm, set the expectation that Messiah would be a priest not of the Levitical order. The history of Melchizedek, showing him to be both king and priest, may have led some to expect this Melchizedekian priest to arise out of the tribe of kings, the tribe of the family of David the king, which is Judah (cf, Genesis 49:10). Some Christian commentators have noted that the phrase, "arose from Judah" may have a Messianic connotation, *ala* Malachi 4:2; Isaiah 11:1; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12, *et al.* Psalm 110 and other Messianic scriptures set the expectation that this new priest would be king as well. Therefore, the connection between Melchizedek and the tribe of Judah is significant in showing that Messiah is priest as well as king. However, the writer does not press this connection, in the main because Judah also paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham. The point, rather, is that a different order of priesthood was prophesied, was required by the limitations of the old order, and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

*15 And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest
16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.
17 For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."*

If it is evident that our Lord arose out of Judah, then it is far more evident that a new priest should arise according to the order of Melchizedek. It is far more evident that this new order of priesthood should not suffer the limitations of the old order, that is, not made according to the flesh, but according to an endless life. When the Writer refers to the "law of a fleshly commandment" he means primarily the requirement that the priests be members of the family of Aaron. More than that, the Aaronic priesthood consisted in transient things, e. g., the ever dying priesthood, the material temple and sacrifices.¹³ This new priest would not be made according to earthly descent and would not minister in transient things. He is called by God to be a priest in the likeness of Melchizedek, thus a minister in eternal realities. What is the nature of this likeness? God testifies that the priesthood of Christ is not generated through the flesh, but according to the power of an endless life, and therefore he must be a priest who has endless life.¹⁴ What is evident therefore, is that a new order of priesthood should be established, and a priest should be called to this order, and that this new priest should be ever-living, and should, after the likeness of Melchizedek, be king as well as priest. The prophesied coming king of Israel was the Messiah, therefore it is evident that this new order of priest should arise out of Judah, to whom the promise of Messiah was made (2 Samuel 7:14) to fulfill the prophecy, Psalm 110:4, of a new and ever living order of priest.

*18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness,
19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through*

¹² One might note that v. 14, having been written some 60 plus years after Jesus' birth, and some 30 years after his death, bears witness to the early church's belief in the Old Testament testimony of the connection between David and Messiah, and the historicity of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth.

¹³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 169.

¹⁴ The purpose in again quoting Psalm 110:4, in v. 17, is to emphasize the word "forever", thus supporting the claim of an "endless life" made in v. 16 (Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 163).

which we draw near to God.

The Writer makes a series of statements directed at demonstrating the imperfection of the Mosaic order of priesthood: it is weak; it is useless; it is set aside.¹⁵ One must take care to understand that the Law in itself was not imperfect, and that it did accomplish the purposes God intended in giving the Law to Israel. As Paul is careful to say in Romans 7, the Law is good and holy and spiritual, but those to whom the Law ministered were not. The purpose of the Law was not to perfect those to whom it ministered. The Law was designed to serve a dual purpose. First, the Law is a witness to the sin nature in man. Sin opposes the commandments of the Law, and in the Mosaic sacrifices sin is revealed for what it truly is, a principle of evil that produces death. The continuing necessity to offer those sacrifices revealed that sin could not be "cured" by the Law, i.e., a sacrifice made under the Law did not change the sin nature in the offeror, who continued to sin and continued to offer the same sacrifices that could never take away sin (cf. 10:11). Second, the Law was like a servant who watched over the heir until the heir became an adult to receive his inheritance. Paul makes this reference in Galatians 3:23-24, the Law was the guardian of morality and faith. If the believer could follow the law, then he would be protected from immorality and unbelief; but no matter how perfectly the Law might be followed, the Law could not change the dominance of the sin nature which inevitably led the believer to rebel, disobey, and commit sin. Therefore, although the Law was good and holy and spiritual, it was not designed by God to overcome the dominating power of the sin nature in the believer, God designed the Law to bring the sinner to Christ, by revealing his need and encouraging his faith, that he might be justified by faith in Christ, not the Law. In that sense, in its designed inability to completely overcome the power and totally remit the penalty of sin, the Law was weak and unprofitable. The Law itself made no one perfect because it designedly looked forward to the hope of these things in Jesus Christ, through whom the sinner now draws near to God by faith in Christ as Savior to receive forgiveness and enjoy eternal fellowship. Therefore, the Law being unable to provide hope (of deliverance from the dominion of sin and an eternal salvation¹⁶), it must be annulled by the better hope of a completed redemption in Christ.

20 And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath

21 (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The Lord has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek'"),

22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.

Let us, for a moment, disregard the parenthesis, and read the main thought, "And inasmuch as he was not made priest without an oath, by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant." The logic here is that the oath of God, by which Christ became the priest of this better hope, is the confirmation of a better covenant than that of the Mosaic Law; the new covenant is included in the oath that called Christ to be a priest. For if he was called to be priest, then he must have some law or covenant through which to perform his priestly duties (8:3, 6); therefore the new covenant is part of the oath calling him to be the priest of God. Christ is called the "surety" of the better covenant, a word (*eagguos*) which refers not to his death but to his eternal priesthood. Because he ever lives, the covenant made in him is eternally effective for those subject to its terms and conditions. He is eternally mediating the covenant to those who partake in it. The word *eagguos* might be better translated by the term "guarantor." A guarantor is one who is legally and personally responsible to ensure the fulfillment of the obligation he guarantees. Jesus is more than the mediator of the covenant to sinners, for even the old covenant had a mediator in the person of the Aaronic high priest. Aaron could not guarantee that the people subject to the covenant would fulfill all the conditions of the covenant; nor could he guarantee that all the terms of the covenant would be applied to the people.

¹⁵ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 164.

¹⁶ The actual effectiveness of the Law in providing its followers salvation was due in whole to the propitiation of Christ that gave worth to their faith in the Law's provision for forgiveness. In, of, and by itself, the Law pronounced the guilt of and penalty due sin, but did not offer the eternal cure for sin. Faith, not Law, not works, is always the means by which the cure is administered.

But Jesus,¹⁷ as the guarantor of the new covenant, ensures that all the terms of the new covenant are fulfilled toward the people, and that the people who participate in the new covenant fulfill all the conditions required of them by the covenant. Moreover, being an eternal high priest, he “guarantees the perpetual fulfillment of the covenant which he mediates, on the man-ward side as well as on the God-ward side. As the Son of God he confirms God’s eternal covenant with his people; as his people’s representative, he satisfies its terms with perfect acceptance in God’s sight.”¹⁸ The new covenant in Christ is better than the old Mosaic covenant, because the new covenant is secured in the oath of God and merits of Christ, not in a ever-changing, ever-dying priesthood that could not remit the penalty and destroy the power of the sin nature. This new covenant is made in the redeeming death of Christ, bringing the complete remittance of sin and deliverance from sin’s dominating power. The Writer will speak to these things in greater detail in chapters 8-10; here he simply notes the fact.

The parenthesis, v. 21, speaks to the difference between the appointment of the Aaronic priesthood and the calling of Christ. Aaron and his descendants were made priests by divine command, Exodus 28:1, “Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest.” The law was established between God and Israel by the oath of the people, Exodus 19:8, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do,” and, 24:7, “All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.” The priesthood was clearly a part of the Law, being part of the commandment to build the tabernacle (Exodus 25-30), therefore Aaron and his sons were appointed to fill the position created by the Law. The Christ, however, was made priest by the oath of God. The Writer has previously stated the importance of God’s oath, Hebrews 6:13ff. God’s word is sufficient, but when God desires to show his unchanging purpose more clearly, and give the believer clear assurance as to the certainty of his word, he does so with an oath, a solemn, binding promise to fulfill his obligations. The oath of God concerning the priesthood of Christ guarantees Christ will always be priest and the new covenant will always be in effect and enforced.

23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.

24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

The priesthood of Christ is superior in that as the one priest he continues eternally, whereas the Mosaic priests were transient. The nature of death and change indicates the transient nature of the Law that made them priests, and the uncertain nature of their mediation. The fact that their priesthood was hereditary did not change the character of their priestly order. A priest who dies is no longer available to make intercession. Although a new priest was appointed, there was no guarantee that the new priest would take the same intercessory actions as the former high priest. Christ cannot be superseded in his position as priest, therefore his intercession is unceasing. Those for whom he has made intercession are ever secure. Salvation to the “uttermost” translates the Greek word *panteles*, from *pan* meaning “any” or “all” and *telos*, meaning “end.” An ever-living priest saves all the way to the end, i.e., a complete salvation. A complete savior, *teleios* (2:10; 5:9), saves completely, *panteles*. The word “intercession” has here primary reference to his saving work, and this has previously been noted under various heads, re: 2:9 (substitutionary death), 2:17 (propitiation).

Christ does, however, also make a continuing intercession (4:16, mercy, grace, help) on behalf of believers. To avoid confusion as to the character and conduct of Christ’s intercessory office, one must understand the nature of those acts of intercession that are subsequent to the act of personal salvation. The apostle John presents Christ’s intercession in the clearest terms, 1 John 2:1-2, “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.” As merely an advocate, one might imagine Christ pleading with God the judge for mercy upon poor sinners. Jesus, however, is the Advocate who *propitiated* God for sins. When the sinner stands accused before God,

¹⁷ In the Greek text, the name “Jesus” is at the end of the sentence, “so that the weight of the argument falls on its last word, Jesus” (Bruce, *Hebrews*, 171).

¹⁸ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 171, n. 70.

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Jesus freely admits the sinner's crime and his guilt, and acknowledges that justice is due the sinner for his crimes against a holy God. Then he presents his own blood, his propitiation of God for those sins, and God grants mercy, forgiveness, and grace to the sinner, not because Jesus made a plea, but because Jesus presented the completed sacrifice of himself that, applied by the sinner's faith, paid the penalty for the sin. Because Jesus is in the Father's presence he makes a continuous intercession for his people, Romans 8:34.

26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

In what way is Jesus Christ a high priest "fitting" for us? (Not fitting for everyone, but only to those who are coming to God through Christ, v. 25.¹⁹) The context is a comparison between the earthly, ever-dying, imperfect, Mosaic priesthood, hindered by sin, unable to release themselves and their people from its grasp, and Jesus, the priest who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. He, having become higher than the heavens, i.e., resurrected and ascended to the throne of God in heaven, is not bound by the sin nature nor by mortality. Therefore he is "fit" to meet our needs, and in this the Writer's thoughts must lead back to his prior statements concerning Jesus as "perfect," that is, as fully qualified in every way to be the Savior. Only, here, the qualifications are not his mortality, nor his suffering temptation, nor his godly fear and spiritual appeal to God, but specifically his sinless nature, that qualified him to die for the sins of others. Jesus is without moral defilement or defect; he is "entirely free from all that is evil and harmful, both in action and motivation"²⁰; he is undefiled ("unstained") in his life and character, indicative of the perfection of his sacrifice (cf. Exodus 12:5). Some have suggested these three characteristics be interpreted to mean Jesus is holy in relation to God, blameless in relation to his fellow men, and undefiled in relation to himself.²¹ The meaning of "separate from sinners" may be intended as a summary of the foregoing three descriptions. However, the better interpretation is that this is another description of Christ. Since he is holy, harmless, and undefiled, then his human nature is, by the very nature of these facts, separate from that sin nature which constitutes other men sinners.²² "For he is not said to be separate from us, because he repels us from his society, but because he has this excellency above us all, that he is free from every uncleanness."²³ "He was every way, in the perfect holiness of his nature and his life, distinguished from all sinners; not only from the greatest, but from those who ever had the least taint of sin, and who otherwise were most holy. And so it became us that he should be. He that was to be a middle person between God and sinners, was to be separate from those sinners in that thing on the account whereof he undertook to stand in their stead."²⁴

Now this One who was holy, blameless, unstained and separate from sinners did not need to offer many sacrifices,²⁵ neither for himself or for those on whose behalf he ministers. In making this particular comparison with the Aaronic priests, the Writer does not mean to say that Jesus offered a sacrifice for himself as well as for others. The Writer has previously stated Jesus did not need to offer a sacrifice for his own sins, because he is without sin, 4:15, and he is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Jesus made a once for all sacrifice on behalf of others, but not for his sins, of which he had none. The essential worth

¹⁹ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 167.

²⁰ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 272.

²¹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 271.

²² Hughes, *Hebrews*, 274.

²³ Calvin, *Hebrews*, 176.

²⁴ Owen, *Hebrews*, V:558.

²⁵ The primary reference to the high priest in the Writer's previous arguments has been to draw attention to the once a year sacrifice on the day of atonement. However, v. 27, every high priest had to offer daily sacrifices for his own continuing acts of sin. He also, as a priest, must be available to offer the occasional sacrifices made by the people whom he served. The Writer's intent in v. 27 may have been to summarize the work of the entire Aaronic ministry in the person of its head.

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of his Person (God-man), and his complete qualification to serve as priest, are such that by means of one sacrifice he completely propitiated God for every sin which God had imputed to him. His sacrifice of himself was of such merit that one offering made once was sufficient for eternity to propitiate God for the crime of man's sin. The Writer is looking ahead to 10:1-12.

28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.

In summary, then, and in anticipation of his next words (8:1-2), the Writer states the priesthood of the Son is superior to that of the priesthood of the Law. The earthly priesthood of the Mosaic Law has all the weaknesses of man. The Mosaic Law as the institution of God was not defective in this regard, it was simply that "the law could use only the kind of persons available for the office of high priest and whoever was chosen was afflicted by the weakness common to all men. This inevitably made the legal system of high priests correspondingly weak."²⁶ The order of Melchizedek, in the Person of Christ, is free from this intrinsic defect. The Son is "perfected", and here the Writer again uses the word *teleioo*. The Son is fully and completely qualified to be priest and mediator between God and man. We have now covered everything required in a mediator and priest. Christ, by reason of his call to office, his deity, his essential holiness, his sinless incarnation, his physical mortality, and his human suffering, is fully qualified to represent the interests of both God and man. He has been appointed to his position by a competent authority, which is the oath God has made to him (to Messiah in Psalm 110), a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. He is acceptable to God as priest and mediator. He is worthy of acceptance by sinners.

Excursus: An Explanation of the Mosaic Tithe

Hebrews 7:5 speaks of Levi receiving tithes from his brethren. I have found that many Christians do not understand the Mosaic tithe. The following gives a background and a brief explanation of the tithe.

The economy of ancient Israel was agrarian based. Agrarian means that the majority product of the economy was agricultural in nature. The majority of the ancient Israelites were farmers and ranchers. There were also gold and silversmiths, weavers, those who made clothes and those who made shoes, metal workers, clay pot makers, those who dyed wool and spun wool, soldiers, politicians, etc., but the majority employment of almost all the people was farming and ranching.

Although the economy was agrarian based, money was still the basis of their economy. Money in the form of coins was invented in China in 900 B.C. and in the biblical world about 700 B.C. However, pieces of metal (such as silver arm bands designed so that pieces could be broken off as payment) were being used as early as 5000 B.C. To put this into the biblical context, Moses lived about 1500 B.C. Cultures as early as 3000 B.C. were using precious metals and letters of credit as forms of payment; in a word, a form of money. The governments of the ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, and Sumerians, c. 3000 B.C., established a standard monetary unit to regulate costs. This monetary unit was a unit of weight. When archaeologists discovered the weights of ancient Babylon they looked like a sitting duck, so they are known as "ducks." They had little feet so the buyer could tell if the weight had been shaved. The cost of an item was expressed in terms of the unit of weight, no matter what form of payment might be used.

God, in keeping with these cultural norms Israel knew and understood, established a standard weight known as the "shekel." The weight of the shekel was set by the temple. Thus, for example, to buy a sandal in ancient Israel, the shoe maker might charge the buyer 5 shekels of gold, or 10 shekels of silver. The weight of the shekel was the basis for all economic activity in Israel. In a word, the unit of weight known as the shekel set the economic value for the sale of goods, i.e., how much does it cost. In effect, the shekel was money.

The shekel was not the basis for the tithe, which in that culture, meant that no precious metals and no

²⁶ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 169.

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non-agrarian product was given as a tithe. For the tithe, every 10th animal was marked (with dye) as a tithe. For agricultural products, Scripture does not tell us the unit for the tithe. Using the shekel to weigh the grains, etc, would have been impossible; at the least impracticable. The tithe was probably measured in units of volume, e.g., 1 bushel of wheat tithed for every ten bushels reaped. The following question-answer statements briefly define Israel's tithe.

- What was tithed? The agricultural product of the land (grains, fruits, nuts), and certain animals (cattle, oxen, sheep, goats).
- How many tithes? Three tithes: 1) Israel's tithe; 2) Levite's tithe; 3) Israel's 2nd tithe.
- Who received the three tithes? Israel's tithe: the eleven tribes tithed to the non-priests of the tribe of Levi, known as "Levites"; Levite's tithe: the Levites tithed to the priests out of the tithe they had received. 2nd tithe: at the yearly feasts, but in every 3rd year given locally to the poor (the Levites received part of the 2nd tithe, at the feasts, or if they were poor).
- How much was tithed? Israel's tithe - 10% of the agricultural product of the land and 10% of the animals. The Levites' tithe - (no animals) 10% out of the agricultural produce they had received (a tithe of the tithes). The 2nd tithe (no animals): for the festivals, "you shall truly tithe"; for the poor, "all the tithe of your increase in the 3rd year" (The 2nd tithe may have been less than 10%).
- When was the agricultural tithe made? Not stated. All agricultural tithes were probably made in accordance with the harvests. The Levites probably took the tithe from Israel after the harvests; the Levite's probably gave their tithe to the priests at the feasts. Note that the feasts were timed to be coincident with the harvests. The method of distribution to the poor is not specified.
- When were the animals tithed? Not stated. Most likely the animal tithe was made after newborns were weaned, possibly springtime.
- How were the tithes offered? Israel's tithe was taken by the Levites; the Levites' tithe was freely given to the priests. Israel's 2nd tithe was freely given to the feasts and the poor.
- Where were the tithes offered? Israel's tithe and the Levite's tithe were probably made directly to the local Levite or priest nearby to one's village. The 2nd tithe was probably made at Jerusalem if for the feast, or in one's own village if for the poor.
- Was the tithe voluntary? Yes, in the sense that it was not a commandment that must be obeyed to keep the Mosaic covenant in force. However, the tithe was a civil and moral obligation.
- What is the theological basis of the tithe? The land was wholly owned by the Lord, therefore the product of the land was the Lord's. In one sense, Israel was a tenant who owed a portion of the land's product to the Owner. In a secondary but equal sense, in the tithe Israel recognized their obligation to the Lord's blessings by returning a token of their blessing to him. In a tertiary sense, the tithe helped support the nation's religious structure.
- Why did the Levites receive a tithe? The 11 tribes were given land as part of their inheritance from the Lord. The tribe of Levi was not given any land (they had 40 cities and the land surrounding those cities). The Lord said he was the inheritance of Levi. Therefore, the Levites received as their inheritance from the Lord the tithes due to the Lord from the other tribes. The Levites recognized their obligation to the Lord's blessings through their work in the tabernacle (non-priestly work).
- Why did the poor receive a tithe? The 2nd tithe to the poor was one part of God's welfare plan.
- Why was there a feast tithe? To help everyone, including Levi and the poor, celebrate the feasts.
- Why did the priests receive a tithe? Because they were the direct representatives of God to the people. The tithe was owed to the Lord; the priests received the tithe on behalf of the Lord.
- Why did the priests not tithe? To whom would they tithe? Positionally, they represented God, and the tithe belonged to God; God does not tithe to anyone.
- Were there some who did not tithe? Yes, the priests, the poor, non-farmers and non-ranchers. The tithe was the produce of the land. If you were not producing grains, fruits, nuts, herds, or flocks you had nothing to tithe. Money was not tithed. (But, see Exodus 30:11-16; Leviticus 22:21; 27:1-27).
- Could a tithe be "bought back" from the Levites? No animals, only the tithe of the "seed or fruit", for the value of the tithe plus one-fifth, according to the shekel (Leviticus 27:31).

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- Were there times when the tithe was not given? Yes. There was no harvest in a Sabbath year; if a drought or locusts caused no harvest; if raiders stole the harvest. No harvest, no tithe. (And, if no animal reproduction, or stolen, or died from disease, no tithe of animals.)

Further information may be found in Leviticus 27, Numbers 18:25ff; Deuteronomy 12, 14, 26.

In addition to the tithe, those producing the agricultural product of the field gave an offering of the "firstfruits" of their harvest (Leviticus 2:12; 23:10; Numbers 28:26). (The "firstfruits" are that small part of the crop that comes to fruition before the rest. In practical terms, it meant a small offering made from the first part of the harvest.) Those persons who were not so employed as to be able to give a tithe or firstfruits had other means through which they could meet their moral and civil obligation to support the tabernacle and priests: the half-shekel required for the birth of a male child; the free-will offering; the shekels to be paid when certain persons, animals, or objects were consecrated to the Lord (Exodus 30:11-16; Leviticus 22:21; 27:1-27). In the New Testament church, each Christian is obligated to service, sharing, and giving of their talents, time, and financial support to the church and its facilities, its ministries, and its ministers. The principles of giving established in the Old Testament, and the behavior of first century believers (e.g., Acts 4:32-37; 1 Corinthians 9, 16; Galatians 6:7-10; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; *et al*) are examples for our learning and imitation.

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1 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

The main point of this chapter is the new and better covenant mediated by Christ. The Writer has established his point that Christ is the eternal priest called by God. In chapter nine he will address the old covenant, and in chapter ten he will complete his argument that the new covenant in Christ is superior to the old covenant in Moses and the Levitical system. Here, in v. 1, he summarizes his previous discussion, Jesus the Christ is that high priest made in the order of Melchizedek. This verse serves to ensure the reader's attention is properly focused on Christ following the detailed argumentation concerning Melchizedek.

Note now in this first verse the Writer's "we." The main point is not merely Jesus as high priest, for there were many high priests in the world, Jewish and pagan, but the relation the reader bears to Jesus the high priest. The Writer has said many things about Jesus to prove that he is qualified to be the one high priest suitable to the interests of man and God. Salvation depends upon such a high priest; but the individual's salvation depends upon his personal interest (portion, stake) in Jesus as his high priest. "We" have such a high priest: holy, harmless, undefiled, eternal, tempted yet without sin, called of God. Are you, the Writer asks, among the we? Many will acknowledge Jesus as a high priest, but they must use him as their high priest if they are to benefit from this knowledge. If he is your personal high priest, i.e., if you will believe that Jesus has acted on your behalf to satisfy God for your sins, then you will receive the benefit of his ministry to the saving of your soul.

Owen, after noting the necessity of a personal interest in such a high priest, goes on to say that "salvation . . . does not depend merely on having a high priest . . . but [also] on his dignity and excellency, his exaltation and glory."¹ What Owen means, is that if Christ was merely a high priest on the earth, then his priesthood is no better than that of any earthly priest. Jesus did make his sacrifice for sin on the earth, because that is where his people dwell and where his humanity must effect the requirement of a propitiating sacrifice (death). However, the result of his sacrifice must be presented in heaven if an eternal benefit is to ensue (and his subsequent resurrection showed that his propitiation was acceptable). Jesus presented the result of his sacrificial offering to God in the genuine temple in heaven.² His ministry was not in the earthly temple, which already had priests for its offices, and where the benefits of the high priest's atoning work are limited. His ministry was in heaven, as befits his dignity and exaltation, where only the high priest Jesus may minister, and where the benefits of his ministry are everlasting. He remains exalted forevermore, ensuring that the efficacy of his offering continues forever (7:24-25). His dignity and exaltation are not seen in his condescension, for a king may condescend to perform menial tasks, and his humiliation was necessary to his sacrifice. Rather, it is in his "durable estate, wherein he continues in the discharge of his office, [that] he is incomparably exalted above the high priests under the law."³ His being seated at the right hand of God, and his priestly work in the genuine tabernacle of God, give his priesthood and his propitiating ministry greater value and efficiency than that of the old covenant and its high priest.

Jesus is now "seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." Four things are mentioned here that are not seen in this particular combination anywhere else: Christ is "seated," at the "right hand," on the "throne," of the "Majesty" on high. The first thing, then, is that Christ is seated. The fact often escapes notice that the furniture of the earthly tabernacle and its courtyard did not include a chair or a bench for the priests. This fact by itself this might not have significance. However, Christ, in his capacity as high priest, is said to be seated once his work was completed. The Mosaic priests must always stand, because their work was never completed. Every day there were morning sacrifices, evening sacrifices, and the occasional sacrifices of the people. Every new day brought the same repetition of the same sacrifices,

¹ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:8.

² John 20:17 refers to Jesus' bodily ascension after his resurrection, not to the presentation of his propitiation to the Father, an act that occurred between his death and resurrection.

³ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:9.

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because the work of atoning for sin was never completed. There was, however, a seat in the earthly tabernacle, made not for the Mosaic high priest, but (in a figure) reserved for God and the greater high priest, Jesus, whom God would send to propitiate sin. On the day of atonement the high priest went into the most holy place and sprinkled blood on and in front of the lid (covering) of the ark of the covenant. The blood on the lid of the ark made it the place where Israel obtained mercy, and therefore this lid was known as the mercy seat, e.g., Exodus 25:17; Leviticus 16:2, 13-15. In the Greek the name for this seat was the *hilasterion*, the place of propitiation, and Jesus is the *hilasmos* (1 John 2:2; 4:10), the one who propitiates. Jesus, in his person and work, is both the place where propitiation was made, and the one who made the propitiation; Jesus himself is God's mercy seat where sin was propitiated, and he is (in a figure) forever seated on the mercy seat, for God's mercy through Christ's sacrifice continues forever. Now, if Christ is seated, then there is no place for further sacrifice and blood. The fact he is seated indicates the propitiation made through him is complete. The Christian's high priest Jesus Christ has finished his work; he has accomplished a completed sacrifice that forever propitiated God for sin. Therefore, he is seated, for the work is completed.⁴

The mercy seat, which was the lid atop the ark of the covenant, was also an illustration of the throne of God in heaven. On the lid were two cherub, and between the cherub God manifested his presence:

- Exodus 25:19-22, "Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel. "
- Leviticus 16:2, ". . . for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat."

Revelation 4 provides a glimpse of the heavenly reality the Exodus and Leviticus passages are illustrating. The ark of the earthly tabernacle, where the Mosaic high priest made the atonement, illustrates the place in the genuine tabernacle (in heaven) where Christ presented his propitiation to the Father, and also the place where he sat down when that propitiation was completed. Christ is now seated at the "right hand" of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

The symbology of the "right hand" indicates that the one so seated is in the position of inheritance, blessing, exaltation, and power. For example,

- Genesis 48:18, "And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."
- Exodus 15:6, "Your right hand , O Lord, has become glorious in power."
- Psalm 16:11, You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."
- Psalm 17:7, "Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand."
- 1 Peter 3:21-22, "Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him."

Jesus, however, is not simply at God's right hand, for even the angels are standing at God's right hand, and his redeemed people are kept and blessed at the right hand of God. Jesus is seated on the throne of God at the right hand of God. Kings reserved a chair at their right hand for those whom they desired to honor, e.g., 1 Kings 2:19. Jesus, however, is not seated on a separate throne beside God. There is one throne on which

⁴ Indeed, as David (Psalm 110), Peter (1 Peter 3:22), and the Writer have noted, he is seated—and therefore waiting—until the Father defeats his enemies and makes them his footstool. However, the eschatological implications of Christ seated are not the subject of this passage.

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God Creator and Ruler sits. Jesus is seated on the same throne⁵ as the Father and the Spirit. He is God the Son on his throne and the Son of God exalted to his rightful place beside his Father. The excellence and dignity of this position are seen in the term "majesty." This word, *megalosune*, is used twice in Hebrews, 1:3; 8:1, and in Jude 25. The prefix *mega* means "great, thus *megalosune* means "loftiness" or "majesty." In Jude it is used as a an ascription of praise to God. The Writer of Hebrews uses it as a title for God. In this, he is building on the Old Testament ascriptions of majesty to God, e.g., 1 Chronicles 29:11; Job 37:22; Psalm 93:1; Isaiah 2:19; and Micah 5:4 (this last reference is descriptive of Messiah's reign). To the Writer of Hebrews, "majesty" is a title of God indicating his superiority in dignity, excellence, power, honor and glory. As applied to Jesus Christ high priest, it indicates his exaltation to the highest position and gives his offering for sin the greatest possible worth.

Jesus is "a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man." The word "minister" is the Greek *leitourgos* and describes one who serves the needs of another.⁶ When used in a religious context it means one who serves in a priestly capacity. Jesus is a minister, *leitourgos*, of the "sanctuary." The word translated sanctuary is the Greek *hagion*, one of a group of several related words whose essential meaning is "holy." Here the word is in the plural and it means Jesus is a priest of the holies, i.e., the place that is holy, which in context means the sanctuary or place of priestly ministry. The word as used here does not discriminate the two compartments of the tabernacle (the outer "holy place" and inner "most holy place"), instead it views the sanctuary or tabernacle as a whole. This "sanctuary" is further described as the true, that is the "genuine" (*alethinou*) tabernacle. The tabernacle in heaven is genuine in comparison to the tabernacle on earth as symbolic and imperfect.⁷ The tabernacle erected by Moses in the wilderness was a true copy (v. 5) designed to reflect or illustrate spiritual realities. Moses erected the tabernacle in the wilderness, but God erected the one and only genuine tabernacle, which is in heaven. This genuine tabernacle is the one in which our exalted high priest presented to God the propitiating result of his once for all offering for sin. The point of these things is that "the possibility of access to God through a Levitical and earthly arrangement no longer exists because of their intrinsic inadequacy. Access is possible only through the ministering priest [Jesus] who serves in the heavenly sanctuary."⁸

3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer.

The Writer in part repeats his statement of 5:1, but this time the subject is not Christ's qualifications as priest, but his duties in that office. Every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices, meaning, for sin. Since Christ was so ordained, a fact the Writer has amply demonstrated, then he did offer a sacrifice.⁹ The fact that Christ does minister in the genuine sanctuary is proof that he did offer a sacrifice for sins, and that his sacrifice was accepted and effectual.¹⁰ As God's high priest of an everlasting salvation, Jesus had a sacrifice to offer, a place in which to make his sacrifice, and a place wherein to present the result of his sacrifice. The earthly tabernacle was in part a type of the Person and work of Christ, and in its details instruct us in these things. A "type" is a divinely purposed illustration of spiritual truth, in which the illustration, the "type," bears a designed correspondence with its counterpart, the "antitype."¹¹ For example, John the Baptist pointed to Christ and said, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." In this statement

⁵ If it might be helpful, the reader may envision God's throne as a bench on which the three Persons of the Trinity are seated together.

⁶ Romans 13:6; 15:16; Philippians 2:25; Hebrews 1:7, 8:2. In secular use the word could refer to a civil servant.

⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 206.

⁸ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 206.

⁹ Gouge, *Hebrews*, II:543.

¹⁰ Brown, *Hebrews*, 364.

¹¹ The tabernacle may be said to illustrate many aspects of Christ's person and work, e.g., the bread with Christ the bread of life, the lampstand with Christ the light of the world.

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John recognized in Christ the antitype to the Mosaic sacrificial lambs that atoned for sin. The antitype, Christ, fulfills the promise made in the type, cf. 1 John 2:2. Certain details of the tabernacle—the altar, the veil, the ark with its mercy seat, the sacrifices, the high priest, the acts performed on the day of atonement—illustrate spiritual truths concerning Christ's sacrifice, his altar, his work as high priest, his propitiation, and his continuing intercession. The Mosaic high priest presented the atoning result of the sacrifice when he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, Leviticus 16. The types of the earthly tabernacle reveal Christ, in his propitiating work, as the sacrifice, the altar, and the priest. As God's high priest he offered himself, 7:27, on the altar of his body, 9:12; 10:5, 10. Where then is the antitype to the earthly tabernacle, that is, where is the true tabernacle, wherein as God's high priest Christ presented the result of his sacrifice to God? The genuine tabernacle is the one which the Lord erected, not man. Not the one on earth, but the one in heaven. In my view the true tabernacle is the exalted Christ in the presence of God. I will further address this issue at 9:11.

4 For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law;

5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

As we continue the thoughts presented in v. 3, it is necessary that Christ have something to offer and somewhere to make his offering, "because," v. 4, "if he were on earth, he could not be a priest." The earthly priesthood, its sacrifices, the place of sacrifice, and the place where the result of sacrifice was presented, were established and strictly regulated by the Mosaic legislation. In that legislation Christ had no place as priest and no gift to offer as priest. Nor could an offering made by Christ according to the Law have real and permanent value. The transitory nature of the Law was revealed when God said to Moses, Exodus 25:9, "According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern (*tabnit*) of the tabernacle and the pattern (*tabnit*) of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it," and Exodus 25:40, "See to it that you make them according to the pattern (*tabnit*) which was shown you on the mountain." The Hebrew word *tabnit* means "pattern" or "plan." Correspondingly, in the Greek text of Hebrews 8:5, these things of the earthly tabernacle are called *hupodeigma*, copies (examples), and *skia*, a shadow.¹² The word *skia* literally means the shadow cast by an illuminated physical body. But here *skia* is being used metaphorically to indicate a foreshadowing of things not yet seen. Stated in these definitions, the tabernacle reveals the heavenly things through the divinely given pattern of "example and indication." The Writer of Hebrews is telling us that God gave Moses a building plan suited to Moses' earthly reality, the design of which reflected the spiritual realities of heaven.

Excursus: A Temple in Heaven

A consideration of Hebrews 8:5 raises the question, "Is there an actual structure in heaven that corresponds to the earthly tabernacle?" There is testimony to support an actual structure. In Revelation 11:19, John writes, "Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple," indicating that John (and probably the people on the earth) saw an actual structure. In Revelation 21:22, John writes of the new Jerusalem in the eternal state, "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." These two verses take place in two vastly different periods of time. The former verse is during the Tribulation period, while the latter verse is after the Millennial Kingdom, the judgment of the wicked dead, the recreation of the heavens and earth, and the beginning of the eternal state. The point of there being no temple in the eternal state is that God and man dwell face to face in holy harmony. The statement concerning "no temple" in the eternal state implies there was a different kind temple in heaven prior to the eternal state. Until the time when man and God dwell face to face, there must be some sort of mediation between God and man. A temple is a structure in which that mediation is

¹² Compare. 9:9, "symbolic" and 9:23 "copies", i.e., "examples."

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accomplished. In addition, Ezekiel 28:14 seems to indicate an altar in heaven. Many conservative commentators believe Ezekiel 28:12-17 deals with the fall of the cherub Lucifer (Satan) using the history of the earthly king of Tyre as a background. Verse 14 reads, in part, "You [covering cherub] walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones." Verse 16 makes this response to Lucifer's sin, "I [God] destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones." If "fiery stones" means a literal altar,¹³ then the altar in the earthly tabernacle was patterned after an actual heavenly structure. There are nine references¹⁴ to a heavenly temple during the Tribulation period. These references, in addition to the "plan" given to Moses, and considering that the things of the earthly tabernacle were an "example and indication" of heavenly things, suggests there may be an actual structure in heaven, which will continue to exist until the dissolution of the current heavens and earth (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21: 1-2). However, it is just as likely that the Scripture references to a "tabernacle," "temple," and "altar" in heaven are metaphors through which the Holy Spirit communicates spiritual realities that the finite comprehension of the earth-bound man—even the informed spiritual man—cannot otherwise grasp. As I (and others) have noted, the earthly tabernacle was designed to symbolize spiritual realities concerning the Person and work of Jesus. Therefore, the heavenly "temple" may in actuality be a metaphor for the exalted Christ. A compromise between the two opposing opinions (actual structure in heaven, or metaphor) is that the manifested presence of God in the third heaven (Revelation 4) is itself the *hagion* (Hebrews 8:2) where unfallen angels and redeemed man gather to worship, and where the Lamb of God presented the result of his sacrifice to the Father, Revelation 5:5-7. If the "sea of glass" (Revelation 4:6; 15:2) before God's throne symbolizes the place in heaven where the creature has an audience with God, then the compromise view may be the correct view, i.e., the manifested presence of the Trinity is itself the heavenly tabernacle. Regardless of the view one takes, Christ has an eternal ministry in heaven on behalf of the believer.

6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

That is, Christ has been ordained the high priest of a better ministry than that of the earthly high priest. The "more excellent" nature of Christ's ministry is seen in the context of the better covenant of which he is the minister, i.e., the mediator. The reason this new covenant is better will be explained in detail below. Here, the focus is that the new covenant was established on "better promises" than those promises that formed the basis of the old covenant. That the new covenant was established on "better" promises implies that both covenants were formed from the promises of God. How can one promise of God be better than another promise? Are not all the promises of God "Yes" and "Amen" to his glory (2 Corinthians 1:20)? Is there a qualitative difference between the two covenants in the nature of the promises?¹⁵ The answer is that the fault of the old covenant lay not in the promises of God but in the inability of the people to be obedient. The promises of the Old Covenant were several, but they were all conditioned upon the obedience of the nation. For example, God speaks of sending his angel before the nation, to "keep them in the way" and to "bring them into the place which I [God] have prepared." However, this promise was conditioned upon Israel's obedience, Exodus 23:22, "But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries." All the promises of the old covenant were conditioned by obedience. Moses, in his farewell address, Deuteronomy 31:26-29, recognizes that the limitation of the covenant was in whole the inability of the people to wholly perform the conditions of the covenant.

- "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you; for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord, then how much more after my

¹³ I believe Lucifer was in some manner constantly tested and thus constantly revealed to be qualified to be the "anointed cherub who covers," until the day the testing discovered his sin. The imagery communicating this testing is an altar filled with fiery stones.

¹⁴ Revelation 7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:6, 8 (2X); 16:1, 17.

¹⁵ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 174.

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death? Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands."

The failure of the old covenant was not a failure of the promises, but a failure of the people to receive the promises through faith and obedience. The promises, then, of the new covenant are not essentially better than the promises of the old covenant, for if Israel would have kept the covenant, they would have received the promises.¹⁶ The promises of the new covenant in Christ are better because they depend upon the obedience of Christ, not the sinner. The sinner's entrance into this covenant is by faith, but the promises themselves are established upon Christ's obedience, 10:7, 9, and his continuing intercession, 7:25. Moreover, they are better in what God has purposed them to accomplish. The old covenant did not promise to regenerate the individual sinner. The promise of the new covenant is that God will write his laws on the heart and minds of his people, and forgive their sins in such a manner that he remembers them no more (8:10-12).

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

The fault of the first covenant (the covenant made at Mount Sinai) was not the fault of the Law. The Law accomplished all that God had purposed it accomplish. But the Law was not intended to be the complete answer to man's sin, and man's experience under the Law was faulty, in that the Law dealt with sin through punishment, not rehabilitation (regeneration). Because of the designed limitations of the Law, God purposed a new Law, that is, a new covenant, that would provide the complete answer to man's sin. As far back as Abraham God had promised an individual through whom all the nations would be blessed. The New covenant would be made through this promised man, whom the New Testament teaches is Jesus Christ, Galatians 3.

8 Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—

9 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

The confirmation of the argument is in v. 8: God did not find fault in the Law, he found fault in "them," i.e., in the law-breakers. One must not think that their failure caught God by surprise. God's redemptive purpose in Christ had, from the foundation of the world, called for a new covenant founded on the propitiation to be made in Christ. Therefore, the Old covenant was designed to be replaced in the outworking of God's redemptive purposes. This does not relieve the law-breakers from their fault, because the old covenant formed the content of their faith, and thus they were required to be faithful to it and obedient in it. Moreover, no one comes to faith without being drawn by God, and no remains faithful without spiritual support from the Holy Spirit.

Now, vv. 8-12 are a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34 (but the Writer ignores the human source and views this Old Testament Scripture, as he does all his quotes, as a word direct from God). Historically, Israel had divided into two nations in 931 BC: the ten tribes of the house of Israel, whose capital was Samaria, and the house of Judah (Judah and Benjamin), whose capital was Jerusalem. The ten tribes were absorbed into the Assyrian empire in 722 BC. Jeremiah ministered about 627-575 BC. (The Babylonian captivity of Judah was 605-536 BC.) In referring to the house of Israel and the house of Judah the prophecy encompasses all of Israel. In Jeremiah's historical context, both Israel and Judah had failed to be faithful to and obedient in the old covenant. That historical circumstance supported the timing of the announcement of a new covenant. However, the point of Israel's failure for both Hebrews and Jeremiah is not the division of the nation in 722

¹⁶ In the sacrifices and offerings that looked forward to Christ for their efficacy.

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BC, but the day in which the old covenant was made circa 1445 BC. The old covenant was made in the days following the exodus of Israel from Egypt.¹⁷ There, as Mount Sinai, God and the people ratified the covenant of the Law, Exodus 19:8; 24:3; 24:7. However, the people did not obey the Law, even violating its terms within the first 40 days, Exodus 32:1-5. Because these people “did not continue” in the covenant, God “disregarded” them, a word indicating to be without care or concern (NIV: “turned away from”). This first failure was an indicator of subsequent and continuing failure by these specific people in particular, but also by their descendants in general; remember Deuteronomy 31:26-29, a word spoken to the next generation about to enter the land their fathers did not have faith to enter in and possess, Hebrews 3:7-11, 16-19. The failure of the nation at the beginning of the old covenant foretold the need for a new covenant based on better promises.

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 in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Literally, “this is the covenant I will covenant” with the house of Israel, i.e., with the entire nation. The view of Israel as an undivided nation¹⁸ is prophetic from Jeremiah’s point of view, as indicated by the phrase “after those days.” The phrase is non-specific, and Jeremiah’s readers may have believed it referred to Israel’s return from the exile. Here, one should be careful to note that although sufficient numbers of the southern tribe/nation of Judah (with Benjamin) did return (539 BC) from its Babylonian captivity to reestablish the nation, the northern group of ten tribes, known collectively as “Israel” (sometimes called “Samaria”) have to date (AD 2008) not officially returned to the land of promise from their captivity.¹⁹ If the prophecy is intended toward Israel, as a whole nation of twelve tribes, then the conditions for fulfillment have not been met as of my writing. This prophecy will, in fact, be fulfilled toward Israel when the entire nation is gathered to Messiah’s millennial kingdom following the second advent. God shall make them one nation under one king (Ezekiel 37:22, cf. Isaiah 66:8), and the promises of the new covenant will be the spiritual basis for their new birth.

This new covenant—which is also for the church in Christ, 10:15-18—sets out a different relationship between the Lord and the believer than that of the old covenant of the Law. In the new covenant the sin nature will be overcome and the soul regenerated. National Israel will experience the “new birth” announced by Christ to Nicodemus and experienced by Christians in this era of grace.²⁰

The laws of the old covenant were written on stone, in part to indicate the hardness of the people’s heart, i.e., they were dominated by sin. The Law required righteousness, but could not keep righteousness within the soul, because the Law did not overcome the power of sin. In the new covenant, God will “put My laws

¹⁷ In terms of modern place names, Israel had journeyed across the Sinai Peninsula to the Gulf of Aqaba at Nuweiba’, Egypt, 70 miles north of the Strait of Tiran. There they crossed the Red Sea on a ridge between the Sinai and Arabian peninsulas, uncovered when God divided the waters, a distance of about 10 miles, to the Saudi Arabian Peninsula, and journeyed about 45 miles southwest to the area of modern day Jabal-al-Lawz (sometimes known as Jabal-al-Musa), the biblical Mount Sinai.

¹⁸ It is instructive to note how in Jeremiah God validates the prophecy of a new covenant. God first states the permanence of Israel is like the permanence of the “ordinances” regarding the sun, moon, stars and sea. Or, if man can measure the heavens above and comprehend the foundations of the earth beneath, only then would God forsake Israel. The permanence of Israel as God’s people is founded on the permanence and vastness of this creation.

¹⁹ Some tribe members were left in the land by Assyria. Second Chronicles 30:11 says members of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun came to take part in Hezekiah’s Passover celebration. Also, some individual families out of the ten tribes probably returned to the land in the years between their exile and Christ.

²⁰ In John 3, Nicodemus came and subtly asked Jesus if he was the Messiah come to bring about the kingdom. Jesus answered the question by stating the qualification required to enter Messiah’s kingdom, which was, the sinner must experience regeneration; or, as Jesus worded it, “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This regeneration of the soul could not be accomplished under the old covenant—if it could have been, Nicodemus would have known. In response to Nicodemus’ confusion, Jesus states the act through and in which the new birth under the new covenant would be made, the death of the “testator,” Hebrews 9:16-17, i.e., in the crucifixion of Messiah.

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in their mind and write them on their hearts." This is regeneration, or being born-again. Putting "my laws" into the mind and writing it on the heart does not mean the Law of Moses is indelibly etched into the memory. God means his righteousness and holiness will be incorporated into man's soul through an internal covenant, a principle of life made part of human nature, created in the born-again believer by the work of the Holy Spirit. In other biblical terms, this is regeneration and sanctification. The born-again person will know God's will²¹ and have the spiritual power to perform it. This new nature will make believer's God's people, and him their God in a way the Law could not. God and man will have a personal relationship as Father and adopted sons and daughters.

11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

This word about teaching and about knowing God must be understood in the context of the old covenant. Commenting on the original passage in Jeremiah, C. F. Keil wrote, "Under the old covenant, the knowledge of the Lord was connected with the mediation of priests and prophets. Just as at Sinai [see Exodus 20:15] . . . so under the old covenant economy generally, access to the Lord was denied to individuals, and his grace was only obtained by the intervention of human mediators."²² In contrast, to "know the Lord" in the new covenant will be to have a relationship with the Lord without a human mediator. God will reveal himself and his grace directly to believers. This is not factual knowledge that is discovered through instruction (whether self-instruction or through a teacher). This "knowing" is that inward conviction imparted to the sinner by the Holy Spirit, that God is a personal being who seeks a relationship with man, a relationship founded on forgiveness of sin by God's grace through faith in Christ. It is "knowledge of divine grace based upon the inward experience of the heart, which knowledge the Holy Spirit works in the heart by assuring the sinner that he has indeed been adopted as a son of God through forgiveness of his sins. This knowledge, as being an inward experience of grace, does not exclude religious instruction, but rather tacitly implies that there is intimation [through instruction] given of God's desire to save and of his purpose of grace."²³ Put another way, the knowledge that Jesus saves is imparted to the sinner either through his personal reading of the Bible, or through a Christian who teaches him this great truth (the work of evangelism). The sinner must be taught about God's desire to save, the method and means of salvation, the necessity of faith, and the result of saving faith, through some means of religious instruction. However, this factual knowledge is not savingly efficient; facts may persuade, but do not give spiritual conviction; facts do not impart the grace that saves. Salvation occurs when God makes himself personally known to the sinner by applying his grace to the sinner's need.

If I might put this in a figure, through the word of God the sinner learns that there is a house of salvation, but he cannot find an entrance by his own devices. God the Spirit is the one who personally takes the sinner by the hand, leads him to the door of this house, and convinces him of the necessity to enter. The Spirit empowers the sinner to exercise saving faith and turn the handle to enter the house. The door swings open on hinges of grace, and Christ himself is in fact inside, pulling open the now unlatched door. Christ personally welcomes the new believer into his house. In such a manner God makes himself known in the innermost being of the sinner. God gives reality to the Scripture in the sinner's soul, God brings the sinner to faith in Christ, and God greets the newly-saved sinner who enters his house of salvation. Religious instruction tells the sinner about the house of salvation, but God alone saves. Subsequent to the act of salvation, Scripture clearly indicates the necessity of having teachers²⁴ to impart what might be called the factual knowledge of God. However, the intimate, personal, "heart-knowledge" of God is always imparted by

²¹ Again, God's will for the believer is not, What is in my future, but is, How does the Christian live a life of faith toward God? When the believer is made aware of the "do this" and "don't do that" components of God's will, by the Scripture or by the direct witness of the Holy Spirit, he knows it as God's will, and is spiritually empowered to do it.

²² Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, VIII:283.

²³ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, VIII:283.

²⁴ For example, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11-12.

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God himself (1 Corinthians 2:11). Looking further along this line of thought, the teacher helps the believer factually know the principles, values, and precepts of God, but God himself gives these things living force in the believer's soul, convicting him of their truth, giving him understanding of their meaning and application, persuading him of the necessity of obedience, and empowering him to practice them daily.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

A further promise of the new covenant. There are no human mediators (priests for the "laity") in the new covenant. God is the one taking action. God himself will exercise mercy and God himself will forgive and forget the believer's sins. This personal forgiveness of sin on God's part is the basis for God's new relationship with the believer. Because the guilt of sin is remitted, and the power of sin is emasculated, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed, God can have intimate fellowship with the believer, and the believer receives the benefit of a direct (not mediated as under the old covenant) knowledge of God and his laws.

13 In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

The Greek text does not use the word "covenant. The text literally reads, "in the saying new, he has made old the first." Obviously, the references are to the old and new covenants, but the force of the argument is in the contrast between old and new; this would have been more apparent if the translators had not inserted the word "covenant." The context is God's prophecy through Jeremiah. The prophecy is that the Mosaic covenant was about to be replaced by a covenant that was new. The Greek word translated "new" is *kainos*. The Greeks had two words whose meaning was "new." The word *neos* meant new in relation to time, and the other word, this word *kainos*, was used to indicate new in relation to quality. For example, a *neos* tomb was one that had been newly created. A *kainos* tomb was one that had never been used, although it might be years old in relation to time. (Jesus was laid to rest in a *kainos* tomb, John 19:41.) Jeremiah's prophecy (31:31) uses the Hebrew word, *hadash*, meaning "new thing" or "fresh" to indicate the same qualitative newness as *kainos*. The historical fact that about 600 years passed between Jeremiah and Christ has no effect on the newness of the new covenant and the "growing old" character of the old covenant. The first covenant was qualitatively growing old (obsolete) and ready to vanish away in relation to the announced qualitatively new covenant; when the new covenant appeared, then the first covenant would vanish away. The old would vanish away when fulfilled and superseded by Christ. God himself would cancel the first covenant when he brought in the new covenant.

There is another view of the last part of v. 13 that understands the words "Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away," as the Writer's comment, rather than related to Jeremiah's prophecy. If such is the case, then the Writer is saying that the Levitical services of the tabernacle are currently ongoing, but will shortly cease. This view depends upon the Writer knowing Christ's prophecy of the destruction of the temple, a likely probability. If this view of the last sentence is correct, then this would indicate the epistle was written prior to AD 70.

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1 Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary.

In this chapter, the Writer begins by presenting a succinct description of the elements of the old covenant as displayed in the tabernacle. The immediate issue is the inadequacy of the old (8:7-9) as compared to the new (8:10-12). The response is to reveal the temporary nature of the old covenant, replaced by the enduring finality of the new covenant as founded in Christ. The Writer does not take for his starting point one of the various temples (Solomon's, Ezra's) that had existed, nor the one still existing (Herod's). His point of reference is the original temple of YHWH, not the embellished copies. It was in the wilderness tabernacle that the spiritual realities of salvation in Christ were most clearly displayed, in the copies, types, and shadows intended by its symbol, ritual, and ceremony. The copies, types, and shadows in the old covenant served an immediate religious purpose for the faith of the Old Testament saints; but more to the Writer's point, they were designed to be temporary in nature: to be fulfilled and superseded in Christ. In their divinely designed correspondences with the Person and work of Christ, they revealed the complete salvation that was yet to come in the one true Savior. The Writer's goal was to open this truth to his readers.

2 For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary;

3 and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All,

4 which had the golden censer¹ of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant;
5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

The Holy Place

This is a list of the essential elements of the tabernacle, or "tent" of meeting. The tabernacle sat within a large courtyard measuring 150 feet by 75 feet. The tabernacle proper was a large tent 35 feet long by 15 feet wide. The frame supporting the outer coverings was made of boards of acacia wood, 31.05 inches wide, by 20.7 inches thick, by 17.25 feet high,² each covered with gold.³ Each board was set in two heavy sockets of silver and connected on the outside by four bars or poles running through golden rings. A fifth bar connecting the boards was run through a hole made in the interior of the boards. There were twenty boards each on the north and south sides and eight boards on the west side. The entrance on the east side was formed by five pillars of acacia wood covered with gold, standing on brass bases, and topped with gold capitals. The tent itself was formed from layers of fabric and skins laid overtop the frame. Working from the outermost to the innermost covering these were: badger skins, ram skins dyed red, woven goat hair panels, woven linen panels. The woven linen hanging inside the tabernacle was embroidered with a representation of cherubim using the colors blue, purple, scarlet, and white. The five pillars at the entrance supported a curtain (sometimes called the "screen") of woven linen embroidered with an unknown representation using the same four colors. The curtain, or veil, separating the holy place from the most holy place was hung on silver hooks from four interior pillars of acacia boards covered in gold, which were set in silver bases. The veil separating the holy place from the most holy place was actually two linen curtains, overlapping at the center to create an entrance into the most holy place. Embroidered on the veil was a representation of cherubim, made using the four colors of the tabernacle. The furniture in the first compartment, which was the sanctuary or "holy place," was a gold seven-branched lampstand, a table of acacia wood covered with gold, and an

¹ The NKJV reflects the indecision concerning the reading. The copyright 1982 edition reads "golden censer." The copyright 1983 edition reads "golden altar." The copyright 1994 edition returns to "golden censer." The NIV, HCSB and many others read "golden altar." The correct translation "golden censer."

² Measurements in this paragraph assume a cubit is equal to 20.7 inches (Kiene, *The Tabernacle*, 30).

³ Kiene, *Tabernacle*. The descriptions in this paragraph are based on information in this work.

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acacia wood altar (for incense) covered with gold. There were also gold dishes, spoons, bowls, a pitcher for oil, a mortar and pestle, mixing bowls, wick-trimmers, tongs, and pans. The furniture in the “most holy place” behind the veil was the ark of the covenant, the lid covering the ark, known as the mercy seat (or atonement cover), and the two poles by which the ark was carried when Israel traveled to a new encampment.

The majority of translations, v. 3-4, locate the golden altar of incense “behind the second veil.”⁴ That is, the translations locate the golden altar of incense in the second compartment of the tabernacle, the most holy place wherein was the ark of the testimony. There has always been some confusion among commentators as to where the golden altar of incense was situated. The descriptions of the tabernacle in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers always place the golden incense altar within the holy place, not the most holy place, e.g.,

- Exodus 31:6-8, make all that I have commanded you: the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that is on it, all the furniture of the tabernacle—the table and its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense.”
- Exodus 30:6, “And you shall put it [golden altar of incense] before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you.”
- Leviticus 4:6-7, “The priest shall dip his finger in the blood [of the sin offering] and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of meeting.

When God, Numbers 4:4-14, addresses who shall carry the tabernacle furniture (when Israel would move to its next camp), the golden incense altar is mentioned as an item of the furniture in the holy place. The locations of the various articles of furniture are given with reference to the entrance of the tabernacle, so that, for example, the location “before” or “in front” of the veil means the item is located in front of the veil between the holy and the most holy place, thus it is in the holy place. Exodus 31:8 (above) clearly locates the golden incense altar within the first compartment, the holy place. The list of furniture begins in the most holy place with the ark and mercy seat. Then the list continues with “all the furniture of the tabernacle,” i.e., all the furniture of the holy place: the table and its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense.⁵ Exodus 30:6 (above) may not at first seem clear as to which side of the veil the golden altar was located. The verse describes the altar’s location as “before the veil that is before the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony.” An all too casual glance at this verse makes it sound as if the altar of incense is both in front of the veil and in front of the mercy seat. Since the altar cannot be on both sides of the veil, many become confused as to its actual location. This description, however, is of the separating veil, not the golden altar.⁶ The veil separating the holy place from the most holy place is located “before [in front of] the ark of the Testimony, [and] before [in front of] the mercy seat that is over the Testimony.” The golden altar is before [in front of] the veil. Why do Moses and the Spirit give this the double description of the veil’s location as “before the ark” and “before the mercy seat?” Commentators all too often speak of one piece of furniture in the most holy place, assuming the ark and its lid (the mercy seat) are one piece. Scripture, however, always lists the ark of the testimony and the mercy seat/lid as two separate and distinct pieces of furniture (e.g., Hebrews 9:4, the ark, and 9:5, the mercy seat). Accordingly, the veil is described as “before,” that is, in front of, these two pieces of furniture: “before the ark of the Testimony,

⁴ The first veil was the exterior entrance to the tabernacle. The second veil was the curtain separating the holy place from the most holy place.

⁵ Note the order in Exodus 30:26-27; 40:1-8, 17-26. In 40 especially note the instructions for setting up the tabernacle work outward from the most holy place, to the holy place, to the exterior: first the ark in the most holy place, then the separating curtain, then the holy place with its table, lamp, and golden altar, then the screen at the entrance to the tabernacle, then the altar of sacrifice, the laver between the sacrificial altar and the tabernacle, then the courtyard. The spiritual truth reflected in this order is that worship begins with God and his commandments.

⁶ Remember that the ark and the mercy seat are in the most holy place, behind the curtain/veil, separating the most holy place from the holy place.

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before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony.”⁷ The golden altar of incense is located before (in front of) the veil, and the ark and the mercy seat are behind the veil; or as Moses puts it, the veil is before the ark and the mercy seat, and the golden altar is before the veil. Moses’ description places the golden altar of incense within the holy place, not the most holy place.

By comparing additional Scripture, we can firmly establish the location of the golden altar. One of the duties of the high priest was to burn incense upon the golden altar every morning and every evening, Exodus 30:7-8. Yet, he could not do this if the golden altar was in the most holy place behind the veil. The high priest could not “come just any time into the [most] Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die,” Leviticus 16:2. The only time the high priest could go behind the veil into the most holy place was during the once a year day of atonement (held in the seventh month, Leviticus 23, 25). On the day of atonement, the high priest would, Leviticus 16:12-13, “take a censer full of burning coals of fire *from the altar before the Lord* [emphasis mine], with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil [into the most holy place].” The phrase “the altar before the Lord,” usually indicates the bronze altar of sacrifice located exterior to and in front of the tabernacle (Leviticus 1:11; 6:14; 16:12?; 2 Chronicles 1:6). I believe those “burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord,” were live coals from the altar of sacrifice,⁸ the altar on which the high priest had just sacrificed a bull and goat.⁹ Then, after making the sacrifice, “the high priest shall [enter into the most holy place and] put the incense on the fire [the live coals in the censer] before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the [ark of the] Testimony, lest he die” (the cloud/smoke of the incense kept him from seeing the manifestation of God face to face, Leviticus 16:2; Exodus 33:20). The high priest used a censer to burn incense in the most holy place on the day of atonement. He did not use the golden altar of incense to burn incense during that ceremony.¹⁰ Therefore (as will be explained below), the translations of 9:3-4 that read “behind the second veil . . . which had the golden altar,” are incorrect. The word in the original text means a golden “censer.” On the day of atonement, the high priest took a censer, filled it with coals from the altar, entered most holy place, and put incense on the coals in that censer. This indicates the golden altar was not used for burning incense on the day of atonement, because it was always located in the holy place, in front of the veil. To summarize, in his every-day duties, the high priest twice daily put incense directly on the golden altar of incense when he went into the holy place to light the golden lampstand. But once a year, on the day of atonement, he took coals from the sacrificial altar and carried them into the most holy place in his golden censer.¹¹

Several major translations (NKJV 1983, NIV, HCSB, ASV, NASB, Jerusalem Bible) in v. 4 locate the golden altar of incense as “behind the second veil” in the most holy place, but the golden altar of incense was always located in front of the veil in the holy place. The translation “altar” misleadingly indicates the high priest on the day of atonement (which is the subject of the passage) burned incense on the golden altar behind the veil, but a review of his instructions indicates incense was burned on coals held in a golden censer that was carried into the most holy place by the high priest. These translations are mistranslating the original Greek text. The Greek word *thumiasterion* means “a censer for burning incense.”¹² The literal translation of the Greek text is “golden censer of incense,” and that translation fits with all the Old Testament accounts of the day of atonement, the main subject of Hebrews chapter nine. It is true that the word could be translated

⁷ The “testimony” is the two stone tablets of the ten commandments which are inside the ark. The lid/mercy seat is over/on top of the “testimony” because it is the lid of the ark.

⁸ Danby, *Mishnah*, 166 (Yoma, 4.3).

⁹ Danby, *Mishnah*, Yoma 4.3, the high priest took the coals from the sacrificial altar. This gave an atoning value to the coals, which gave atoning value to the incense.

¹⁰ In the conclusion to the atonement ritual, Leviticus 16:18-19, the high priest put the blood of the sacrifice on the horns of the “altar before the Lord.” Based on Exodus 30:10, this is the golden altar of incense. In detail, he goes into the most holy place (v. 15), to make atonement (v. 16), for the holy place. Then he “comes out” of the most holy place (v. 17), and goes to “the altar before the lord” (v. 18) and puts the blood on the horns of the altar; see also v. 19. Comparing Exodus 30:10 with Leviticus 16:17, this mention of the “altar before the Lord” must refer to the golden altar of incense.

¹¹ Censer: Leviticus 10:1; 16:12; Numbers 16:17, 18, 46.

¹² Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 744.

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"altar," and the fact that it was a golden censer "of incense" probably lead to the interpretation golden "altar" of incense. The Old Testament, however, is explicit in its multiple descriptions of the golden altar of incense as always being located in front of the veil. The majority translators are wrong in preferring an incorrect interpretation of *thumiasterion* as "altar" versus the accurate translation "censer." The Writer is comparing the high priest on the day of atonement with Jesus and his propitiating work, 9:7-12, 25-26. As previously noted, on the day of atonement the high priest must take a censer filled with live coals into the most holy place. He brought a censer with him, because there was no other means within the most holy place to burn the required incense. The overwhelming testimony of the Old Testament Scripture is that golden altar of incense was not in the most holy place. Therefore, the correct translation of Hebrews 9:4—the translation that fits the Greek text, that fits the Old Testament day of atonement, and that fits the Writer's purpose—must be "behind the second veil . . . which had the golden censer of incense and the ark of the covenant."

Where did the gold censer come from? The censer is not listed among the garments of the high priest, nor of the subordinate priests. The first time a censer is mentioned in ritual use is Leviticus 10:1.¹³ The Scripture simply assumes that the priests had censers for burning incense, an assumption confirmed in Leviticus 16:12 and Numbers 16:17-18, 46. The dress of the high priest was superior to that of his subordinate priests, therefore, it is not unreasonable to believe that the Israelites made the censer used by the high priest out of gold. Additionally, since every other article used inside the tabernacle was made of gold, or covered in gold, it is not unreasonable to assume that the censer used for the day of atonement was made of gold. In fact, the Hebrew word in Exodus 27:3, 38:3, where it is translated "pan" (as in a shovel for the coals), could be legitimately translated as "censer." When all these facts are taken into consideration, the translation "golden censer of incense" is the correct translation in Hebrews 9:4.

Why is this discussion concerning the location of the golden altar and golden censer important? There are always skeptics who are willing to accuse the authors of the Bible of making mistakes. A mistake here would be of grave concern. The Writer basis his argument for a superior priest and a new superior covenant on the imperfect and temporary nature of the old covenant. In his argument the details are important. If he shows ignorance of one critical detail, such as the location of the golden altar, perhaps his reasoning concerning Jesus the high priest, and the propitiation made by Jesus, is also faulty. When the eternal destiny of one's soul is at stake, can a mistake be tolerated? Certainly his original readers knew, beyond any doubt, the location of the golden altar of incense, and many of them may have watched the high priest enter into the temple with a golden censer, full of live coals off the altar of sacrifice, carrying finely beaten incense in the other hand. The second, more general, reason is the inspiration and veracity of Scripture. The Bible claims (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21) that every word of the original written documents was breathed-out by God, inspired into the human authors. This means Scripture is accurate, authentic, and credible in the parts as well as in the whole. If one part is in error, then the whole must be suspected of error. An error in a translation (NKJV, NIV, etc.) is not an error in the Scripture; but an error on the part of a human author of Scripture is also an error by the Holy Spirit, and that view is unacceptable. The word of the Spirit in Hebrews 9:4 must harmonize with the word of the Spirit on the same subject in other scriptures. The golden altar is outside the veil, and the high priest used a golden censer on the day of atonement.

Are there other acceptable views of the passage? Hughes quotes Lange (circa. 1870) "that we should 'rather find a theological idea than an archaeological error.'"¹⁴ What this means is that, in Lange's view, the Writer was not considering the physical location of the golden altar. He was, rather, considering the function of the altar in relation to its significance according to the theology of salvation, as typified in the day of atonement. The bronze sacrificial altar, the golden altar of incense, and the ark of the testimony form a "doctrinal line"¹⁵ which clearly indicates "the line of propitiation and atonement appointed by God."¹⁶ In this

¹³ However, the same word is translated as wick-trimmers (Exodus 25:38; 37:23; Numbers 4:9), and pans (Exodus 27:3, 38:3).

¹⁴ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 313-312.

¹⁵ Physically, these three items were in a straight line from sacrificial altar, to golden altar, to the ark. The sacrificial altar, exterior to the tabernacle, was separated from the golden altar by the screen at the entrance. The golden altar was
(continued...)

view, the high priest entered into the most holy place bearing both the blood of the sacrifice and the golden altar of incense (into which he had placed the coals from the altar of sacrifice). This is an acceptable interpretation of the various passages concerning the day of atonement. However, this interpretation requires the high priest to carry the golden altar into the most holy place to burn the incense, and then carry it back into the holy place before he puts the blood on the horns. This would not be unreasonable in relation to the typology, but the major problem this view must overcome is that the golden altar was presumably very heavy, being made of dense wood and covered inside and out with gold. The golden altar required two poles, one on each side of the altar, when the Levites carried it; but only the high priest could enter into the most holy place. How the high priest could have, alone, carried the gold altar both into and out of the most holy place is problematic for this view. Moreover, a censer eliminates the need for moving the golden altar.

Owen doesn't quite dismiss the problem of the altar's location when he states that the Writer "doth not propose an accurate account of their station [location] and relation to one another, but makes such mention of them in general as was sufficient unto his end, namely, to manifest their use and signification."¹⁷ Accordingly, further on Owen writes, "he respects not its situation, but its use. And the most holy place may well be said to have had the altar of incense, because the high priest could never enter into that place, nor perform any service in it, but he was to bring incense with him, taken in a censer from this altar."¹⁸ This view of the golden altar as theologically associated with the most holy place, although physically in the holy place, is also espoused by Patterson.¹⁹ He writes, *in loco* at 1 Kings 6:20-22 (addressing the location of the golden altar in Solomon's temple), "The room [the most holy place] was a perfect cube, overlaid in its entirety with gold, as was the cedar altar of incense (cf. v. 22). This altar was physically placed in the main hall or Holy Place directly before the entrance into the Most Holy Place (Exod 30:6), but functionally and symbolically it was associated with the Most Holy Place. Thus v. 22 notes that it 'belonged to the inner sanctuary' (cf. also Heb 9:4)." If the Writer of Hebrews was thinking of this passage, then his view of the golden altar as "behind the second veil" was functional and theological, not physical.

Considering the functional/theological view, it is possible the instruction of Leviticus 16:12 meant that the high priest was to take coals from the golden altar (although the *Mishnah* states it was taken from the sacrificial altar, see note *cxxiv*) and use that fire to burn the incense in his censer within the most holy place. This would fit the requirements of the ritual. Theologically, however, and typologically, the fire in the golden altar of incense must come from the altar of sacrifice (but in no Scripture are we told where the daily fire for the golden altar originated). As for the incense, a amount was probably kept within the holy place (just like the oil for the lamp), for the daily offering of incense. If this is the case, then the origin of the coals in Leviticus 16:12, could be the golden altar, although all other mentions of the "altar before the Lord" (Leviticus 16:18 excepted) indicate the sacrificial altar.

I can allow the interpretation that views the coals in the golden censer (on the day of atonement) as coming from the golden altar, and theologically connects the golden altar with the most holy place. However, in allowing this alternative, I must remain with the basic tenets of my original interpretation: the golden altar was always located in the holy place; the high priest took a censer (with coals from one of the altars) into the most holy place, and used the censer to burn the incense. After making the atonement on the mercy seat, the high priest left the most holy place, went to the golden altar, and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on it,²⁰ to make an atonement for it, then he left the tabernacle. The part the offering of incense played on the

¹⁵(...continued)

separated from the ark by the inner curtain (veil). Doctrinally, they formed a unit symbolically indicating the proper approach to God for salvation and worship.

¹⁶ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 313.

¹⁷ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:198.

¹⁸ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:201.

¹⁹ Patterson, *Expositors*.

²⁰ An atonement was made for the golden altar of incense to sanctify the incense which would, over the next year, be offered upon it. Incense tangibly symbolizes the spiritual result of an acceptable sacrifice, Leviticus 16:12-13. In Psalm (continued...)

day of atonement is not especially dependent upon the vessel used to carry the coals, but upon the coals and the incense. Therefore, a golden censer is as theologically and typologically appropriate on that one day as was the golden altar every day. The high priest could not enter the most holy place without burning incense. The incense tangibly symbolized the result of an acceptable sacrifice. The burning incense gave the priest safe passage into God's presence, and the blood brought the sacrifice into most holy place to make an atonement. However, the Hebrews 9:4 text uses the word for a golden censer, and a golden censer exactly meets the instructions, the theological intent, and the typological illustration, intended by carrying coals from the sacrificial altar into the most holy place, where it was part of the atonement made by the high priest.

The Most Holy Place

3. (Continued) behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, 4 which had [. . .] the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

The Writer now passes into the most holy place. As I noted above, the "second veil" indicates the curtain separating the holy place from the most holy place (the first curtain-veil-screen was the one at the entrance to the tabernacle). The room behind the veil was "most holy" because there God presented a visible manifestation of his presence, a cloud of glory, resting above the ark between the cherubim. The ark of the covenant was 3.75 feet long, 2.25 feet wide, 2.25 feet high. The ark contained the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. There has been some small discussion as to whether or not the pot of manna was inside the ark, or sitting beside the ark. The instructions were:

- Exodus 16:32-34, "Then Moses said, 'This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: 'Fill an omer [a unit of measurement] with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.' And Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations.' As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept."

The confusion occurs because the casual Bible student confuses the "testimony" with the "ark of the testimony." The "testimony" usually refers to the two tablets of stone on which were written God's "testimony," the Ten Commandments (Exodus 25:21). The ark was called the "ark of the testimony" because it contained the two tablets.²¹ Note Exodus 30:6 where the ark is called the "ark of the testimony," and the mercy seat is described as "over the testimony," that is, the mercy seat, set atop the ark as a cover or lid, was covering the two tablets—the "testimony"—that were inside the ark. Thus, Aaron put the pot of manna "before the testimony," that is, inside the ark beside the two tablets. Similar confusion occurs in relation to Aaron's rod:

- Numbers 17:10-11, "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.' Thus did Moses; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did."

The solution, however, is the same. Aaron's rod was kept inside the ark, "before the testimony," that is, inside the ark beside the two tablets. This would make Aaron's rod about four feet in length (the diagonal of the ark was 4.373 feet).

The ark was made of acacia wood covered with gold inside and out. The lid or covering of the ark, the mercy seat, was made out of pure gold with one cherub at one end, and a second cherub at the other end, made as one piece with the mercy seat. The cherubim wings stretched out above the seat. The cherubim

²⁰(...continued)

141:2; Revelation 8:4, a connection is made between incense and prayer.

²¹ Sometimes, the entire arrangement was called the "testimony," e.g., Exodus 27:21, but when this is the case, the context indicates the ark plus contents is in view.

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faced one another and each faced toward the mercy seat. No one today knows the actual form of the cherubim on the ark.

The Writer did not intend to discuss the details or the symbology of the elements of the tabernacle. His intent was to establish that the old covenant made in the earthly sanctuary consisted in the material and the temporary. His focus is the day of atonement.

6 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services.

All the priests had various duties inside the tabernacle. An example of this is found in Luke 1:8-10, "So it was, that while Zacharias was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord." However, the ordinary priest could not enter into the most holy place, which is why the Writer of Hebrews notes that the priests went into the first part of the tabernacle. (This verse indicates the golden altar was in the holy place in New Testament times.)

7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance;

The reference is to Leviticus 16, where God gave the instructions for the ceremony of the day of atonement. I urge you to read that passage before continuing in this commentary. The instructions for this ceremony are complex. I have outlined them as an aid to your understanding.

- The high priest took off his normal priestly garments, washed his body with water, then put on the garments for this ceremony: the holy linen tunic, the linen trousers, a linen sash, and a linen turban.
- He took for his own sins a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He took from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering to be offered for the sins of the nation.
- He offered the bull as a sin offering for himself, and his house.
- He presented the two goats before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.
- He then cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat. The goat on which the Lord's lot fell would be offered as a sin offering for Israel. The other goat would be released later in the ceremony.
- He then took the blood of the bull sacrificed for his own sins, a censer full of burning coals from the sacrificial altar, and a handful of incense, and brought these inside the veil (into the most holy place).
- He then put the incense on the coals in the censer. The instructions (16:12, 13) indicate he may have first put incense on the golden altar, then, after entering the most holy place, put incense on the censer.
- He took some of the blood of the bull and sprinkled it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side (the tabernacle always faced east) and before the mercy seat seven times.
- He then left the tabernacle and returned to the altar of sacrifice to kill the goat of the sin offering as an atonement for the nation.
- He reentered the tabernacle with the blood of the goat and went inside the inner veil into the most holy place (and would have repeated the incense offering).
- He sprinkled the blood of the goat on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. Although the number of times is not specified, the instruction was to sprinkle the blood "as he did with the blood of the bull" and therefore he probably sprinkled the blood seven times before the mercy seat.
- He then left the most holy place, went to the golden altar, and put some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat on the horns of the altar all around.
- Then, he sprinkled some of the blood of the bull and goat on the golden altar, seven times.
- He then left the tabernacle, went to the live goat, laid both his hands on its head, and confessed all

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the sins of Israel.

- He then sent the live goat away into the wilderness “by the hand of a suitable man.”
- The suitable man left the camp and released the live goat in the wilderness. The goat was taken to a remote location from which it could not return to the camp.
- After the man with the live goat left, the high priest went into the tabernacle, took off his linen garments, washed his body, and put on his every-day priestly garments.
- He then came out of the tabernacle and offered the two rams (16:3, 5) as burnt offerings, one for himself, and one for the people (see Leviticus 1:3-17).
- The dead bull and the dead goat were carried outside the camp, and their skins, flesh, and offal were burned.
- The person who burned them washed his clothes and body in water before returning to the camp.
- The man who released the live goat returned and washed his clothes and body before entering the camp.

The high priest first made an atonement for his own sins, then for the sins of the people. The day of atonement was the cleansing ceremony for all the sins of priest and people of the past year. “During the course of the year it was difficult for people to account for every defilement and every sin. Regular worship left too many things unresolved. And so here was a chance to have a general atonement for people, priests, and place of worship. The whole nation was involved, for the sins of the whole assembly were carried away by the goat, and the sanctuary was purified by blood so that the people could continue to come into God’s presence.”²² In the day of atonement, God provided people, priests, and tabernacle a sacrifice to cover all their past sins and defilements, that they might maintain their covenant relationship with him. Although priests and people offered sacrifices and offerings throughout the year, and though they may have followed all the instructions to make their sacrifices and offerings acceptable, yet the holy tabernacle was defiled by the presence and work of the priests and people. Their sacrifices were not perfectly nor permanently efficacious, and the unchanged sin nature of priest and offeror defiled the tabernacle. So God provided them and himself a sacrifice to maintain the holiness of the people, and of the tabernacle, that both it and they might be suitable to their holy work. The Writer’s notation of sins “committed in ignorance” means that the atonement was not effective for presumptuous sins. A presumptuous sin indicated unbelief in the terms, conditions, and results of the covenant, so the day of atonement sacrifice, which depended upon faith in the covenant for its efficiency in regard to sin, could not atone for a presumptuous sin.

8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.

In the high priest’s once a year entry into the most holy place, the Holy Spirit showed that the way to God was not open.²³ This too was an indicator that the old covenant was imperfect; if the way had been opened by the atonement, then access would not have remained restricted. The reference, “the first tabernacle was still standing” is in its primary sense a reference to the old covenant. The tabernacle and its services were the visible manifestation of the intangible covenant with God. As long as its services were honored by God, it indicated the old covenant was in force. The tabernacle was, in a symbolic gesture, torn down when Christ died on the cross: Mark 15:37-38, “And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” When the veil was rent, the way into the Holiest of All was then made manifest, indicating that the old covenant was no longer in force (cf. Hebrews 10:19-22). That is, the atonement made under the old covenant was no longer required, since the

²² Ross, *Leviticus*, 314.

²³ If entrance into God’s presence—the most holy place—was restricted to one man, and that only once a year, and through a complex ritual, then the way may be said to be effectively “not open.”

way had been opened by Christ.²⁴

The Writer's reference, "while the *first* tabernacle was still standing" (emphasis mine) seems puzzling at first, for both Writer and readers knew the first tabernacle—the one Moses had built—was superseded by the temple Solomon had built. The literal "first" tabernacle had not existed for about 1,000 years at the time Hebrews was written. The solution is in the context. The Writer began this part of his argument in chapter eight with a reference to the literal first tabernacle. A study of Hebrews 8:1-6 indicates that the writer views the old covenant in terms of the first tabernacle. In other words, the first tabernacle was the manifestation of the old or first covenant, therefore a reference to the first tabernacle is a reference to the first (old) covenant. His reference to the first tabernacle/covenant must include all the subsequent temples, including the temple Herod built, because their existence depended upon the first covenant. The yearly day of atonement showed that the old covenant remained in force, and while it was in force, the way into the holiest of all was not yet made known. When the veil in the temple was torn in two pieces from top to bottom, it indicated the first/old covenant had been superseded by the second/new covenant made in the death/resurrection of Jesus Christ (v. 16ff). When Christ accomplished his ministry, the first covenant was made obsolete and superseded by the new covenant.

9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience —

10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

The physical curtain separating God's presence from the priest and people was a symbol that daily indicated the way to God was not yet made known. The once a year visit behind the curtain emphasized the way remained shut. The phrase "for the present time" indicates the time the curtain remained, that is, during the time the first covenant was active. The various and continuing ordinances, ritual, and ceremony of the first covenant indicated the continuing spiritual need of the sinful soul for a completed atonement, and the inability of the first covenant to accomplish that completed atonement. The problem with the first covenant was not the "fleshly ordinances" of the law, but was (as discussed previously, 8:7–8, and as expressed here) "in regard to the conscience."

One is tempted by the Writer's declaration to see in the Old Testament ordinances simply and only a ceremonial and symbolic removal of the guilt and pollution of sin.²⁵ However, if the sacrifices did not provide an effective answer to the immediate moral guilt of the offeror, then he could not have gone away from his sacrifice with faith in a peace with God that allowed him to worship, fellowship with, and serve God in his daily life. The Old Testament worshiper, through the sacrifices, could and did resolve the personal moral guilt he felt for his past sins. Yes, the old covenant was made in outward acts of washings, restrictions of food and drink, and the blood of bulls and goats. Some of these, such as the requirement a priest wash his hands and feet before each act of service, were completely symbolic and ceremonial; in this instance, they indicated that inward purity—sanctification—required to serve God. One must, however, always bear in mind that under the old covenant the sacrifices were the content of faith, thus the means by which God cleansed the conscience for past acts of sin.

The Writer, in addressing the inability of the Law to make the conscience perfect, has the underlying cause in mind: Adam's crime of sin and the judicial guilt imputed to Adam's race because of that crime. He is referring to the continuing guilty conscience resulting from a divinely imparted spiritual sense of standing guilty before a holy God. It is this sense or conviction of God pronouncing the judicial sentence of "guilty" that causes the sinner to continually seek out the immediate comfort of some good work or "sacrifice." These, however, cannot "make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience." As Bruce says, "the really effective barrier to a man or woman's free access to God is an inward and not a material

²⁴ History says the priests repaired the curtain; they completely missed the spiritual significance of the way opened to God.

²⁵ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 209-210.

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one; it exists in the conscience. It is only when the conscience is purified that one is set free to approach God without reservation and offer him acceptable service and worship."² Good works and sacrifices cannot purify the inner man (the conscience; the soul) from the judicial sentence of "guilty," nor from the continuing defilement caused by the sin nature, 9:12-15, 23. Only the payment made by Christ can do that. Jesus Christ—not the Law, not its sacrifices, not good works—is the Savior.

The first covenant was "imposed" until the better priest bearing a new covenant should come. The word "imposed" (*epikeimai*) is used in the same sense that one would say the laws of America are necessarily imposed upon its citizens. God gave the Law to Israel, Israel affirmed that they would obey the Law, thus the Law, in all its religious, civil and moral obligations, was "imposed" or "laid upon" Israel as a necessary condition of their lives. Israel was to live according to the Law until the time of "reformation." In Galatians, Paul addresses this same subject in 3:19-25. Paul says the Law was a guardian to keep the Old Testament believer safe in his faith until Christ came.²⁶ The Writer of Hebrews does not address the guardian function of the Law, purposing rather to focus on the temporary nature of its function. Therefore, the Law served its purposes until the "reformation." The word translated "reformation" is the Greek *diorthosis*. This word means "to correct, amend." The word is used in the New Testament only here, and never occurs in the LXX. The word has a variety of medical, political, social, and ethical uses in secular Greek, based upon its essential meaning, "the making straight of what has shifted from its true position."²⁷ Man is the "thing" that has shifted; sin dislocated man from his true nature and his true relationship with God. The Law was a temporary "fix," a splint, so to speak, on a broken bone. The Law made a (limited) relationship with God possible, but it was not designed to "set the bone," i.e., to permanently fix the sin problem. The old covenant, being designed by God as temporary in nature, was not the true order in the plan of God to fix the sin problem in man. The new covenant in Christ is that true order which fulfills all that the old order looked forward to, but was not designed to accomplish, God having purposed Christ, not the Law, as the Savior.

11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

The word "but" places Christ and all that he represents as high priest of the new covenant, in contrast with everything of the old covenant, as represented in the Levitical order. Christ has appeared, and the imperfect "copy and shadow of the heavenly things" has been superseded by the perfect reality. The thought as expressed is that Christ came to sinners as a priest of the heavenly tabernacle, the one God made, not man-made, and through his ministry (in the heavenly tabernacle) he brought "good things" to those who believe on him as Savior. His purpose in coming was to bring those "good things," and because he was the eternal high priest ministering through²⁸ the genuine tabernacle he was able to accomplish that purpose. The basis for this interpretation is the "good things" accomplished by the Levitical high priest on the day of atonement as he ministered in the earthly tabernacle. One must not think the work of the Levitical high priest was for nothing. He accomplished a great atonement, he effected a great reconciliation; these are the "good things" of the old covenant. An effective atonement was made for all the past sins of the people and the past defilements of the tabernacle. This, however, was also the very problem with the old covenant. The atonements it made covered past sins, therefore the "good things" resulting from its ministry were the good things of the present, not the good things promised (in the types, copies, shadows, and symbols of the old

²⁶ The Law was a *paidagogus* to bring the Old Testament believer to Christ. In the Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day, the *paidagogus* was a household servant responsible for a child's physical and moral welfare from 6-16 years of age. The *paidagogus's* job was to guard the heir until he became an adult. The job of the Law was to guard the Old Testament believer, body and soul, until Christ came and effected the adoption of the believer as an adult son/daughter and heir of God.

²⁷ Kittell and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, V:450.

²⁸ The NKJV translates *dia* (by, through) as "with." The thought expressed by *dia* is that of "instrumentality." The true tabernacle in heaven is the instrument, the means, through which Christ finalized the propitiation.

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covenant) that were to come.²⁹

The ministry of Christ the high priest, and the good things he accomplished, were perfect; but again, let us not completely dismiss the atonement made by the Levitical high priest. His office, ministry, and atoning work are the point of comparison, in which the "better" work and results of Christ's ministry may be properly evaluated and appreciated. Did the high priest atone for the sins of the people and bring them a spiritual benefit as a result? Yes. But Christ, the ever-living high priest, made a complete propitiation to God for sin. The result of Christ's work was accomplished with a perfect sacrifice (his own blood), and presented in a perfect (genuine) tabernacle, and accomplished a perfect spiritual result (propitiation), that by God's decree was effective for sin past, present and future. Christ's coming to earth as God's high priest is analogized in terms of the old covenant "copy and shadow", but advances on that view in presenting his priesthood, his work, and its result, as exceeding that which could be accomplished under the old covenant. Put in different terms, there was an atonement under the old covenant which was effective at maintaining a relationship with God, but Christ came with a better atonement (a propitiation), in a better tabernacle (made by God in heaven), that accomplished better things (God present with the believer), and guaranteed an eternal result (everlasting communion with God).

There is a variation in the Greek text that results in a variation in translation and thus a slightly different view of the verse. In the Greek text used by the KJV, NKJV, the translation "the good things to come" is based on the Greek text *ton mellonton agathos* (the ASV and NASB use the same translation). The word *ton* is the definite article ("the"); the word *agathon* is the "good things." In the variant text used by the NIV, the Greek reads *ton genomenon agathon*, which is translated, "the good things that are already here."³⁰ Guthrie explains the interpretation resulting from the variant text: "whereas the old was a foreshadowing of better things to come, the new rests on an already accomplished fact. When Jesus Christ became high priest he at once dispensed many 'good things' as a result."³¹ The text used by the NKJV looks forward from the Old Testament Levitical high priest to the good things Christ would accomplish. The text used by the NIV looks backward to the good things Christ did accomplish. The end result is the same: better things from a better high priest ministering in a better tabernacle. In my view *ton mellonton agathos*, the good things to come, better fits the expectation established by the Writer's argument.

What is the Writer's meaning when he states that Christ came "'with' (through, by) the greater and more perfect tabernacle"? There are many discussions trying to answer the question, "what is the 'tabernacle' intended in this verse?" The issue is complicated for some commentators by the mention in v. 12 of Christ entering the most holy place. How can Christ come with (through, by) the tabernacle, and then be said to have entered the most holy place of the tabernacle? Some believe Christ himself is the "tabernacle" of v. 11; some say it is the New Testament church; some that it is heaven itself; others that the reference is to Christ's human nature.³² However, Christ's body, therefore his human nature also, is of this creation, *contra* v. 11, the perfect tabernacle "not made with hands . . . not of this creation." John Brown believed the reference in v. 11 is of the first compartment, the holy place, in relation to the most holy place in v. 12. Accordingly, he viewed the meaning as Christ passing through the visible heavens on his way to the most holy place (v. 12), which corresponded to the "heaven of heavens"³³ (the spiritual heaven where God continually manifests his presence, cf. Revelation 4). Bruce is representative of those who believe the v. 11 tabernacle means the people of God,³⁴ the spiritual temple made of "living stones."

The answer, however, is found in Hebrews. In 9:24 the same tabernacle is described and said to be in heaven in the presence of God, a description that also corresponds with 8:2. Hughes has it right when he

²⁹ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:262, this is not specifically Owen's argument, but I am indebted to his argument for this thought.

³⁰ Compare HCSB, "the good things that have come."

³¹ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 185.

³² Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:266, all these are cited by Owen, who supports the "human nature" view.

³³ Brown, *Hebrews*, 394.

³⁴ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 212-213.

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writes, "Christ is envisaged as entering the true tent³⁵ (of heaven) which contains the true sanctuary (of God's presence). But as the curtain which divided the tent into two chambers has now been abolished, it is easy to see how in the true order of things tent and sanctuary can be treated as synonymous terms."³⁶ The tabernacle (or tent) in which Christ ministers, whether *dia* is translated as "with", "through", or "by", is the genuine tabernacle in heaven. When Christ came as high priest, the new covenant and the genuine tabernacle were inseparable from his ministry and necessary to the "good things" that would result from his ministry. It came with him, he ministered by means of it, and his work was accomplished through it. His work was accomplished in his Person and the result of his work presented to the Father in his Person; my view is that the true tent is the exalted Christ in the presence of God. As to an assumed holy place and most holy place in the true tabernacle (vv. 11, 12), in relation to Christ's priestly ministry the curtain/veil is gone; there is no curtain in the true tabernacle, because in Christ God and man are reconciled. When the exalted Christ entered into the presence of God to present his propitiation, he came into that "presence" which *is* the most holy place. The meaning of the symbolic veil torn in two is that now there is one and only one compartment, cf. 10:19-20. The heavenly tabernacle is the presence of God, making all the tabernacle the most holy place. The table presented in Hughes³⁷ is most instructive in its comparison of the earthly and heavenly tabernacles:

<i>The Mosaic tabernacle</i>	<i>The heavenly reality</i>
"on earth" (8:4f)	"in heaven" (8:1)
"an earthly sanctuary" (9:1)	
"set up by man" (8:2)	"set up by the Lord" (8:2)
"made with hands"	"not made with hands" (9:11)
"of this creation" (9:11)	"not of this creation" (9:11)
"a sanctuary made with hands" (9:24)	"not a sanctuary made with hands" (9:24)
"a copy and shadow" (8:5)	
"a copy" (9:24)	"the true tent" (8:2)
	"the true sanctuary" (9:24)
	"The greater and more perfect tent" (9:11)
	"Heaven itself" (9:24)

The greater and more perfect tabernacle is Christ exalted. The greater and more perfect tabernacle in which Christ ministered is the presence of God. The greater and more perfect tabernacle, the one not made with hands, that is, the one not of this creation, is the exalted Christ in the presence of God in the heaven of heavens presenting his propitiation.

12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

The Levitical high priest entered the man-made tabernacle with the blood of animals to make a transient

³⁵ The word being translated "tabernacle" is literally "tent."

³⁶ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 290.

³⁷ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 290.

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redemption—a redemption that lasted until the next sin required the next sin offering. Christ himself entered the heavenly tabernacle with his own blood to make an eternal redemption—a redemption that remits all sin past, present, future, to which it is applied. When the Writer states that Christ entered the most holy place (the heavenly tabernacle) he “qualifies Christ’s entrance into the heavenly sanctuary by the word *ephapax*, ‘once for all,’ a term that excludes both the necessity and the possibility of repetition.”³⁸ The primary meaning is that Christ will never leave the heavenly tabernacle for the purpose of offering himself again as a sacrifice for sin. “Christ’s sacrifice on the cross requires no repetition or renewal; his exaltation and entrance into the real sanctuary consecrates the eternal validity of his redemptive ministry.”³⁹ The result of Christ’s sacrifice was an eternal redemption.

13 For if the blood of bulls⁴⁰ and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,

14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The contrast is easily seen: animal sacrifices dealt with the immediate moral conscience and defilement caused by a past act of sin; Christ’s propitiation paid for the crime of sin that made the person judicially “guilty,” and permanently cleansed the conscience of that spiritual conviction. The Levitical sacrifices cleansed the believer from a past sin for continued fellowship with God; Christ’s sacrifice remitted all the believer’s sin and regenerated his/her soul for eternal life with God. Sin under the Law was usually defined by its outward acts, and thus tended to be viewed by the people more as the defiling of one’s physical being, than as a defilement originating in the soul. This one dimensional view of sin may be seen in the astonishment of the people when Christ defined murder as hatred and adultery as lust (cf. Mark 7:15). The essence of sin as the corruption of human nature was seen in the intangible requirements of the Law,⁴¹ but the remedies in the Law emphasized the outer defilement caused by sin. Therefore, believers looked for cleansing from defilement in the blood of sacrificed animals, in various washings, and in the ashes of a heifer (Numbers 19).

Christ’s redemptive work cleanses the soul. If God gave the outward sacrifices of the Law sufficient worth to purify the flesh, of how much more value and efficacy is the blood of Christ in cleansing the soul from sin? His blood cleanses the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. The word “conscience” (*suneidesis*) means moral self-awareness. The conscience is the inner witness and moral judge of one’s thoughts and acts. The Law, v. 9, “cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience.” The “conscience” is the inner man, and is used here metonymically⁴² for the soul. The soul is defiled by “dead works,” which are works a sinner performs in an attempt to become righteous in God’s eyes. The works are “dead” because the spiritual faculty of the sinner is inert, separated from God by the sin nature, incapable of communing with God; God does not have fellowship with the works of sin. A spiritually dead soul is incapable of producing works acceptable to the living God; therefore they are dead works. The word “works” as used in a spiritual context always means the actions of the soul, whether expressed physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. When the context is further defined as relating to salvation, as it is here (v. 12, the eternal redemption obtained by Christ), then “dead works” indicates the acts of the soul in his/her attempt to become righteously acceptable to God. But a sinner’s soul can produce only dead

³⁸ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 239.

³⁹ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 239.

⁴⁰ V. 12 states the blood of “goats and calves,” while v. 13 states the blood of “bulls and goats.” This is narrative variety on the part of the Writer, but no contradiction with Scripture. The animals for the sin offering on the day of atonement were a “young bull . . . and two kids of the goats” (Leviticus 16:3, 5). A young bull could also be called be a calf.

⁴¹ For example: do not covet; do not hate your brother in your heart; love your neighbor; reverence my sanctuary; worship God only.

⁴² A “metonym” is a word or expression used as a substitute for something with which it is closely associated. For example, using the word “blood” when the death of Christ is the subject, or, the word “Washington” for the US government.

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works: Isaiah 64:5-6, "You [God] are indeed angry, for we have sinned—in these ways we continue; and we need to be saved. But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses [works] are like filthy rags." And Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous, no, not one." A dead soul does not worship a living God and dead works cannot serve a living God. Usually the phrase "living God" is in contrast to dead idols. Here, the "living" God is in contrast to the dead soul (exhibited by its dead works). When the dead soul is cleansed from sin then it is made alive to serve a living God with living works. The context remains salvific: salvation/redemption from sin. To cleanse the soul from self-righteousness (dead works) is to convict the person that he/she is a sinner in need of a Savior: a sinner by nature, a sinner by works, a sinner needing salvation. God, working through the sinner's inner self-witness (the conscience) convicts of sin, and of a Savior who brings forgiveness of sin. The only sin one cannot be saved from is the sin of constantly turning away from the Savior in unbelief. The short message here is that faith in Jesus as Savior brings forgiveness of sin and saves the soul by bringing it to life by means of spiritual life given by God.

The Writer states that Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God." The latter part of this phrase is clear. That he offered himself without "spot" simply means what the Writer has previously said, that Christ has no sin nature and never committed an act of sin. Christ was holy, blameless, and undefiled, tempted as we are, yet without sin. One should also note that Christ "offered himself." His work on the cross—his suffering physical pain and spiritual loss—was voluntary. In eternity past God the Son and God the Father agreed that the Son would in the fulness of time become incarnate and offer his physical body and his immortal soul as an offering to propitiate sin. The Son did not shrink from his task—he could have called 10,000 angels to rescue him—he did offer himself. He went to the cross; he accepted the guilt of your sin against his sinless soul; and he suffered God's wrath against sin in the spiritual loss of separation from God. Then, when the full wrath of God had been discharged, he completed his payment of sin's penalty by physically suffering death, by his own will separating his soul from his body, thus completing the propitiation made for sinner's like me and you.

The first part of the phrase, "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself" has generated much discussion. What "eternal spirit" is the Writer indicating: Christ's eternal spirit or the eternal Holy Spirit? As is often the case, the best choice is to choose both choices. Christ's spirit and the Holy Spirit were necessary to the offering of Christ. The acting of his own eternal Spirit was required, as unto the *efficacy and effect* of his offering; and the acting of the Holy Spirit in him was required, as unto the *manner* of his offering.⁴³ As to Christ's spirit, the whole person, the God-man, accomplished his work as high priest. The Levitical high priest made his offering on a material altar; Christ made his offering through his eternal spirit, the divine nature acting in the person of the Son. "But on the other side," as Owen says, "it is no less certain that he offered himself on the altar of his human nature by the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴ The God-man Christ Jesus offered himself as a spirit-filled man who acted willingly to fulfill the plan of salvation God had purposed in him. He submitted himself to the will of God, through the grace given him by the Holy Spirit, who filled him with the faith and trust necessary to accomplish that will, and thus through the workings of Holy Spirit in him, "his offering of himself was a free, voluntary oblation and sacrifice."⁴⁵

15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

The Writer has already stated, 8:6, that Christ is the mediator of the new covenant foretold by Jeremiah. Here, 9:15, is the basis for that covenant made through his priestly mediation: his sacrificial death. The Greek text of this verse reads thus:

- "And for this reason of a new covenant he is mediator, so that, death having taken place for

⁴³ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:304.

⁴⁴ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:305.

⁴⁵ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:305.

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redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, the promise of the eternal inheritance they who have been called might receive.”

The NIV and the HCSB translate the text in this fashion:

- NIV: “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”
- HCSB: “Therefore He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”

The reason Christ is the mediator of the new covenant is that the new covenant is established by and through his death. This is set out more fully in the verses that follow, where the new covenant is set forth in terms of a “last will and testament.” For now, let us address the preexisting conditions that needed to be satisfied before the new covenant could be effected. The Writer’s focus in this verse is the result of Christ’s death: redemption from sin and receiving the promise of the eternal inheritance. The preexisting conditions were the necessity of a permanent judicial satisfaction for the crime of sin, and the inability of the old covenant to fully satisfy that judicial need. To fully understand why only a sacrificial death could accomplish redemption, one must comprehend sin, the crime of sin, and redemption as deliverance from the penalty due that crime.

First, what is sin? Sin is an evil life-principle of human nature that, in harmonious interaction with other life-principles in one’s human nature, influences a person to self-determine his or her course in the world in opposition to God’s revealed will, whether that will of God is discovered in Scripture, or in that revelation of himself God has made in human conscience. Sin is accomplished in acts of rebellion against God and disobedience to his commandments. There are several useful definitions⁴⁶ that reveal sin in its full evil:

- Transgression - to step across the line between good and evil, a line immutably fixed by God.
- Error - a departure from the path of right as that path is defined by God.
- Missing the mark⁴⁷ - a failure to reach God’s ideal of human character, as exhibited in Christ.
- Trespass - an intrusion of self-will into the sphere of God’s authority: to do what I think is right not what God says is right.
- Iniquity or inequity - a doing wrong to the ethical order God has established for right choices and right behavior in his universe.
- Vanity, perverseness - denying the sovereignty of God through pride and self-love: what I want is more important than what God wants.
- Lawlessness - moral and spiritual anarchy; to rebel against God by doing what is right in my own eyes. To replace God’s standards for living with those rules and values that I think are right for me.
- Unbelief - an insult to the divine veracity; unbelief in what God has said is to believe that God has lied.
- Sin - any violation of, or want of conformity to, the will of God.

The essence of sin is “I”: “I don’t need God”; “I don’t want God”; “I will not submit to God”; “I will not have God rule over me”; “I don’t need God to manage my life”; “Who is God to tell me what to do”; “God can just leave me alone and I will leave him alone.”⁴⁸

What is the crime of sin? God is not only Creator, he is Governor of all he has created, King and Ruler

⁴⁶ These are not completely original with me. I have expanded on C. I. Scofield’s definitions, which I believe are from the *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, administered by Moody Bible Institute. See also the *Scofield Reference Bible*, note 2 to Romans 3:23, “Sin, Summary.”

⁴⁷ To “miss the mark” is what happens when an archer shoots an arrow and misses the target. When human beings miss the mark God intends, their effort or activity becomes imbedded in something God never intended. If we attach our self to something other than what God wants for us, then we have violated his plan (My thanks to David Hollingsworth for this thought).

⁴⁸ This last was my personal rebellion against God before I came to faith in Jesus as Savior. I thought I was good enough and God could just leave me alone.

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of his creatures. He has established physical laws that regulate the functioning of the universe. He has given moral laws to which his sentient creatures (angels and men) must conform their behavior. For those who have a faith-based relationship with God, obedience to his laws is willing, voluntary, and joyful. Those who have chosen to transgress find his laws a burden, unfair, and an imposition. Their choice is not willing joyful obedience, but rebellion and disobedience, seeking their own way, finding in their personal path of fulfillment a path of life wholly independent of their Creator-God. In the believer's life, God is a part of their thoughts and actions. The unbeliever doesn't think of God as important to his life decisions. Yet, God never ceases to interact with his creation man: God is love, as well as Creator, Governor, King and Ruler. He will deal with the crime of sin in mercy and love, as well as in holiness and justice.

When one chooses to disobey any one of God's moral laws, then one has committed a crime: he/she has broken the law. Disobedience of God's law is a crime against God. Although the moral consequences of the crime may be several, the punishment is one: death. This is clearly stated. To Adam and the Woman God stated the penalty: in the day you eat of the fruit I have forbidden to you, in that day you shall die. Paul views the punishment as the earnings of dead works, but states the penalty just as clearly: the wages of sin is death. That penalty, death, is not merely an eventual physical death—the separation of the immaterial soul from the material body—it is also the immediate death of the soul. The soul is the person, it is who we are, our very existence. Under the influence of sin the soul becomes grossly insensitive—dead or inert—to all things spiritual. Soul death is the separation of the person from God. Since all spiritual life originates in and flows out from God, then the separation of the soul from God is spiritual death. More horrifying than that, if spiritual death continues past physical death, then the soul is eternally separated from God. God is the origin and source of all that is good and righteous, holy and just, loving and merciful. During our physical life God's goodness communicates good things; but he allows evil things to happen so we can know we are guilty of sin, separated from God. In physical death, if one dies without salvation, one's soul is eternally separated from God. To be eternally separated from God is to know and experience only that which is unholy, unrighteous, immoral, and evil; there is no good and holy thing apart from God. The soul eternally separated from God never again knows or experiences goodness, kindness, happiness, mercy, or love. He/she has chosen by their sin-rebellion against God to be separated from his goodness. When the sinner physically dies while in a state of spiritual death, the result is what the Scripture defines as eternal punishment. Eternal punishment is to forever experience the loss of all that is good, to forever know only that which is evil, and to forever be physically and spiritually separated from God. To choose sin over God is to choose death over life.

The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Do you see? God's love for you was the reason Jesus came. There was a crime committed. God's holiness and justice required a penalty be paid for the crime. In mercy and love, God sent Christ to suffer for the crime of sin. He endured the judicial penalty. The first part of the judicial penalty that Christ experienced on the cross was to suffer a temporary spiritual death. From conception Jesus the Christ had experienced unending communion with God the Father. When God imputed sin to Christ, then God ceased to have communion with Christ the sin-bearer. Through some unknowable spiritual means, God temporarily separated himself from his incarnate Son when he became the sin-bearer; that separation was spiritual death. God's punishment against sin was pressed against Christ who took upon himself the guilt of man's sin. *Christ suffered all that was evil in his separation from all that is God.* Then, having paid the spiritual penalty, Christ suffered the physical penalty for the crime of sin, physical death. He died on the cross. He bowed his head, and through an act of personal volition he separated his immaterial soul from his physical body. Did God accept his death—spiritual and physical—as a sufficient satisfaction for the crime of man's imputed sin? Yes. Just before his physical death Christ commended his soul into God's care for safe-keeping, indicating the spiritual separation was past and communion was restored. Then, Christ resurrected out from among the dead, indicating he had made a full and complete payment for the crime of sin. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cooperated to re-unite Christ's soul with his body, and to glorify his body so that he could never suffer death again. Christ's resurrection is proof positive that he endured the full punishment for those sins imputed to him; proof positive that faith in him redeems the sinner from death.

Now we understand sin, the crime of sin, and the punishment of sin. What is redemption? The most

basic idea of redemption is an exchange. I exchange something of value for the item I want to redeem. The item being redeemed is under the control of another; it is owned or controlled by someone else. I might redeem a lawbreaker from the possession and control of the police through an exchange of something of equal or greater value: a bail bond. The redemption of a sinner's soul is more serious, and the item of exchange of far greater value: Christ, acting out of his great love, redeems the sinner out of enslavement to sin through the offering of his own soul. In the theology of redemption, sin is viewed as the owner of the sinner's soul; the soul is viewed as the property—the slave—of sin. Sin is constantly "selling" his slave to do evil; to do acts of sin. Remember the statements and examples I gave earlier to define sin. Evil is as God defines it, not as the sinner might define it. As a sinner I might say that I am not as bad as the next man—I haven't killed anyone. God says every sin is the product of evil and the punishment for every sin is death. Sin enslaves the soul and sells it to do evil. More than this, unless the soul is redeemed, the eventual destiny of every slave of sin is an eternal death. The redemption price for the human soul, the thing of greater value that redeems the sinner's soul from sin and death, is the soul of Christ, enduring the punishment of sin and death on the cross. The suffering of his soul—enduring God's wrath, spiritual separation, physical death—was the price required to buy the sinner out of the slave market of sin and eternal death.

How, then, is this transaction of redemption accomplished? Sin forms a barrier between the sinner and God. The sinner cannot breach that barrier except by the instrument of personal faith in Christ as Savior. God will reach out to the sinner only through the love he has expressed in the redemptive death of Christ. God presents this testimony to every sinner: "*In My love for you, Christ suffered the penalty due to you for your sin, to redeem you out of sin and death.*" That was the redemption price. God's love met the crime of sin by sending his Son to die for your sin. How do you, personally, apply that redemption price to your need? It is there, waiting for you to accept it. God holds it out to you: if you will believe that you are a sinner needing salvation; that no efforts of your own can save your soul; that Jesus Christ died for your sins; then God will save your soul by applying Christ's payment for your sin to the spiritual need of your soul. God will forgive your sins and give you eternal life. How can you receive God's gift of salvation in Christ? Faith is believing that God's testimony is true; faith is taking action just because I do believe. Faith is the hand of your soul reaching out to take God's gift of salvation, and apply it to your soul to take away the guilt and penalty of sin. As the apostle Paul said to one sinner (Acts 16:31), "right now and once for all, take the keeping of your soul out of your hands, and place the eternal destiny and well-being of your soul into the hands of Christ, for him to keep it safe for eternity." The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). God's holiness and justice demanded that sin be paid for before there could be any relationship between you and God; and then in mercy God's love sent his Son to be the way of redemption. God himself paid the penalty for the punishment his justice demands for your crime of sin. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation [payment] for [the crime of] our sins" (1 John 4:10). He has made your faith in his Son—as the one who paid for the crime of your sin—to be the means of your salvation.

As the Writer states in v. 15, by means of his death Christ became the mediator of a new covenant. There are two results from the covenant established by his death. First, sinners are redeemed from the transgressions under the first covenant. Second, those who are the called (the redeemed) receive the promise of eternal inheritance. As to the redemption, the original covenant with Israel was the covenant with Abraham. As Paul notes, Galatians 3:17, the Law, which was given 430 years later, did not annul the Abrahamic covenant. The inheritance is from the promise to Abraham, not in the Law given through Moses. The Law was given because of the transgressions of the people, a means, as I have previously explained, to safeguard believers until the purposes of God in Christ should be fulfilled.⁴⁹ The redeemed people in view are those who are "the seed of Abraham", Hebrews 2:16, which people are not solely the faithful Israelites, but all who are "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus . . . and if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's

⁴⁹ For the one who sins, the obligations of the Law (its commandments) are intended to reveal sin. The righteous power of the Law is to accuse man of his sin. If an atonement for sin is not made, then the Law is "a ministry of condemnation and death" for it then changes from accuser to prosecutor. Only in the propitiating blood of Christ the sinner's advocate can the voice of the Law be silenced.

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seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26, 29). The redemption of Christ obviously applies to New Testament believers—those who have had faith in Christ subsequent to his first advent (his birth, death, resurrection, ascension). The Writer is also saying that the efficacy of this redemption extends retroactively to those who trusted in the Old Testament promises [that looked forward] to the time of their fulfillment in his coming (as vv. 16-22 explain). The perfection that is ours in Christ is theirs also.⁵⁰ The faith expressed by the Old Testament believers through the old covenant is rewarded—better, fulfilled—by the new covenant in Christ; their faith in the first covenant caused them to be included in the new covenant.

Second, the promises made to Abraham are the basis for the new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah and founded in Christ. One must bear in mind that the promises made to Abraham were not made to the Jews alone, but to every person who has faith in God's promise of redemption and reward, whether they are of the past, present, or future. God promised Abraham an everlasting covenant, an innumerable posterity,⁵¹ and everlasting possession of the land. The covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:12-17) added an eternal kingdom and Messianic King to the promises made to Abraham. Those who are called in Christ do receive the promised eternal inheritance (cf. Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18; Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4).⁵² The partial fulfillments to be found in Israel's previous occupation of the land under David and Solomon did not exhaust the "everlasting" nature of the promise. These were in a sense "signs" pointing to the final fulfillment to be literally experienced by a resurrected Abraham and all his physical and spiritual posterity who, with him, believe the promises of God, and receive the grace of salvation in Christ, v. 15. The effectual call of God to receive the inheritance is inclusive of all believers past, present and future to the initiation of the new covenant in Christ; the blessings of the new covenant are extended to all who believe with faithful Abraham. "God, who has made provision for the blessings of this eternal inheritance also by his calling, guarantees that there will be inheritors to enter into the enjoyment of it, for his calling⁵³ is always an indefectibly effectual calling."⁵⁴

16 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

17 For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

To understand the Writer's thought, a few definitions are in order. A "mediator" is a person who intervenes in a dispute to bring about an agreement of reconciliation. A "covenant," v. 15, 18 in a theological context, is an agreement held to be the basis of a relationship with God. A "testament," is a "will," which is a person's final expression for the disposition of his possessions. A "testator" is the person who has made the "will." An "executor" is a person appointed by the testator to carry out the terms of their will. A "surety" is a person who takes legal responsibility to ensure someone will do something. All these terms will come into play as we look into these verses.

In v. 16, the new covenant is being viewed as a "will" or "testament" made by Christ, who is the "testator," i.e. the one who made the testament. For the new "testament" to become effective, then the person who made it, the "testator," must die. A will or testament comes into force only after the testator dies:

- For where there is a [last will and] testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the one who made the testament. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the one who made the testament is living.

In the Writer's presentation, the new covenant replaces the old covenant because the death of Christ caused the new covenant to become effective. We need not be confused by the application of different terms and positions to Christ. He is both the one in whose death the covenant was made, and he is the ever-living

⁵⁰ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 367.

⁵¹ Abraham was promised a physical posterity: like the sand of the sea in number; and a spiritual posterity: like the stars in number.

⁵² There are a few quantitative differences in the inheritance between the physical posterity and the spiritual posterity in the messianic kingdom, but receipt of the promises is certain.

⁵³ Do not question if you are "called" to redemption, because all are morally obligated by God to repent of their sins and have faith in Christ. If you by faith believe in Jesus as your Savior, then you are called to redemption and inheritance.

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 368.

Hebrews Nine

mediator of the covenant. He is both the testator and the executor of the testament. Some have difficulty accepting that Christ the testator could also be the executor of the testament he has made; for in life, the testator dies and the executor enforces the provisions of the testament. "But all analogies from ordinary life must be defective when they are applied to him who rose from the dead and is thus able personally to secure for his people the benefits which he died to procure for them. He is testator and executor in one, surety and mediator alike."⁵⁵ Christ is the one (the testator) who made the new testament, he is the one (the executor) who carries out its terms and conditions, he is the guarantee (the surety) that the new testament will be effective, and he is the one who mediates the new testament between God and man.

18 Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood.

19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, 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 has commanded you."

As the Writer continues his argument, we remember that a testament could not be validated and enacted as long as the testator was alive. In vv. 18-20 the Writer assumes the death of the testator in an analogy between the dedication (enactment) of the old covenant to illustrate the dedication (enactment) of the new. The old/first covenant was enacted with blood. Although literal blood was used from animal sacrifices, the blood is a symbol for the death of a testator. Moses stated the terms and conditions of the Law. The people agreed to accept the Law as the rule of their life (Exodus 24:7). Moses then dedicated the covenant by sprinkling blood on the book of the Law and on the people. The book of the Law served as a symbol of God who gave the Law. The blood served as a symbol of the death of the testator that validated and caused the provisions of the covenant to be enacted.

There are variations between the Writer's account in Hebrews and Moses' account in Exodus. Moses wrote, Exodus 24:3-8,

- "So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words which the Lord has said we will do.' And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.' And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.'"

The Hebrews account mentions the blood of calves, which could correspond to the oxen in the Exodus account. The Hebrews account mentions the blood of goats, which the Exodus account does not, but the Exodus account does note that peace offerings were made, and Leviticus 3 allowed a goat to be offered as a peace offering, as well as an oxen (an offering of the herd). In the Exodus account, Moses put half the blood on the altar, but in Hebrews the blood is sprinkled on the book. As "almost everything" was dedicated with blood, there is no reason to assume Moses did not also sprinkle the book of the law. Exodus does not tell us the means Moses used for sprinkling the blood, but one may assume the Holy Spirit inspired the Writer of Hebrews to know Moses mixed the blood with water, and used wool and hyssop (a spiky plant) as the instruments for sprinkling. The wool would be scarlet because dyed red by the blood. I am content there are no contradictions between the accounts, but that the Writer is doing that which other New Testament authors did, supplementing the Old Testament accounts with divinely provided knowledge (e.g., compare Exodus 7:11 with 2 Timothy 3:8). Both old and new covenants were dedicated with the blood of the testator.

⁵⁵ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 224.

21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry.

The tabernacle was built after the covenant was dedicated. However, this sprinkling of blood upon the tabernacle and the vessels took place at the consecration of the priests, Exodus 29:12; Leviticus 8:15; and on the day of atonement. The Writer's point is that blood was continually required to dedicate the people, priests, and tabernacle for their holy work.

22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

Although there were a few exceptions (Leviticus 5:11; Numbers 16:46; 31:22ff; 31:50), these exceptions were notable because everything else was cleansed by blood. The rule was, blood had to be shed for the remission of sins (to "remit" is to cancel the penalty). Looking to the many rules (Leviticus) regarding the sacrificial shedding of blood, a solid argument may be made that the shed blood must in some manner be applied for its cleansing value to be effective. The shed blood was either sprinkled on the altar, sprinkled all around on the altar, drained out at the side of the altar, or applied to the horns of the altar. We may legitimately expand this verse to bring out its true meaning: "without the shedding and application of the blood of the sacrifice, there is no cancellation of the penalty of sin." The spiritual application to Christ's death should be plain: the shed blood of Jesus Christ—his propitiating death—must be applied to the sinner's soul by faith, if it is to be effective to cancel the penalty due the sinner for his/her sin.

23 Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The word "these" in both occurrences refers to the shedding of blood—the animal sacrifices—required to dedicate the law and consecrate the people, priests, tabernacle and its vessels for their work. The subject here is not purification from defilement, but dedication or consecration (v. 18) for the purposes God has set for these things. (That earthly things must be purified in order to be dedicated to God is assumed.) The Writer's focus is on the result of purification, which is (was) the consecration of the people and the Law to fit the divine purpose. Animal blood, religious rites, and priestly ceremonies sufficed for the shadows and copies. But the genuine tabernacle in heaven required the blood of the Savior, v. 12, for its consecration. "Consecration" means to be devoted to sacred use. Only Christ's blood could make the genuine propitiation for sin that resulted in the consecration of the heavenly tabernacle to fulfill God's salvific purposes. The heavenly things were not purified by Christ's blood, they required Christ's blood to consecrate them for the divine purpose, which was to open the way into God's presence.

The "better sacrifices" (note the plural "sacrifices") narratively parallels the many sacrifices under the old covenant that were required to consecrate the many "copies" of the things in the heavens. Many "copies," that is, many and varied ceremonies and many and varied sacrifices, were required to communicate the infinite truth found in the one heavenly sanctuary. But, just as there is one sanctuary in heaven, even so there is one better sacrifice to consecrate the heavenly sanctuary. All the sacrifices of the old covenant (the burnt, the meal, the peace, the sin, the trespass) were needed to teach the manifold truth concerning the one, once for all, sacrifice of Christ; all were included in, fulfilled by, and superseded through the one sacrifice of Christ. The use of the plural "sacrifices," then, ("the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices") to refer to Christ's one sacrifice, is a figure of speech known as an "enallage," where the plural is put for the singular by way of emphasis. The plural "heavenly things," and the plural "sacrifices" emphasizes the superlative excellence of the heavenly sanctuary and the one offering of Christ, denoting the one genuine spiritual reality seen in the many copies and shadows of the Law.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Pink, *Hebrews*, 519.

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24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—

26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

The context formed by the day of atonement, vv. 6-10, as well as the immediate context of vv. 11, 23, "Christ came with a better sacrifice," must be kept in mind. Through his Person and work, Christ superseded the Levitical high priest in every way. Christ took his own blood into the presence of God, and presented himself with his blood as the genuine propitiation for sin. If his sacrifice had not been the genuine propitiation, then he would have needed to suffer repeatedly for the repeated sins of his people, for whom he is their priest. Since it is evident that he did this once, then it is evident his sacrifice was a true propitiation, and he never need do it again.⁵⁷ At the end of the ages, to accomplish one sacrifice for sin, in order to redeem sinners, the Son became incarnate, the God-man, that he might (out of love toward his creation) offer himself to God as a propitiation (satisfaction or payment) for the crime of sin (1 John 2:2; 4:10). The term, "the end of the ages," has some parallels in other Scripture, e.g., in Matthew 13:39, where it indicates the end of the church age and the beginning of the messianic age, and in 1 Corinthians 10:11 and 1 Peter 1:20, where it means the present church age. However, in relationship to Christ's first advent and sacrificial death, "the end of the ages" means that "his coming made that time the time of fulfillment,"⁵⁸ corresponding to Galatians 4:4-5. His coming accomplished the cancellation of the penalty, the power, the pleasure, and ultimately the presence of sin, for all who believe on him as Savior.

27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

The Writer brings finality to his argument that Christ has died one time only for sin. Christ was made like his brethren in all things, 2:11, 14, sharing flesh and blood, life and death. And as it is ordained by God that a human being should die only once, it is patently absurd that Christ should die for sin more than once. He made himself an offering for the sins of the many; and for the many who believe on him, he will come again and receive them unto himself, taking them into heaven, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. The phrase "a second time, apart from sin" simply means what has been said before, he died once for sin. The "salvation" that he brings with him at his second appearing is "all the blessings which he won for his people at his first appearing. Therefore, let them not grow faint and weary but persevere in patience and faith."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ I cannot forego a word against the Roman Catholic Mass. Roman Catholic doctrine teaches that the Mass is a re-enactment of the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. However, their doctrine also teaches the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine used in the Mass. In accordance with their doctrines, their mass is not simply a re-enactment, but is a continual re-sacrificing of Jesus for sin. Scripture states his sacrifice was made once and once for all.

⁵⁸ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 231.

⁵⁹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 233.

HEBREWS 10:1-18

1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

The Greek text of v. 1 reads “for the law having a shadow of the coming good things, not the image itself of the things, year by year with the same sacrifices which they offer continually, never is able to perfect those who approach.” The opening “for” (Greek: *gar*¹) is explanatory² and looks back to the arguments of chapters eight and nine. The divinely designed limitations of the Law (Christ, not the Law, was purposed as the means of salvation) are contrasted with the fully qualified priesthood of the Son. The Law must forever offer sacrifices, but the Son need offer his sacrifice but once. His sacrifice purifies the conscience of the worshiper, making those who believe in him as Savior qualified to approach God (10:19-22).

The Law is imperfect or incomplete (*skia*: the shadow, a shape similar to the reality and closely related to it, yet vastly different³). The Law is not defective in and of itself; quite simply, the intrinsic limitations imposed by this earthly, material reality make impossible a perfect representation of the reality of the heavenly, spiritual truth. (These limitations are not so much the physical laws regulating life in the material plane of existence, as the finite limitations of man's spiritual understanding, especially as corrupted by the sin nature.) The Law is not the perfect heavenly reality. Within the boundaries of its necessary limitations, the Law can only indistinctly represent the spiritual reality. The Writer captures this by saying that the Law is not the very *eikon*, “image” of the good things to come. The word *eikon* means more than a resemblance or likeness. The word indicates a representation, such as a statue of a man is the *eikoin* of the man who posed for the statue. When this word is used it “always assumes a prototype, that which it not merely resembles but from which it is drawn. Thus, the reflection of the sun on the water is *eikon*.”⁴ Within the limitations of its copies and shadows, the Law gave an indication of the good things to come, but could not give very *eikon* of the good things. In more modern terms, one might say the Law did not provide a photograph of the good things to come, but presented them in a likeness similar to an impressionist painting,⁵ which captures something of the form without the details or substance. As the *skia* of spiritual reality, the Law allowed the Old Testament believers to catch a glimpse of the good things to come, but the greater fullness and higher meaning of the spiritual reality was hidden from them in the necessary copies and shadows of the Law. That greater, fuller, and higher reality is seen in the incarnate Son.

However, let us not take this argument where the Writer does not take it. These “same sacrifices” were not useless in their historical context, and the “good things to come” that they represented were in and of themselves “good things” to the worshiper; the future may have been indistinct, but the present reality was sharp and clearly focused. The Old Testament sacrifices had a validity and spiritual use for the faith of the Old Testament believer. He was not aware that his faith rested in a copy and shadow of a higher spiritual reality. The things that he believed in, and the sacrifices he made to atone for his sins, were to him genuine spiritual realities, although expressed in certain physical acts. These physical events spoke to him of the spiritual reality of peace with God. The Old Testament believer under the Law understood that fellowship with God was found through obedience to the obligations of the law and forgiveness of sin through faith in YHWH, who required the sacrifices and other religious rites and ceremonies, that the believer willingly performed as

¹ The NIV omits the opening *gar*, preferring instead to interpret the sentence for the reader. In so doing, the NIV ignores the connection with the Writer's arguments in 8:3-5; 9:23-26.

² The HCSB translates *gar* as a confirmation or assurance, “Since the law...”, and like the NIV misses the connection with 8:3-5; 9:23-26.

³ Hagner, *Hebrews*, 128.

⁴ Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 512.

⁵ The impressionist painter attempted to capture the general impression of visual reality (a scene or object) in terms of the transient effects of light and color. They used unmixed primary colors and small brush strokes to simulate reflected light. A good example is Monet's “Garden at Giverny,” or “Impression: soleil levant.”

Hebrews 10:1-18

the expression of his faith. This was the content of his faith. He did not see Jesus Christ in the tabernacle and its services, nor was he supposed to—that would require a divinely inspired prescience that, if given, would have defeated the purpose of the Law. That the Law did not, in and of itself, bring men to a knowledge of Jesus Christ is a fact discovered in the Gospels, where one sees that 1500 years of temple and sacrifices, types and prophecies, did not inform the priests or the people sufficiently to recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of those copies, types, shadows, and prophecies.

These sacrifices, then, faithfully served their purpose within their historical religious environment, always demonstrating the spiritual realities, but never distinctly revealing the greater, higher spiritual reality that they foreshadowed of Christ. They did have a recognizable spiritual reality that would, or could, inform the faith of the Old Testament saint. Just as with a believer today, serious contemplation of the word of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, enables the believer to perceive truth contained in the content of faith. Under the Old Testament economy, the spiritual reality in their content of faith, as seen in the copies and shadows of the tabernacle services, could be perceived by the man or woman of faith: the penalty of sin is death; the imputation of sin's penalty to a substitute; the vicarious death of the sinner in the substitute; and atonement of sin's penalty through the death of the sacrifice. All these things were there to see for those with eyes spiritually enlightened by faith and the Holy Spirit. But that these very things were to be accomplished once and once for all through one person, whose spiritual merit would give infinite worth to his sacrifice, thereby eliminating the need for sacrifice, this was unknown and unknowable to the Old Testament believer. The Old Testament believer could not understand that he was witnessing the Person and work of the Son of God in the types, copies and shadows. If he could have perceived the Son in the sacrifices, then he would have perceived the reality of the Son's work. Had he perceived the reality of the Son's redeeming work, then he would have perceived the Son's one sacrifice to be the spiritual reality promised in the Old Testament sacrifices. If he could have, then, perceived that spiritual reality that is the offering of the Son of God, he would have ceased to bring the sacrifices.

Therefore, the Writer's argument is not the immediate insufficiency of the same sacrifices offered year by year, because those sacrifices were immediately sufficient to satisfy the faith of the worshiper. His argument is that those sacrifices were not in themselves the true spirituality reality that would have made continual sacrifices unnecessary. In and of themselves, they had no spiritual power. "These same sacrifices" served their immediate purpose in the history of redemption. But because they were the *skia* of the true reality, and not the very *eikon* of that reality, they could not give the Old Testament worshiper a new spiritual reality (a full propitiation for sin), that would once for all change his position before God through spiritual regeneration (born-again), that would have made further sacrifice unnecessary. In the Writer's words, the Old Testament sacrifices could not make the worshipers "perfect."⁶ The word "perfect" is the Greek *teleioo*, used before in 2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; here in 10:1, 14; 11:40, and 12:23. Here the word can bear the sense of "fully qualified." The sacrifices of the Law could not in and of themselves qualify even one person for heaven. They were the shadow that looked forward to the reality, therefore, in and of themselves, they did not have spiritual power. The Old Testament believers did, however, become qualified for heaven when through faith on YHWH as Savior they performed the sacrifices. They became qualified for heaven in the same way today's sinners become qualified to enter heaven, by grace through faith. Their faith in God's testimony of forgiveness, as presented in the Law and its sacrifices, was by grace given genuine spiritual power by the yet-future qualifying sacrifice of Jesus Christ so that, Hebrews 9:15, their faith (in what to the New Testament believer is but shadows and copies and types) saved them from their sins. Today there are no shadows and copies and types. Today, faith is required in God's testimony concerning the genuine spiritual reality: Jesus saves.

The death of Christ was effective for those under the first covenant because its occurrence was certain. The decree of God for the salvation of sinners was the surety that the event of the cross and resurrection would occur at a particular moment in history. The certainty of the event was the basis upon which God could and did decree that the Son's work on the cross would be efficacious throughout all time to all who believed

⁶ The animal sacrifices could not cause the spiritual regeneration necessary to transform sinners into willingly obedient worshipers.

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in him (the one true God) through active faith in their particular content of faith. Therefore, again Hebrews 9:15, God could decree that the redemption accomplished by the new covenant, which was established at a particular moment in time by a certain historical event, would be the basis for salvation under the old covenant. When the genuine spiritual reality appeared and was accomplished in the Person of the incarnate Son of God, the salvation implicit under the Law (and in every preceding dispensation) became explicit in Christ. He is every believer's fully qualified high priest (2:10; 5:9), who has by his one sacrifice made all his people fully qualified for heaven, 10:14. All those, from Adam forward, who are saved from the guilt and penalty of sin, are saved by the Person and work of Jesus Christ, as expressed through their particular content of faith.

The New Testament believer in Jesus as Savior has had his/her conscience cleansed from the guilt of sin (9:14), therefore no other sacrifice for sin need ever be offered again. "The forgiven sinner is not insensitive to sin,"⁷ but he knows that he is forgiven in Christ, and is thereby delivered from fear of judgment."⁸ The New Covenant is enacted in every believer in Jesus Christ, the soul purified, the conscience cleansed. It is this last thought, so brilliantly expressed in 9:15, 28, that forms the link between the preceding chapter and 10:1-18. As Lane states, "in 9:11-28 the writer considers the 'objective' benefits of Christ's sacrificial offering . . . But in 10:1-18 the writer elaborates the 'subjective' effects of Christ's offering for the community that enjoys the blessings of the new covenant . . . The function of 10:1-18 is to clarify the subjective benefits of salvation reviewed in 9:13-14, where the writer referred specifically to the decisive purgation [cleansing] of the conscience of the worshiper."⁹ In Christ, the believer is freed from the consciousness of the judicial guilt and penalty of sin.

Excursus: the Israelite's theocratic and salvific relationships to God.

The Old Testament Israelite had a relationship with God that the New Testament believer does not have, and it is this relationship that partly explains the insufficiency of the Old Testament sacrifices to the individual Israelite. The Old Testament Israelite had a theocratic relationship with God on the basis of having been born into the covenant people. A "theocracy" is government by God, and nationally the Israelites were governed by God's legal code. The Israelite had a relationship to the theocracy by birth, and therefore had a relationship by birth with the head of that theocracy, God, regardless of his spiritual state. He was a member of a nation governed by God and in covenant with God. As long as there was a theocracy, the Israelite was related to God theocratically. When an Israelite sinned, it was a sin against the theocracy, i.e., against the government and against God as the theocratic ruler, or king. Obedience to the Law was the primary means of maintaining and restoring that theocratic relationship. Should a member of the covenant sin by breaking the Law, a sacrifice of the Law restored the offender to his position as a worshiper of YHWH and restored the theocratic relationship. Bringing a sacrifice satisfied the broken legal code by making an atonement for the offender in relationship to the broken law. Viewed from the perspective of their function within the theocracy, the offerings themselves could not automatically effect spiritual salvation. Their primary use was a civil function to maintain or restore the relationship between the citizen and God his king. Thus, a salvific faith is not in view in the covenant, theocratic, governmental relationship. When the sacrifices were performed to restore a believer's civil, covenant relationship with God as the king of Israel, then they could not make the conscience perfect in regard to the guilt and eternal penalty of sin. The modern religious analogy would be performing religious works because they are required to maintain a denominational affiliation (e.g., baptism for church membership, not as a testimony of faith; confession to a priest, versus confession and repentance toward God). Such works—and the list is virtually endless—require endless repetition for every infraction relevant to the rules of the particular denominational relationship. So too with

⁷ One of the characteristics of the believer is a sensitivity to sin: sin and sinning bother the believer, and he cannot rest until he has confessed his sin and restored his soul to fellowship with God, 1 John 1:9.

⁸ MacArthur, *Hebrews*, 250.

⁹ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 258.

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the sacrifices performed to maintain one's governmental (theocratic) relationship with God.

Some Israelites were related to God spiritually, i.e., by their faith in God as their personal Savior. The content of Old Testament faith was in God's testimony that sin could be forgiven through offering the appropriate sacrifice in faith with repentance and confession. For this act to be saving faith the object of their faith must be God himself, not the sacrifices. The sacrifices, whether viewed from a theocratic or a salvific perspective, required confession of sin. Bringing the sacrifice implied the need for repentance, but the implicit requirement of the Law for repentance was not the same as an explicit repentance given in godly sorrow for sin. To bring a sacrifice because the legal code required it was not the same as bringing a sacrifice because of faith in YHWH as personal Savior. The New Testament faith is the same, for one believes *on* Christ, i.e., believes that through faith in Christ God forgives sin. The object of saving faith is the God who saves, the content of saving faith is to bring to God the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the basis of God's forgiveness is the application, by grace, of the eternal efficacy of Christ's propitiation (his death for our sin and resurrection for our justification). An individual Israelite's spiritual salvation during the Mosaic economy of Law was the same: belief in the God who saves, through the sacrifice that pointed to redemption from sin, on the basis of God's forgiveness through the application, by grace, of the eternal efficacy of Christ's propitiation. If we ask whether or not the Israelite understood all these details, we should we not also ask how many Christians understand the details behind "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved"? Faith in God as Savior, not faith in the details, is what saves.

The revelation of God in the Old Testament did not directly reveal 'believe on the Lord Jesus Christ' as the Savior, nor directly reveal that the basis of saving faith was Christ's propitiation. But, the eternal efficacy of Christ's propitiation for sin was the basis, the only basis, on which faith in YHWH could redeem the individual Old Testament believer. The content of saving faith in the Mosaic economy was to bring a sacrifice for sin as the fruit of faith in God as Savior. On the other hand, the content of theocratic faith was to restore the governmental relationship through a sacrifice of the Law. This may seem a fine line to some readers, i.e., bringing a sacrifice to restore the broken law and theocratic relationship, or bringing a sacrifice as the fruit of personal faith in God as Savior. However, the same distinctions may be made today between people who perform religious exercises to maintain a legal relationship with their god, and people who perform religious exercises because they have faith in God as Savior. The superior revelation of God in Christ given to the New Testament believer makes salvation in the Old Testament economy seem different, if we look to the content by which their faith was expressed. However, if one looks to their faith and God's grace, then salvation from Adam forward is the same. Faith is a gift from God, Ephesians 2:8-9, resulting in the absolute conviction that God is "my" Savior. The content of faith, whether that of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, or Peter, does not change the basic message of saved by grace alone, through faith alone. The revelation of God in Christ given to the New Testament believer fully reveals, but does not change or supersede, that basic salvation message: saved by grace alone, through faith alone, as expressed in the revealed content of faith, made effective by Christ's propitiation.

In relation to the argument of Hebrews, if I might reason from the Scripture, one never sees certain Old Testament believers under the Law, for example Moses, Joshua, Ruth and Boaz, David, Elijah, or Elisha, bringing a sacrifice for personal salvation from personal sin. Their faith in God as Savior had saved them. Although I believe they did bring an appropriate sacrifice at appropriate times, as the fruit of their faith, the Holy Spirit did need to demonstrate their faith by showing them bringing a sacrifice. As the Writer points out, the general rule in the Mosaic economy was that a consciousness of sin remained. Viewed theocratically the Mosaic sacrifices were not designed to bring the cleansing of conscience that would result from Christ's sacrifice (propitiation). Viewed redemptively, while the object of his faith was God, obedience to the law and the offering of sacrifices was part of the content of his faith. The faith of the Old Testament believer resulted in him bringing the sacrifices as the fruit of his saving faith, which also included forgiveness for acts of sin, serving the same purpose as 1 John 1:9 does for the New Testament believer.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

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The specific sacrifice the Writer has in mind is the day of atonement; but the sacrifices of this one day represent all sacrifices for sin that were made every day under the old covenant. In the annual sacrifice there was an annual reminder of personal sin. The Old Testament believer would have said there was an annual removal of sins,¹⁰ but in their repetition, there was an acknowledgment that the sacrifices could not actually purge them away; thus, the sacrifices were a reminder of their continuing sins. Ironside gives a wonderful illustration. "Let us suppose," he says, "one is in debt for a certain sum of money. He gives a promissory note to run for a year. At the end of the year he finds himself unable to pay. He renews the note. The note has no real value in itself . . . But in that note there is a reminder [an acknowledgment] of the debt from year to year."¹¹ That the sacrifices continued to be offered from year to year was sufficient proof that the spiritual value of the blood of the bulls and goats poured out at the altar and sprinkled on the mercy seat was limited. The repetition of the same sacrifices proved they did not have the spiritual worth to permanently cancel the guilt and penalty of sins. Moreover, in more than one place in the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah 1:11-20) the Lord denounces the ritual offering of sacrificial animals, because the blood of bulls and goats had no value at all when offered without faith; it is faith that saves. When offered in faith, the immediate spiritual value¹² of the animal was that which God had given it in the Law: to cleanse the offeror from the immediate sense of moral conscience and defilement caused by his past sins. The sacrifices were also, however, illustrations of spiritual reality that pointed faith to Jesus Christ who takes away the sin of the world! In the ending words of Ironside's illustration, "Now let us now suppose that some one who is well able to pay endorses the note, what then? When it becomes due, it is referred to him for settlement and he discharges the obligation."¹³ Even so, Christ took upon himself the obligation to pay the sin debt for our sins, and discharged that obligation in his one sacrifice for sin.

Therefore, listen, you who think your good deeds, or good thoughts, or good intentions will get you into heaven. If the works of faith that God gave to Israel were but a copy and shadow of the true way in Jesus Christ; and if the commandment of God's Law to offer the blood of bulls and goats could not perfectly purge the conscience from the continuing sense of "guilty" for the crime of sin; then why do you persist in believing your man-made efforts will satisfy God for the guilt of your sin? Your personal efforts to deal with sin are "a promissory note of no real value." Your works are of much lesser value than the sacrificial, vicarious, substitutionary offering of the blood of bulls and goats, which could *never* take away sin; and so your good works, good deeds, good thoughts, and good intentions, can never take away the guilt and penalty of your sin. The Writer of Hebrews is telling you: only the work of Christ and faith in him will "cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

5 Therefore, when He came¹⁴ into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.

7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.'"

The original for this quotation is presumed to be Psalm 40:6-8, which the Writer of Hebrews interprets as the Son speaking to the Father. In Hebrews the quotation is from the Septuagint version, which differs a little from the Masoretic (Hebrew text) version, presented below:

¹⁰ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 237.

¹¹ Ironside, *Hebrews*, 116.

¹² Although I have not mentioned it before, one should note that the animals used for sacrifices were under the curse of sin that affects all creation, Genesis 3:15; Romans 8:22. Although the animals themselves were innocent of sin, the universal corruption caused by man's sin had some effect on the spiritual worth of the sacrifices. This is a consideration when we read Hebrews 10:4, 6, 8, and 11.

¹³ Ironside, *Hebrews*, 116.

¹⁴ "There is no question that the author is convinced about the reality of the pre-existence of Christ" (Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 205-206).

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- "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering¹⁵ You did not require. Then I said, 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God. And Your law is within my heart.'"

The two texts differ significantly in one place. The Hebrew language version reads, v. 6, "my ears you have opened" or more literally, "ears you have dug for me." The Septuagint (Greek language) version reads, "you have fashioned (prepared) a body for me." Hebrew's Writer has a preference for the Septuagint version in his quotations, probably, as I have previously noted, because this was the version his readers were using. What might account for the difference between the two Old Testament versions? Bruce suggests the Septuagint is a translator's interpretation. Since digging out the ears is a part of the total work of fashioning a human body, the Septuagint translator rendered the phrase in an expression that envisioned the entire body as given back to God as a living sacrifice.¹⁶ However, this sense does not quite fit with the use of the Psalm in the epistle to the Hebrews, where obedience is the primary object in view. For a better sense we turn to Owen, who viewed the expression, "ears you have dug for me" as a synecdoche, (a figure of speech) which is the use of a part for the whole, in this instance the ears for the body.

- "That which is spoken of is an act of God the Father toward the Son. The end of it is, that the Son might be fit and meet to do the will of God in the way of obedience. So it is expressed in the text, 'Mine ears hast thou bored,' or, 'A body hast thou prepared for me. . . . Then said I, Lo, I come to do your will, O God.' This is the sole end why God so acted toward Christ. Why this was, is so expressed in the Psalmist, 'Mine ears hast thou bored,' with a double figure: (1) A metaphor from the ear, wherewith we hear the commands we are to obey. . . . Wherefore the ascription of ears unto the Lord Christ by an act of God, is the preparation of such a state and nature for him as wherein he should be meet to yield obedience unto him. (2.) By a synecdoche, wherein the part is put for the whole. In his divine nature alone it was impossible that the Lord Christ should come to do the will of God in the way whereby he was to do it. Wherefore God prepared another nature for him, which is expressed synecdochically, by the ears for the whole body; and that significantly, because as it is impossible that any one should have ears of any use but by virtue of his having a body, so the ears are that part of the body by which alone instruction unto obedience, the thing aimed at, is received. . . . it respects the framing of the organ of hearing, which is as it were bored; and the internal sense, in readiness unto obedience, is expressed by the framing of the outward instrument of hearing, that we may learn to obey thereby."¹⁷

"The Psalmist is stressing the inadequacy and unacceptability of the sacrifices of the levitical system apart from a life of obedience to the will of God. The original form, 'ears thou hast dug for me,' means simply, 'thou hast caused me to hear and obey thy will,' . . . as Moffat comments, 'the Greek text meant practically what the original had meant, and it made this interpretation or application [in Hebrews] possible, namely, that there was a sacrifice which answered to the will of God as no animal sacrifice could.'"¹⁸ The overall picture is a clear statement (as the Psalm is interpreted by the Writer of Hebrews) of the explicit intent of the Son. He became incarnate with the purpose of accomplishing the will of God in the plan of salvation, which "sacrifice and offering" and "burnt offering and sin offering" could not accomplish. Instead of these former sacrifices, whose efficacy had been limited,¹⁹ the Son would come into the world in a body and with a will suited to accomplish the salvific plan and purposes of God: full payment of the penalty of sin through the once-for-all sacrifice of himself as the sin-bearer.

This quotation from Psalm 40 is used by the Writer as a biblical statement of the sacrifice which *could*

¹⁵ The four words used, "sacrifices (*thysia*), offerings (*prospora*), burnt offerings (*holokautomata*), and sin offerings (*peri hamartias*) . . . together fairly sum up the whole Levitical system" (Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 204).

¹⁶ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 240.

¹⁷ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:458-459.

¹⁸ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 397.

¹⁹ Limited not simply by God's design that the Son, not the Law, would be the Savior, but in that the sacrifices were all too often offered religiously, i.e., merely ceremonially or ritually: without conviction of and repentance from sin, and without personal faith in the efficacy of the sacrifices to allow grace to convey forgiveness.

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take away sins.²⁰ The Writer considers the verse as appropriate to Messiah in his incarnation, meaning, not the act of incarnation, but the purpose intended by the incarnation, which was, v. 10, the willing offering of his body. Let us first understand this quote in the context of the entire Psalm, as an original reader of the Psalm, and as the Psalmist himself, would have understood it. Perowne gives a concise statement of the meaning of this passage in its original context.

- "Here, after speaking of the blessedness of trusting in YHWH and of the wonders of his goodness, not only to the singer [Psalmist] himself, but to all Israel (cf. 73:1), he further declares what had been the great lesson of his affliction,—how he had learnt that there was a better sacrifice than that of bulls and goats, even the sacrifice of an obedient will; and how, moreover, he had found that this truth which God had opened his ears to receive (v. 6) was in most perfect harmony with the truth taught in the written law (v. 7); and lastly, how, constrained by a sense of gratitude, he had published to 'the great congregation' the lovingkindness and truth of the Lord."²¹

In this explanation, one can see that the original intention of the Psalmist is caught and expressed by the Writer of Hebrews. Sacrifice and offerings, burnt offerings and sacrifices for sins, are the result of disobedience; they are not required where obedience is practiced (cf. 1 Timothy 1:9). Therefore, the Psalmist learned the importance of obedience over sacrifice. Even so, the Law, in its unremitting requirement for obedience, and its continual provision for disobedience (the sacrifices), demonstrated the failure of the people to fully satisfy a holy God. In the plan of salvation, made in the eternity before creation, God the Father prepared²² a body for his Son; a body which was physically created in the fullness of time through the virgin birth and incarnation of the Son in humanity. In his humanity the Son would perfectly perform his Father's will. "It [v. 7, "in the volume of the book it is written of me"] seems clear that the book embraces all the written revelations of God's purposes and therefore provides the perfect pattern for the divine will. When applied to Jesus Christ therefore there is an obvious allusion to all that God has made known in prediction about the coming Messiah."²³ Based upon these predictions (which include the prophetic character inherent in the typical representations made in the tabernacle, its services, and sacrifices) the Father's will included Christ's death on the cross for his people's sins. "Obedience characterized Christ not only in his incarnation, but throughout the course of his entire life. And that obedience reached its climax when he offered himself as a sacrifice in obedience to the will of God."²⁴ Through his sacrifice came the enactment of a new covenant (vv. 9-10). This new covenant would bring about a new relationship with God, in which lasting forgiveness, fellowship, obedience, and service to a holy God would be the norm. The affliction brought by disobedience to God's laws reveals to every sinner that obedience is better than any sacrifice one might bring; for sacrifice does not purge the soul of sin. But the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ will purge the soul of the guilt and penalty of sin, and bring the believer into the spiritual perfection of the new covenant, which is, an eternal relationship with the living God.

8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law),

9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

The Writer is summarizing his argument: the new (the second) covenant in Christ fulfilled and superseded the old (the first) covenant. The Greek word translated in v. 9 as "takes away" is *anaireo*, a word usually

²⁰ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 239.

²¹ Perowne, *Psalms*, 331-332.

²² Prepared, *kataritizo*. "Although the tense of the verb in the quotation is past, it cannot in this case refer to a completed act as the fulfillment [at the time the Psalm was written] is still future. It expresses rather what is timeless in the mind of God . . . it may be wondered in what sense a body could be *prepared* . . . the verb is probably chosen only to suggest the perfect character of the provision" (Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 204).

²³ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 205.

²⁴ Pentecost, *Faith*, 156.

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meaning “to kill.” The ending of the first covenant is final: it is dead. If the first had succeeded in overcoming the sin nature, then the second would not have been needed. Since the continual offering of sacrifices demonstrated the destructive force of the sin nature—seen in its continuous rebellion and disobedience to God’s laws—then the failure of the old covenant to take away sins is amply demonstrated. Thus, Christ came to enact a new covenant²⁵ which was spiritually empowered to take away the guilt and penalty of sin, and thus could (where the old could not) destroy the power of the sin nature in the believer. One should note that the speaker in vv. 5-9 is the incarnate Son of God. He has come to do the will of God. The Writer has left out part of the quotation, “in the volume of the book it is written of Me,” because the Son’s intention to do God’s will assumes all that the written word of God has stated concerning the Son. Upon his coming into the world, he assumed all the responsibilities of the eternal covenant of salvation made between God the Father and himself. The Law did not satisfy God in his relation with his people, because it could not make them spiritually fit for an eternal relationship with himself. The Son came into the world, in his own words (Luke 19:10), “To seek and to save that which was lost,” and (as recorded by the Psalmist) “to do your will, O God.” Both statements come to the same conclusion: the redemption of sinners. The other authors of Scripture follow this same theme, e.g., Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

“By that will” (the will of God in sending the Son, as completely fulfilled by the Son’s willing obedience) all who believe in the Son for salvation have been sanctified. Note first that it was and is the will of God to accomplish the sanctification (salvation) of the sinner through the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ. The perspective of the inspired Writer is that the will of God for the salvation of sinners can be achieved *only* through the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ. This view is emphasized when one considers the Writer’s historical context. He lived in a religiously pluralistic world, in which every belief was assumed to lead to eternal bliss, if the follower sincerely followed the dictates of his religion. Every religious belief in his historical time claimed to have been established by some deity; some were as old as or older than that form of religion established by God through Moses. Because the Writer’s point of view was biblical, he addresses that one true religion,²⁶ Judaism, a religion whose followers sincerely (and correctly) believed had been delivered to them by the one true God. The Writer himself sincerely believed this also. His argument to the Hebrews is that this divinely given faith, Judaism, had now been superseded by the action of the same God, in giving a new faith in Jesus Christ as the one true God and Savior. To a people who knew that their way was the one and only divinely given way to salvation, he is demonstrating from their religion that their way had been designed by God to be imperfect. He is telling them that God’s will had created their way of salvation to be superseded through Christ. Since God ended (*anaiero*) the old covenant and enacted a new covenant in Christ, then Christianity (faith in Christ as “my” Savior) is the way they must now follow as the one and only divinely given way to salvation.

If the Writer was living in today’s religiously pluralistic world, he would argue to the same end: faith alone, in Jesus alone, by grace alone, is the only way one can be saved. Those religious beliefs that are ignorant of Christ are not God’s way to salvation. Those religious beliefs that view Christ as one of many prophets, or as one of many ways to God, are not God’s way to salvation. Those religious beliefs that add

²⁵ An act that immediately *anaiero* “abolishes,” the old covenant.

²⁶ Religion may be succinctly defined as believing that saving grace comes through one’s works. Judaism can (partly) meet that definition because saving grace, when accompanied by faith in God as “my” Savior, gave spiritual value to the “sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and offerings for sin.” There have been and are today religions that call themselves “Christian,” but believe saving grace comes through one’s works (Christ plus works saves), or that one must do works to maintain salvation (confusing sanctification with salvation). Christianity is faith in a Person, Jesus the Christ, believing that saving grace comes only through Christ’s obedience to God’s will and his work on the cross. Religion is working to save myself, or to keep myself saved. Christianity is faith in the Person who did all the work on my behalf. Faith in him saves forever; the good works that follow are part of salvation: Ephesians 2:8-10. One way of salvation, Acts 4:12; Christ plus nothing saves, Acts 16:30, 31.

good works to Christ's work are not God's way to salvation. The Writer unequivocally states—God the Holy Spirit declares this truth through the Writer—that a sinner can be saved only through the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ. Only Christ's work is acceptable to God. The message is, Christ alone and Christ only saves the sinner from the guilt and penalty of sin.

The Writer states that “we (himself included) have been sanctified through the offering of the ‘body’ of Jesus Christ.” The previous sacrifices under the Law had been ineffective in achieving a permanent salvation. The only effective sacrifice was the humanity of Jesus Christ, body and soul. In chapter one I discussed how God the Son assumed humanity to himself (see *Excursus: The Hypostatic Union*). In chapter 2:9-18, I discussed in various ways the necessity that God the Son assume mortality to himself. Here, I will discuss how the Son of God could legitimately offer himself as the propitiation for man's sin. The sin of mankind in Adam was an action of Adam's humanity (his human nature) performed through his physical body.²⁷ As a result of Adam's choice to sin, his human nature became corrupted by sin; a “sin nature,” an evil life-principle, became part of Adam's humanity through his choice to sin. Put another way, Adam, through his personal disobedience, incorporated into his humanity the attribute of self-determination in opposition to God, which would forevermore express itself through making choices to rebel against God and disobey his commandments. When Adam corrupted his human nature through his sin, his physical nature was also affected.²⁸ His corrupted humanity was passed along to his descendants through the natural process of procreation; the reader may remember God's law of biological reproduction: each “kind” is to reproduce itself after its own kind. A corrupted human nature can reproduce only itself: Genesis 5:3, “Adam . . . begot a son in his own likeness, after his image.”

Thus every son and daughter of Adam has a corrupted human nature. Moreover, as I discussed in chapter 7:8-10, Adam was appointed by God to be the spiritual representative of all his physical descendants (cf. Romans 5:12-21). Thus, Adam corrupted his descendants seminally (reproductively), and because he is their divinely appointed spiritual representative, the guilt (and therefore the penalty) of his sin is imputed to all his descendants. This, then, is why the Son became incarnate in humanity. The crime of sin exists in the human nature, which human nature all have from Adam; therefore all human beings (Christ excepted) are guilty of sin. Since the crime of sin exists in the human nature, and the physical body is part of that nature, God, in the incarnation of the Son, joined to himself a genuine human nature and physical body to make a propitiation (satisfaction, payment) for the crimes of Adam and his descendants. On the cross Christ, in his human soul, suffered the wrath of God against sin and endured the spiritual penalty of sin, separation of his soul from God. On the cross Christ, in his human body, suffered the wrath of God against sin and endured the physical penalty of sin, human death. The penalty endured by Christ in his human soul and human body was the means by which the judicial guilt and penalty due to sinful humanity was justly satisfied: he suffered and paid the penalty.

The death of Christ as the sinner's substitute, the full payment of the sinner's penalty by someone other than the sinner, is the saving work of God that all the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to. Therefore, the Writer makes a point of saying that salvation is through the “body” of Jesus Christ. The just and holy penalty due sinful human nature must, in the court of God's justice, be endured by human nature.

²⁷ Adam's human nature was created holy, Genesis 2:7 (not intrinsically holy, but holiness was added to his nature). He had no sin nature and no indwelling desire to commit sin. That he chose to sin was contradictory to every part of his humanity, because his humanity had been designed by his Creator to resist and reject sin. He chose to act independent of God's grace and the natural inclination of his human nature. That one exercise of free will in the choice to commit an act of sin corrupted his human nature. Humanity finds its freedom in submission to God, not in independence apart from God's will, John 8:31-36.

²⁸ God created man as body and soul, not as a soul imprisoned in a physical body. The fact that all human beings from Adam forward will be resurrected, i.e., their souls reunited with a physical body, each to his own eternal destiny (with God or separated from God) indicates God's will is that man's existence is to be as a united body and soul. Therefore, body and soul are parts of the whole, and what is done in one part has an appropriate effect on the other part. When the physical body is conceived in the womb, an appropriately rudimentary soul is also conceived. Thus both body and soul experience growth and maturation simultaneously, as appropriate to the nature of each part.

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Christ, being of a sinless human nature, was qualified to suffer on behalf of the sinful human nature. Now note also the Writer has repeated that Christ was offered "once for all." Jesus paid the full penalty for sin. All guilt and penalty was satisfied through his death. No other payment is needed. Logically, therefore, no payment made by someone else or in some other way than through Jesus the Christ could be sufficient. Sinner beware! If you do not, by faith, apply Christ's propitiating death to your own soul, as full payment for your sins, then you must spend an eternity personally suffering for your sins; for your corrupt human nature is in and of itself insufficient to make the full payment. Your corrupt sinful soul is of less spiritual worth in atoning for your sins than were the animals sacrificed under the Law. If the divinely ordained, but repeatedly offered, sacrifices of the Law could not take away sin, neither will the endless suffering of your sinful human nature. The message is, Christ alone and Christ only saves the sinner from the guilt and penalty of sin.

Now we must turn to the result of Christ's propitiation, the "sanctification" accomplished by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all. First, take note that if the offering was made "once for all," then the sanctification it accomplished must also be "once for all." The application, by God's grace through personal faith, of the propitiation made by Christ, results in the sinner's sanctification. This is the aspect of sanctification that is eternal, effecting one's standing before God as eternally set apart from the guilt and penalty of sin and eternally dedicated to God (see discussion at 2:11). Sanctification indicates the cleansing of one's soul that is required to make a person or thing acceptable to God. The word means "holy," indicating that those who are sanctified are "holy ones" or, "saints." Every believer in Jesus the Savior is a saint, because he is sanctified. Above, I suggested that the word sanctification was being used as synonymous with salvation. In the immediate context, one might appropriately substitute the word "saved," if the meaning of "sanctification" in this context is fully understood. Sanctification is the result of the act of salvation. Salvation is an event, not a process (although there are processes leading to the act of salvation), and in that event several changes take place in the soul of the new believer. I will assume the reader understands the reason for and the act of salvation, as explained at 9:15. When the sinner wholeheartedly seeks God and believes that Jesus died for his or her sin, and accepts salvation in Jesus as God's gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), several changes occur (at the moment of faith) within the sinner's soul, and in his standing before God. An actually sequential order to the changes accompanying the act of salvation is not completely true to the instantaneous act, but to aid the understanding theologians have proposed a logical order.

When genuine saving faith in Christ takes place, God forgives the sinner of the guilt of all his sins, thus the penalty, because Jesus paid the penalty.²⁹ God then regenerates the soul (Jesus called it being "born again") by imparting (the communicable attributes of) his eternal life to the soul, and through regeneration incorporates the believer into Christ, spiritually uniting him or her with God. Part of regeneration is the reviving of the soul's spiritual faculty. By regeneration the soul is made spiritually alive, meaning that the soul is capable of perceiving and understanding spiritual reality and is capable of communion with God. Then, in the next "step" of this process, the saved, regenerated believer is sanctified. In the Writer's immediate context of the saving act, sanctification is the decree and act of God whereby God sets the believer apart from sin unto himself, making the believer fit for God's presence. The believer is divinely ordained to serve God, not sin. A homely illustration will help. My toothbrush is sanctified. I have set it apart from all other uses to just one use, and only one use. The believer is set apart from sin for God's use, to serve him only and always. We discussed at 9:15 how the sinner is the slave of sin. When he is saved and sanctified the sinner becomes the servant of God, for "you were bought [out of the slave market of sin] at a price [the offering of Jesus]; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

One of the results of sanctification is to take away sin's domination of the believer's will. The sin nature

²⁹ "The idea [of sanctification in the context of the saving act] seems to be that those in Christ have been so identified with him, that in him they too have fulfilled the will of God" (Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 206). This is true, and is beyond question the immediate basis for the sinner's forgiveness. The believing sinner is forgiven because his or her faith causes the believer to be spiritually identified with Christ, so that Christ's payment for sin is accounted to the sinner as payment for his/her sin.

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itself is not destroyed,³⁰ and it constantly tempts the believer to commit an act of sin. Salvation destroys the sin nature's dominating, overpowering influence and mastery of the will.³¹ If I may illustrate this in a figure, Christ sits enthroned in the believer's soul, leaving no place for sin to be king. The sinner will argue that sin does not dominate his will, that in his choices he sits in a neutral position, free to sin or not. The problem with this notion is that sin is an attribute of the human nature, a part that actively seeks to rebel against God and disobey his commandments. The sinner's "free will" has moved over to sin's side, sitting at sin's side as an agreeable companion who is helping him or her in making life's choices. Sin tempts the will to disagree with God. The corrupted human nature urges the will to agree with temptation, and commit an act of sin. This does not mean that every sinner is as bad as he or she could be, but he or she is as bad as they want to be; and "want" is sin's best tool to move the sinner to sin. In regard to sin's temptations, the difference between the unsaved and the saved is this. The sinner usually finds himself in agreement with sin's temptations. He can say "no," but the temptations proposed by the sin nature are constantly recurring. The constant tempting of his sin nature will often turn a "no" into a "yes."

Sanctification makes the difference. Because the believer is no longer under sin's dominion, he (or she) can say "no" to sin and mean it. He can withstand temptation.³² The believer's sanctification releases him from the domination of sin, making him a willing servant³³ of Christ. The principle of evil, sin, that always tempts the person to commit an act of sin, is overcome by the principle of holiness, which is sanctification. All that I have explained is part of the sanctification gained through faith in Christ. The context in Hebrews 10, is that the believer is separated, by salvation, regeneration, and sanctification, from the guilt and penalty of sin to possess and enjoy an eternal relationship with God. The believer is never again in jeopardy of the penalty due sin. In fact, one may correctly say that the believer is freed from the penalty of sin, no longer under the power of sin, is not captive to the pleasure of sin, and (after death or at the rapture) is delivered forever from the presence of sin. He or she is forever saved, forever a son or daughter of God, not of Adam. Christ is now the believer's representative, not Adam. Whatever is due Christ is part of the believer's inheritance from God (the new believer is adopted by God as a joint-heir with Christ, Romans 8:14-17). When one believes on Christ, he or she is forever set apart (sanctified) as belonging to God.

11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

A simple repetition of the opening argument of the chapter. A human priest is limited to the sacrifices set by the rules of his religion. Under the Mosaic law, every time any priest offered a sacrifice, it was the same as the sacrifice previously offered, and accomplished the same result: a cleansing of the soul for a past

³⁰ The sin nature remains after salvation, because it is linked to the body. For the believer, sin dies with the body in physical death. Sin is not part of the believer's glorified body at his resurrection, or translation if raptured (1 Corinthians 15:42, 50-53). In the unsaved, the sin nature remains with the corrupted soul after physical death, because their soul was not redeemed. Sin corrupts their resurrection body, thus making the unsaved resurrected body susceptible to corruption and suffering, Revelation 20:11-15.

³¹ Sin is said to dominate man's will, not because sin is some sort of overlord imposing itself on man, but because sin is innate to man's nature. The dominion of sin does not mean that unsaved man does not possess any freedom of will at all, but because sin is an innate principle of life in man's nature, his will is of itself always inclined to choose to sin and, as being rebellious and disobedient toward God, never desires to change its inclination to choose sin.

³² There are times when the believer gives into temptation. He makes a choice to sin. Practice makes the wrong choice a habit, then a surrender to an addiction to a particular sin or sins. 1 John 1:9 states the path to forgiveness and restoration to fellowship with God after the believer commits an act of sin.

³³ The word sanctification is also used in the Scripture to describe the daily process whereby the believer denies sin and obeys Scripture, thus becoming more and more like Christ. That use is not the subject of the Hebrew's passage, but does apply to the believer's spiritual power to say "no" to sin. Practice makes the right choice a principle, then a precept, and finally a habit.

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sin, to restore the believer to fellowship with God. The repeated sacrifices of the Levitical order were of such a kind (*haitines*, "which") as could only cover sin (an atonement) with the blood of the animal, but never remit sin. Neither priest nor sacrifice could change the sin nature, nor take away future sins, nor make a perfect payment for the judicial "guilty" of sin. The Law was limited to the endless repetition of the sacrifices.

Although the Law is the point of reference in the Writer's argument that Christ brought a permanent solution to the guilt and penalty of sin, his argument is applicable to any repeated offering for sins. Whatever action, other than faith in Christ, the sinner repeats in an attempt to satisfy the penalty due sin, it is intrinsically incapable of fully paying the penalty. Sinners intuitively know the spiritual limitations of their works: every sinner does more than one good work, because he is unsure if just one good work, or just which good work, or how many good works, is sufficient to qualify him for heaven.³⁴ Their good works are repeatedly performed, in the belief that the spiritual weight of the good will outweigh the bad³⁵ when the sinner dies and faces judgment. That, however, *is not* the biblical view. No amount of that which is spiritually insufficient in and of itself can ever add up to a full satisfaction for the penalty of their sins. When one adds one negative to another the result is always negative. Experience will teach us that cocoa eaten without sweetener is always bitter, no matter how many times you try it, but the sinner will keep trying to sweeten God's disposition with his spiritually insufficient good works. Repetition of the insufficient in the belief it will become sufficient is a good example of the insanity of sin. The Writer states the spiritual rule: *if an offering for sin must be repeated, then it is always incapable of making a full payment for sin's penalty*. It does not matter what the repeated offering may be: personal sacrifices, good works, charitable acts, loving thoughts, kind words, or kind deeds, prayers, baptisms, church attendance or service, the "golden rule", climbing the highest mountains or swimming the widest oceans to overcome prejudice, injustice, and evil. In the unsaved person these works are the result of choices made by a human nature infected with sin; therefore the works are defiled by sin. All good works have their ultimate origin in God's wisdom and grace, and God's omnipotence causes the works of men to fulfill his will. This is God's mercy and general providence at work in the world to do good to his creatures. However, from the sinner's perspective, these good works are performed for reasons other than God's will or God's glory. From the unsaved sinner's perspective, all the works they perform, whether innately good or not, originate from choices made by the sin nature, therefore their overt motivation is their will, not God's will, and their end is their glory, not God's glory. Therefore, in God's perspective, unsaved man's works are always as filthy rags, because they originate in a corrupted-by-sin human nature. Whether one uses a priest, or acts as his/her own priest, repeated offerings of self, or even selfless acts of sacrifice, *can never* take away sins.

The Writer, in v. 11, is not indulging in the repetition of his argument (vv. 1-4), but is re-stating it so he can state the fuller and greater conclusion (v. 12) to the argument: Christ is the only way to take away sin, because only Christ offered God perfectly sinless obedience in his life and propitiating death. Only Christ offered one perfect sacrifice for sins, a sacrifice whose spiritual worth God has valued at "forever." The contrast between v. 11 and v. 12 is, "highly dramatic: on the one hand, the vain zeal, the agitation of these [Levitical] sacrificers, always on their feet . . . never at rest, incessantly reproducing the same actions, offering the same victims, every day starting their task over again, serving without effect, since sin remains; on the other hand, there is Christ who offered but a single sacrifice of absolute worth, so that now, he has only to rest and be seated, the seated position being synonymous, in the Orient, with being unoccupied [with a task]"³⁶ (but, see his intercession, 7:25; I John 2:1). Christ's one sacrifice permanently took away the guilt and penalty for all sins. Therefore, his saving work being completed, he sat down (cf. 8:1; 1:3).

³⁴ The sinner does good works to try and qualify for salvation. The believer does good works because he is saved, Ephesians 2:10.

³⁵ The idea of *karma* is expressed in many ways in most religions. The notion of *karma* is a corruption of the justice of God, which gives every person his or her due reward, or punishment. Be not deceived: justice may be delayed by mercy, but its action is certain, Galatians 6:7-8.

³⁶ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 400.

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The Writer then adds, he repeats,³⁷ in v. 13, part of the Psalm he had quoted at 1:13. In the context of his arguments in chapter ten, the intent of “waiting till His enemies are made his footstool” must be to show that Christ’s salvific work is fully completed. Put another way, Christ has completed his work of love. He went to the cross because of his love toward those who have sinned and are lost. That act of love is now completed, but the outworking of his love, i.e., the result flowing from his act of love, which is the salvation of sinners, is still working itself out in the world. So he need not rise from his throne: his work is completed, and his sovereignty causes the outworking of his love to effect the salvation and sanctification of believing sinners.

In another sense, to address a different Scripture context than that in Hebrews, Jesus is waiting for the time of his wrath (Revelation 6:17; 19:11-21). The context of Jesus waiting for his time of wrath, is God speaking in love at the cross where Christ died, John 3:16. Since that day, Christ has given every sinner their opportunity to come to him in faith for salvation. God’s plan was to give Christ more brethren (2:10-13) than just the few who followed him while he was on earth, John 17:20. Every sinner born after God spoke in love at the cross has been the recipient of God’s love in the divinely given opportunity to believe on Christ as Savior, John 3:18, 2 Peter 3:9, Isaiah 30:18.³⁸ (I’m grateful he waited; for me it resulted in an eternal life spent with God.) His waiting, however, will come to the end as prophesied. The calendar of God counts down to the day when God will speak in wrath. Since God did before speak in love, what can remain to those who reject his love but his wrath? The work of that wrath, so clearly expressed in various Old Testament prophecies and presented in the book of Revelation,³⁹ will be to prepare the earth for Jesus Christ the Messiah, the King coming into his kingdom. Thus, Christ waits, dispensing salvation, until the time of his wrath is come, and his kingdom is delivered to him. Those who ignore and despise his love—they are his enemies—will be made to kneel in abject subjugation before his throne. But, as I said, in the context of the Epistle’s argument, the fact that Christ sits and waits for his future to come to pass is the sure indication that he has accomplished all actions necessary to the salvation of sinners. He need do nothing in the interim but receive those who accept his love. My friend, is he waiting for you to respond to his love?

14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

The literal Greek text reads “for by one offering he has perfected in perpetuity the [ones] being sanctified.” The Greek *hagiasomenous* is most accurately translated “being sanctified” without needing to supply the verb “are.” The NKJV translation “are being sanctified” (NIV, “are being made holy”) is intended to indicate the present tense of the Greek participle (*hagiasomenous*), but unfortunately implies an ongoing, therefore incomplete, process looking toward a conclusion. The best representation of the present tense would be, “are having been sanctified,” which communicates that the believer’s sanctification took place in the past and continues into the present and beyond into the future.⁴⁰ The saved person is in a continuing state of sanctification, a “steady state” that once having taken place continues for eternity. Looking to the NKJV translation, if the reader connects the present tense “are being sanctified” with the leading, past tense, verb “has perfected forever,” the meaning of the Greek text will be understood: a completed action (perfected forever) resulting in the steady state or condition of sanctification. The context is this: Christ has made one offering that resulted in a state of eternal perfection, *teleioo*, for the saved. The *teleioo* in this context means,

³⁷ The Writer’s constant repetition of Scripture and ideas is the mark of a good teacher, intended to reinforce spiritual truths to those whose knowledge of and faith in Christ was less than secure in their own heart and mind.

³⁸ Every man and woman is born into sin, but is also born into the hope of salvation from sin. God hinders no one from desiring to be saved, God hinders no one from coming to Christ in repentance of their sins and faith in his propitiating death. Is he waiting for you? All that hinders you is your love of your sins.

³⁹ See my book, *The Epistle of Jesus to the Church: A Commentary on the Revelation*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008.

⁴⁰ Compare Ephesians 2:8, where the present tense should be translated as “for by grace you are having been saved.” More directly: you are in a continuing state of salvation. Salvation happened in the past and has resulted in a steady state of salvation that exists in the present and will continue in the future.

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"completely qualified to live eternally with God." Since Christ's one offering has eternally perfected the saved, and this view of sanctification⁴¹ is part of the act of salvation, then the ones saved cannot be in the process of being sanctified. As I discussed above, being sanctified from sin unto God is part of the instantaneous act of salvation. A process of "are being sanctified" would conflict with the state of "has perfected forever," *teleioo*.

The Greek *hagiasomenous* is in a verbal tense known as a "present passive/middle participle." One interpreter's understanding of this verbal tense (in v. 14), is that it is being used to indicate a present continuous action that represents the succession of sinners that are constantly being saved under the effective application of the single offering.⁴² However, although the present participle does express continuous or repeated action, the time of the action, as represented by the Greek participle, is relative to the time/action of the main verb. The Writer's use of the present participle in v. 14 is to signify action that is contemporaneous with the leading verb, whether that action occurs in the past, present, or future.⁴³ The leading verb in this sentence is "has perfected." This verb (*teleioo*), is in the "perfect indicative active." The perfect indicative emphasizes either the completeness of the action or the finished results, depending upon context.⁴⁴ The context is clear: v. 10, the sinner has been sanctified once for all by Jesus once for all offering; v. 12, Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins forever. By one offering he has perfected [the believer] forever. When considered in its relationship with the leading verb, the continuous action of *hagiasomenous* must indicate the steady state of sanctification, because the believer has experienced the completed action of "has perfected forever." He or she is in the unchanging state of eternally qualified to live face to face with God. The meaning intended by the Writer is captured in the HCSB version: "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified." Faith in Jesus as Savior makes the believer forever fully qualified and perfectly fit for eternal life with God.

15 And the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before,

16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"

17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

The reference to the Holy Spirit is a reference to his work with the prophet Jeremiah. Some form of the phrase "the Spirit says" (3:7; 9:8) is one of the ways in which the Writer refers to Old Testament Scripture, ignoring the human means and focusing on the divine inspiration. The fact that the Holy Spirit "also witnesses to us" indicates "the message is for the church,"⁴⁵ so "pay attention" is the Writer's unspoken meaning. This is the same New Covenant the writer addressed in 8:10-12. He quotes it again (with variations that are of no significance⁴⁶) in 10:16-17, so he can highlight 10:17. Verse 17 proves the proposition of 10:5-14. The fact that God will "remember no more" the believer's "sins and their lawless deeds" indicates that Jesus' offering was sufficient payment for the guilt and penalty of sin; that the sacrifice of himself did take away sins; and that his one, never to be repeated, never needing to be repeated, offering did in fact perfect forever those who by faith in him have been saved and sanctified. When the omniscient God can "forget" sin, it means a full satisfaction has been made to him for the crime of sin. Under the old covenant, the constant presence of sacrificial death and blood revealed sins were not fully forgiven. In Christ, God remembers our sins no more, he has forgiven them, put them out of sight, and there is no need for further propitiation.

⁴¹ The Writer's point of view is of critical importance. The Writer's view of sanctification is the act of salvation that makes the saved fully qualified, perfected forever, and sanctified forever, for an eternal relationship with God.

⁴² Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 208.

⁴³ Zodhiates, *Word Study*, 867.

⁴⁴ Zodhiates, *Word Study*, 867.

⁴⁵ Hagner, *Hebrews*, 132.

⁴⁶ The Holy Spirit who inspired the Writer is not bound to exact repetition in the translation and interpretation of His Old Testament Scripture. Divine inspiration does not require either pedantic necessity nor wooden literalness by the Spirit as he teaches.

Excursus: How Can a Holy God Forget Sin?

God, in being omniscient, meaning he has an immediate knowledge and understanding of all things, never loses the "memory" of any event. In his omnipresence, meaning God is immediately present everywhere in time and space, every event is always in the present moment to God's senses. (I am stating these things in a somewhat anthropomorphic manner to aid the understanding.) How, then, can it be said that God will "remember no more" the saved sinner's sins? An understanding of "remember no more" is gained through its opposite, "God remembered" (*italics mine*):

- Genesis 8:1, "Then *God remembered* Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark."
- Genesis 19:29, "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that *God remembered* Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow. . ."
- Genesis 30:22, "Then *God remembered* Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb."
- Exodus 2:24-25, "So God heard their groaning, and *God remembered* His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them."

God didn't forget that Noah was in the ark. After Noah, his family, and the animals entered the ark, God closed the door and shut them in. God then ceased to act toward them in a direct manner (but his providence remained active). God made no further communication and took no further observable actions toward them during the time the flood waters were upon the earth. The rain came, the flood happened, the ark served its purpose in saving Noah *et al*/from judgment, and God did not speak to Noah throughout the event of the judgment. Noah had, by God's gracious provision, completed everything required of him, and God did not feel the need to further communicate with his servant during the 371 days Noah was in the ark. God had said all that needed to be said to sustain Noah's faith. After a while, the judgment was completed. Then it was time for God to again directly interact with Noah, to fellowship with him, and to instruct him as to the next course his faith was to take. To rephrase the verse, "Then God again took action toward Noah . . ." etc. The time had come for God to interact with Noah and complete his plans for the re-establishment of mankind. God did not forget Abraham, in Genesis 19. God took action toward Abraham's nephew Lot in a manner consistent with his agreement with Abraham to save the righteous in Sodom. In Genesis 3:20 God "remembered" Rachel. A more explanatory translation would be, "Then God took action toward Rachel by answering her prayers and causing her to become pregnant." In the Exodus passage, the time had come for God to take action on behalf of, and toward, the children of his servant Israel, based on his covenant with Abraham, as renewed with Isaac and Jacob. For God, to "remember" means God will take action.

In Hebrews 10:17, for God to "remember no more" means God will not act—will never act—toward his saints in judgment for their sins. As far as God is concerned the saved sinner's sins are fully paid for by Christ, therefore never to be spoken of again. When God says in the New Covenant, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more," God means that he will never enact any judicial punishment against the believer in regard to the penalty due his sins. Because the believer has faith in Jesus' payment for the full penalty due the believer's sins, the penalty has been fully satisfied. This is full payment for any and every sin the believer has committed prior to his salvation, and might (future to his salvation) commit. An act of sin will never again put the believer in jeopardy of eternal punishment. "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."⁴⁷ Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Isaiah 38:17, "You have cast all my sins behind Your back." Hebrews 10:17, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." "And when before the throne, I stand in Him complete, 'Jesus died my soul to save,' my lips shall still repeat."⁴⁸

When the believer does commit an act of sin, his fellowship with God is broken, but his relationship is not. An example will help to make this clear. When my daughter colored the walls in her bedroom closet, with

⁴⁷ Chorus from the hymn, *Jesus Paid it All*, lyric by Mrs. H. M. Hall.

⁴⁸ Fourth stanza, *Jesus Paid it All*, lyric by Mrs. H. M. Hall.

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a crayon, I did not punish her by disowning her as my child and casting her out of my household. Friendly relations were broken for awhile, but they were mended and restored. Even so with the believer and God. First John 1:9 tells us the right course of action when the believer sins: conviction, confession, and repentance, leads to restoration of fellowship.

18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

The conclusion to the matter. The conclusion is, that when the penalty of sin has been cancelled, then an offering (sacrifice) for sin cannot be required. That God will "remember no more" indicates the penalty of sin has been cancelled in the new covenant made by God with sinners, through the sacrificial offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. What is obvious to the Writer (and therefore he does not mention it), and what I have tried to stress these past few chapters, is that (to speak in the terms of the old covenant), the blood must be applied. One must diligently seek God to find a personal faith in the payment Jesus has made for sin. His payment for sin can only be effective toward those who believe in its efficacy to cancel the penalty due their sins. One may present this in casual terms: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved", or, "Whosoever calls upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved." The meaning of these evangelistic calls to faith is as I have explained it: by faith the sinner must appropriate and apply Jesus' payment for sin to his or her own sins, and by that faith in Jesus alone the sinner must believe that he/she will be saved from the penalty of sin and the wrath of God. Then there will be a cancellation (remission) of the sinner's sins. God, in having been propitiated by Christ, will no longer require of the believing sinner an offering for his/her sin. "A new era has dawned. A new covenant is in force which makes the Leviticus sacrifices obsolete. Whatever message they were intended to convey is more perfectly fulfilled in Christ."⁴⁹

From this point forward the Writer moves toward and continues with several applications⁵⁰ drawn from his conclusion. The argument is complete. The Writer has answered the question, "What is saving faith?" He will yet again warn his readers to persevere in their faith, but from this point forward he assumes most of his readers have found and possess personal faith in Christ. The question he will now answer is this, "What is the character, and what are the privileges and practices, of the one who is saved?"

⁴⁹ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 209.

⁵⁰ His last application was 6:4-12.

HEBREWS 10:19-39

*19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,
20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,
21 and having a High Priest over the house of God,
22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

The Writer's theme has now changed from, "what is saving faith?" to, "what is the character and what are the privileges and practices of the one who is saved?" He confirms his new theme in the first two words of verse nineteen: a "therefore" referring to the preceding arguments and conclusion; the word "brethren" signifying the mutual community of faith in Jesus Christ shared by the Writer and the reader. The Writer encourages his brethren to enter the holiest (the presence of God) by the blood of Jesus. I have previously discussed at 9:12, 24 that the propitiating death of Jesus was presented in the heavenly tabernacle, so that in the heavenly tabernacle there is no separating curtain/veil between the believer and God. There, in the heavenly tabernacle, one finds himself in the very presence of God, which is, as the Writer expresses it (10:19) "the holiest." The Writer's point is that the Christian can enter into the holiest part of the heavenly tabernacle, into the immediate presence of God, because Christ his high priest is there. Jesus' divine mediatorial work and continuing intercession on behalf of his people, has both made the way and keeps the way open for his people. The Writer encourages his Christian brethren to enter the holiest, which under the old covenant was forbidden, but under the new covenant is not merely possible, but a privilege and duty.

The Writer does, in fact, urge them to enter with boldness. This word translated "boldness" is the same Greek word translated "confidence" at 3:6 (see discussion there), "boldly" at 4:16, and "confidence" in 10:35. This word, as used in Hebrews, does not mean to press ahead with courage or fearlessness, much less arrogance or impudence. Christ has cancelled the penalty of sin and opened the way into the holiest! Therefore, Christian boldness and confidence is taking an action based upon, indeed, authorized by, the certainty of God's commandments and promises, and, as in this context, upon the terms and conditions of the new covenant made in Christ's propitiation. I am not denying that courage may be required, especially when one follows God in the face of worldly opposition. Christian boldness, however, is a matter of faith, and faith is taking action based upon God's word, because faith knows that God's word is truth.¹ Boldness means one is certain that the Scripture he holds to be true is true. He or she takes action in Christ because of the certainty, given by the knowledge of God's word, that God has commanded, promised, or covenanted the action. The righteous are as bold as a lion, Proverbs 28:1, not because of indwelling strength or ferocity, but because God has declared them to be righteous; their boldness is based upon their relationship with God. Bridges² (commenting on Proverbs 28:1) strikes the right note for Hebrews 10:19 when he notices the boldness of the believer is due to the removal of guilt. Sin's guilt has been removed in the righteous through faith in the blood of Christ; therefore, the believer can be bold in approaching God. The fear of the Lord, which is a profound awe of God incorporating complete trust and devout reverence, drives out every other fear.³ The Christian can have boldness to enter into God's presence because his faith has identified him with Jesus, who has entered into the Presence in advance of the Christian. More simply, when a Christian enters into God's presence, he is, so-to-speak, following Jesus into the holiest. He does, in fact, in a spiritual sense, meet Jesus there, and his Savior conducts him into God's presence. Because God's word states that Jesus made the way into the Presence, and ever lives in the Presence, the believer knows, with certainty born of

¹ Faith is not blind nor is it ignorant. Faith is not taking a step into the darkness hoping there is a floor, not a chasm. Faith is taking that step into darkness because God's word says that, even if I cannot see it, there is solid ground; I act because I believe God who cannot lie. Faith is informed by God's word, and therefore acts on the basis of that word. Faith spiritually sees what unsaved sight, blinded by sin, neither sees nor cares to see. In the midst of the raging storms of my life, in the darkest times of personal trial, I reached out my hand to God who is always there, because he said: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

² Bridges, *Proverbs*, 525.

³ Bridges, *Proverbs*, 525.

faith and spiritual conviction, that this way into the holiest was made for him.

Before continuing with the interpretation of vv. 19-22, I believe we should discuss what it means to be in the immediate presence of God, and the manner in which one can enter into God's immediate presence. First, I trust it is obvious that the Writer's term "holiest" does not literally refer to the most holy place in the wilderness tabernacle, or to any of the subsequent temples. The ark and the mercy seat were the "copy and shadow" of the heavenly throne of God. Second, from the Writer's discussion of the heavenly tabernacle, and the declaration of it in 9:24, it should also be obvious that the genuine (not copy or shadow) "holiest" to which the Writer refers is the very presence of God where Jesus presented his propitiation. Third, the reader should be aware that Hebrews 4:16, the "throne of grace" and Hebrews 10:19, "the holiest" are essentially used as synonymous terms in Hebrews.

In determining the nature of God's immediate presence for the physically living believer—for such are the Writer's readers—let us begin with two aspects of God's essential nature. The God of Scripture is Spirit and he is ubiquitous. The declaration "God is Spirit" (John 4:24) means (in relation to the present context) that in his essential nature God exists as a personal being whose essence or substance is "other" than all he has created. He is Spirit, his creation is not. Neither the material nor the spiritual plane of existence were created out of God's "substance," but came into existence out of nothing by his divine command. Therefore, as a personal being who exists as "other" than his creation, his essential nature is not perceptible by his creatures. Scripture and experience reveal that God did not give his creatures an ability to perceive anything that is "other" than the "stuff" of their existence. One may "discover" the existence of God in the things he has created: they are marks of his activity that indicate his presence. They present evidence of his power and authority, and imply that one so omnipotent and omniscient must be worshiped. Other than these things, if he did not reveal himself in other ways, we could not know him. Scripture is the means God has chosen to reveal himself to man; not merely in its record of his "appearances" but primarily in the words he inspired into chosen servants. All apparently visible "appearances" of God in Scripture are not of that "other" essence or substance, but are an act of God to make a deliberate manifestation (an embodiment) of his presence at a specific spatial location.⁴ He creates a temporary representation of himself that is consistent with the laws governing his creation, thus his creatures can "see" him.

Second, because God is "ubiquitous," if he wants to make his presence known at one specific spatial location, then he must manifest his presence in a deliberate way so that he (his temporary representation of himself) is visible to his creatures. "Ubiquitous" means God is always present at all places and times in his creation, in both the material and spiritual planes of existence. Just because he cannot be seen, and just because he exists separate from his creation, does not mean that he is not present everywhere at once in relation to his creation. In perhaps the only way we can understand God as to being both Spirit and ubiquitous, in his relation to his creation, we could say that his finite creation exists within the infinite "boundaries" of his essential being, without being a part of his being. God is self-existent; God is self-living. One of his names, "I Am", means "the One who exists because he chooses to exist"; he alone has existence in himself. All that is other than God, all that we understand as "matter" both living and non-living, including the angels, is not self-existent. What we understand as creation exists because God communicates life to his creation. In some way beyond our finite comprehension, creation is located within God's existence, receiving life from him, without being part of his Person. Since creation exists "within" him, he is present everywhere at once in his creation; as the perfect self-aware being, he is therefore always aware of all of his creation at once. In the sense, then, of his being ubiquitous Spirit, all beings are always in his presence, Acts 17:27-28, "He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being." In addition to these aspects of God's nature, one must also acknowledge that the believer is always in God's presence because of his union with Christ (we are "in Christ"), who sits at the right hand of God, representing his people.

These things will help us to understand the Writer's exhortation to enter the holiest. The Writer is using the symbol of the wilderness tabernacle, and the reality of the heavenly tabernacle, to indicate that "entering the holiest" is more than being in God's ubiquitous presence, and is part of being "in Christ." The spiritual

⁴ I believe, based on Revelation 4, that God continuously presents a manifestation of himself in the third heaven (where holy angels dwell).

presence of the Christian's soul in the holiest is possible because, 1) Jesus' soul, when his body was dead and buried, entered into the heavenly tabernacle with the propitiation of his blood for our sins, creating the way into the holiest; 2) the resurrected, glorified, and ascended Jesus sits at the right hand of God as the believer's Mediator, Intercessor, and God, *always* keeping the way open. Now, to be physically in the immediate presence of God, to stand physically before the throne of grace, 4:16; 10:19, is impossible for the believer in his mortal body—impossible for body *and* soul.⁵ The reality of being in God's presence is, for the physically living Christian, not in substance but by spiritual perception. A person's "spirit" is the soul's faculty of perception that perceives spiritual "things," such as the sin nature, temptation, God, faith, salvation. The unsaved sinner is spiritually dead: he cannot perceive spiritual things, except as God reveals himself as his Savior or Judge. The believer is spiritually alive: he perceives God as Savior, and through the volition of the Holy Spirit is able to have communion with God. Thus, when one speaks of a spiritual "thing," one means the soul's faculty of spiritual perception is at work discerning spiritual reality, such as conviction of sin, salvation, God's grace and power. When the believer's soul enters into the holiest, it is his faculty of spiritual perception that is at work. In the most basic, fundamental meaning of "spiritual perception," the believer is exercising faith that God is present, that God knows him, hears his prayers, accepts his worship, and, because he has "entered the holiest," blesses his life with grace and the power to be obedient, serve, and commune. Being in God's presence, during physical life, is not physical in any sense, not even for the soul. The soul is immaterial, but it is inseparably united to the body in physically living believers. Therefore, entering the presence of God does not mean one's soul leaves his or her body to be literally present where God is manifesting his presence. One of the functions of the soul is to animate the flesh (Genesis 2:7). The soul leaving the body is the definition of physical death. Entering the presence of God is a non-literal act for the physically living believer. Words are inadequate to define or describe what 4:16 and 10:19 mean in spiritual reality, but I will try. The explanation is easier to follow through the use of personal pronouns.

- When you use your soul's faculty of spiritual perception, through any of the several means God has prescribed, to "enter the holiest" in order to "come boldly to the throne of grace," what truly happens is that God focuses his attention on you and your reason for coming, seemingly as though you were the only person asking for God's attention. Your soul, acting through its innate faculty of spiritual perception, accepts this spiritual action by God to be just as though you were really, truly, actually, genuinely in heaven at that moment, standing before the manifestation of God's presence. This is what Scripture means by 4:16 and 10:19.

The universal experience of all believers from Adam forward indicates that the finite limitations of the material plane (which apply to the soul and its spiritual faculty because the soul is united to the body), generally, usually, prevent any objective physical perception of God's immediate attention focused on you.⁶

⁵ Those who believe man is "tripartite" i.e., composed of three distinct parts, a body, a soul, and a spirit, must say, if they are to be consistent in their biblical anthropology, that the believer's spirit literally enters the holiest. The holiest is the temple in heaven located in the spiritual plane. The physically alive man can only enter the spiritual plane of existence by a spiritual means. If man is tripartite, then this means man's spirit. This seems impossible, because the immaterial parts of man—in the tripartite belief soul and spirit, are united to the material body until physical death. I believe man is "bipartite," i.e., two distinct parts, body and soul, and that man's "spirit" is the soul's faculty to perceive certain realities of the spirit plane of existence. I believe that, at this time, because of sin, man's faculty of spiritual perception is very limited in scope and use, even in the believer. Standing at the throne of grace, entering the holiest, is a matter of our faith in God and his focus on us, not a literal entry into his manifested presence. Spiritual perception, not a literal transference of the body's spirit, is how one enters the holy presence of God.

⁶ God has granted exceptions, e.g., Isaiah 6; 2 Corinthians 12. See various devotional literature. The experience recounted by D. L. Moody (the "Billy Graham" of the 1800's) is one, credible, non-biblical, example. As a result of prayer (he was seeking funds to rebuild after the Chicago fire; but had also for months been seeking spiritual power in his ministry), as he later related the experience to a few select friends, "I was crying all the time that God would fill me with his Spirit. Well, one day, in the city of New York ... I cannot describe it ... it is almost to sacred an experience to name ... I can only say God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand" (Fitt, *Life of D.L. Moody*, 65; Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls*, 156). Moody says (Day, *Bush Aglow*, 137) how he went (continued...)

Some persons may subjectively sense that God is present. For some believers there may be a conviction that God has responded to prayer. Others, whose life is focused on devotional activity, may have a sense of God's love, or Christ's presence. For others, especially those who labor in preaching, evangelism, and teaching, there may be a sense of the Spirit's power at work through the speaker in convicting the listener(s). These experiences, however limited, or unbelievable (as they may seem to the inexperienced observer) are to be expected, for the Holy Spirit has come in part to give believers "a foretaste of glory divine",⁷ so that the spiritual believer (the one who is faithful, obedient, serving, and having fellowship with God) may experience a token of what awaits in heaven.

Having described what it means to enter the holiest, what are the means God has provided to approach his presence? There are many ways, and this is not intended to be a complete list. Remember, these "ways" must be performed in faith, for faith is the channel of God's grace to man.⁸ To enter the holiest, faith *must* use God's means, and God's means *must* be used in faith. Entering into God's presence is most often accomplished through prayer. An explanation of prayer would require another chapter in the commentary, but in essence prayer is comprised of three actions: worship, thanksgiving, and supplication for one's self and for others (the latter being "intercession"). A second means of entering into God's presence is a devotional contemplation of who God is and what he has done. Another means is the use of praise, worship, and thanksgiving: God inhabits the praises of his people, Psalm 22:3. Meditation on the Scripture is for others an effective means to enter God's presence. Biblical meditation is not like the worldly counterfeit. Biblical meditation is an interactive contemplation of the Scripture: seeking to understand Scripture and apply its principles, values, and precepts. One "asks" the Scripture (verse, passage) questions about its meaning, then "listens" to the answers, with a view to understanding and application to one's self. "Listening" will involve letting one's mind interact with Scripture in various ways. One should try to determine meaning: what the human author intended in his historical and cultural circumstances? What did his original readers understand when they read this Scripture? How may this (verse, paragraph) be understood in my culture? Then meditation should search for the significance of the passage (the application of Scripture principles, values, and precepts). Meditation may involve comparing Scripture with Scripture, seeking out passages addressing the same theme(s), or parallel passages expressing the same thoughts or actions. I have found that meditation on God's word, and communicating it to others, such as through this commentary, often "transports" my soul into his presence (this sounds more mystical than the reality). One means, and this is a point missed by many believers, is simply being obedient to God's commands and being his servant in the world and the church. Obedience and service places the believer in God's presence, just because success in these things cannot truly be accomplished without prayer for and dependence upon the guidance and spiritual empowerment only God the Holy Spirit can give. Obedience is the key that turns on every spiritual power. The critical point in our discussion is this: whether by such things as prayer or meditation, or through the activity of service and obedience, the believer should always seek to be in the presence of God. The believer is to be faithful and consistent in the practice of Scripture-based beliefs. By depending on the ever-living God as the source of spiritual life, one will discover God's presence.

Having laid the necessary background, let us return to vv. 19-22. The Writer gives six reasons as the basis for the Christian's boldness in entering into the holiest. The first three of these are found in vv. 19-21: by the blood of Jesus; by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, his

⁶(...continued)

to a friend near-by who had a room where he could be alone. I can no longer recall the source (*Secret Power* (?)), but I do remember reading that Moody said he spent hours prostrated by the continuing experience, until he had to ask God to "stay his hand" lest he die from the overwhelming experience of God's goodness and love. After this experience, which occurred in 1871, "Moody" wrote D. W. Whittle (Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls*, 156), "lost interest in everything except the preaching of Christ and working for souls." Accounts by others of similar experiences relate the overwhelming perception of God's presence.

⁷ *Blessed Assurance*, lyric by Fanny Crosby, 1873.

⁸ Ritualistic means, such as a "prayer wheel," the votive candle, isolation, flagellation, or any other man-made means, are substitutes for genuine faith. Faith, although it may be seen through physical action, is spiritual, not physical.

flesh; having a high priest over the house of God. The first of these, the blood of Jesus, has been the subject of discussion beginning with 1:3 (by himself purged our sins), 2:9, 14 (his death); 2:17 (he is God's high priest), and continuing in the Epistle as the object of increasing focus, to the climax in 9:11-10:18. I need not repeat these arguments, but I may summarize them by stating that the death of Christ—for which "blood" is the metonym—is the basis for the benefits of the new covenant, whose terms and conditions make possible the believer's entry into the immediate presence of God. The "new and living" way is a statement of contrast between the dead animals of the Mosaic sacrifice and the resurrected living Christ. One must not think the Old Testament saints had no way to God; they had a way to the Father through the content of faith he had given them, but their way was imperfect, 8:5-8, 13; 9:8-10. The "new" way is new because 1), no one before Christ had walked this path, John 14:6; 17:19; 2) unlike the old imperfect covenant, "the efficacy and strength of Christ's propitiation is ever the same"⁹ therefore it is never old or obsolete;¹⁰ 3) "before the death of our Lord no believer and worshiper was able to enter thus"¹¹ into the presence of the Most High,¹² John 10:4; and 4), it was in the New Covenant that Jesus made for the sinner a "new and living" way. The way is "living" because,

- "Jesus is not merely the way, but the end of the way, a living Saviour within the veil; the great, all-glorious Priest, continuing in the heavenly sanctuary without intermission his priestly functions, interceding for his people, and bringing each of us individually, with our various need, infirmity, and sorrow, before the Father."¹³

He is the ever living mediator who not only maintains the way as always present and open, but is present at the entry into the holiest to guide his people to his Father.

The reference to "the veil, that is, his flesh" must be understood in the light of the phrase "which he consecrated for us." He consecrated the new covenant, 8:6, meaning he caused it to be enacted, by the offering of himself as the One in whom and with whom the new covenant is made, 9:14-23; 10:5-12. The veil in the tabernacle represented that the way to God was not open, 9:8. His body was the altar on which his offering for sin was made, 9:12; 10:10, and through that offering the way was opened.¹⁴ Put more clearly, the way to God was through a payment for sin that fully satisfied God. The only way through the veil in the old covenant was with the blood of a sacrifice. The only way to God in the New Testament is through the offering of the body¹⁵ (the blood/death) of Jesus Christ once for all (10:10): which interpreted means his propitiation made through the offering of himself as the perfect sin offering for mankind's sin. "The flesh of Jesus stands here for the incarnation seen in the light of the fulfillment of its purpose in the offering of the perfect and final sacrifice on the cross."¹⁶ Only faith in Jesus gives the sinner access into the presence of God. "By virtue of the sacrifice of Christ, wherein his flesh was torn and rent, we have a full entrance into the holy place, such as would have been of old upon the rending of the veil."¹⁷ The Writer's third point, that we have a high priest over the house of God, recalls 2:17; 3:1-6; 5:1; 7:24-8:2. The believer, who is God's house (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:22), may confidently enter God's presence, because

⁹ Saphir, *Hebrews*, II:662.

¹⁰ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 406-407.

¹¹ The word "thus" is important in this quote from Adolf Saphir. There is no more barrier, 9:8, the veil is gone. The Old Testament saints had an entry into God's presence, but it must be re-established by sacrifice after every sin; it was not through the ever-living Mediator-Intercessor.

¹² Saphir, *Hebrews*, II:662.

¹³ Saphir, *Hebrews*, II:663.

¹⁴ Moffatt (quoted in Hughes, *Hebrews*, 409) says, the Writer "allegorizes the veil here as the flesh of Christ. This had to be rent [torn] before the blood could be shed, which enabled Christ to enter [the heavenly tabernacle] and open God's presence for the people. It is a daring, poetical touch . . ."

¹⁵ Owen notes, "the whole efficacy of his sacrifice is ascribed unto every essential part of the human nature of Christ ... his soul, Isaiah 53:10; his blood, Hebrews 9:14; his body, v. 10; his flesh, v. 20 ... where any one of them is mentioned, the whole human nature of Christ, as unto the efficacy of it in his sacrifice, is intended" (Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:506).

¹⁶ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 409.

¹⁷ Owen, *Hebrews*, VI:506.

all necessary mediation has been accomplished on his behalf by his great high priest. Christ continually makes his priestly intercession for the believer, thus there is *always* access into the Presence.

Believers, therefore, have the privilege, as well as the duty, to "draw near." Many have interpreted, *proserchomai*, "draw near," as a priestly act, based upon some Old Testament (LXX version) religious uses. In both Testaments, however, the normal use of *proserchomai* is spatial, not religious, and its basic New Testament use is "to come," or "to go." The believer, it is true, is a priest (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6; 5:10), and thus every entry is, in that aspect, a priestly entry (cf. Romans 12:1). However, in Hebrews there is only one true priest (the Old Testament high priest serves as a type and contrast), and that priest is Jesus Christ. What is being emphasized, vv. 19-22, is the privilege and duty of the believer. The privilege is unrestricted access into the presence of God. The duty is to come into his presence at every appropriate event, moment, opportunity, need, reason, etc.¹⁸ Reflect for a moment on the scope of this unrestricted access. The Old Testament believer came into God's presence primarily for forgiveness, bringing yet another sacrifice, and making contact with God only through his involvement with his offering. The priest was the one with the primary responsibility of entering into God's presence on behalf of the believer. This mediation was strictly limited, attained only as he burned the animal on the altar, or changed out the bread in the tabernacle, lit the lampstand, or burned incense. At the most the Old Testament saint knew God accepted his offerings and heard his prayers. Meeting God face-to-face, even spiritually as the New Testament saint does, was not merely beyond his experience and capacity, but was life-threatening, Exodus 20:19, cf. Isaiah 6:5, 6. There were sacrifices available for praise and thanksgiving, but even these had an expiatory aspect, for none can approach God with sin, and there was always sin present and needing atonement under the old covenant. The New Testament saint has a privilege the Old Testament believer did not have, could not conceive, and did not want. Yes, as I have said, often the New Testament believer enters the Presence seeking forgiveness and restoration from an act of sin. He can enter seeking forgiveness because in the new covenant God has remitted the penalty and cleansed away the guilt. Therefore (even if the believer has entered to take care of an act of sin), he/she should and can enter for reasons of worship, praise, and fellowship; for guidance, empowerment, and perseverance; and for grace, love, and blessing. The privilege is high, as high as heaven, and should be rightly valued by the believer; the greater appreciation one has of the value of the privilege, the more often one will enter God's presence, and experience the divine joy, comfort, peace, and love awaiting him. "I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God" Psalm 43:4.

The fourth reason for the Christian's boldness to enter into God's presence is found in v. 22, a "true" heart.¹⁹ The Greek word translated "true" is *alethinos*. There are two Greek words which are translated by the one English word "true." One is *alethes*, a word meaning "to speak the truth." An *alethes* person is one who cannot lie. The other word, the one used here, *alethinos*, means real, or genuine. As an example, a *xul-l-nos* object is an object made of wood: it is made out of that substance which is genuine wood, not an imitation of wood. An *aleth-l-nos* object is made out of that which is true: that which has truth and only truth for its substance.²⁰ Thus, an *alethinos* object is genuine: it is all that it presents itself to be.

In most cultures people are used to thinking of genuine as opposed to false or counterfeit, but that was not the use of the word by the ancient world, and not its use in Hebrews 10:22. *Alethinos* has previously been used in Hebrews 8:2, where it is said that Jesus is a minister of the *alethinos* tabernacle. The earthly tabernacle was an (note the word change) *alethes* (true, not false) tabernacle, because it was built at God's command and made according to the pattern God gave to Moses. But it was not the *alethinos* (genuine) tabernacle, because it was a copy of the *alethinos*, genuine, reality in heaven. In 10:22 the genuine *alethinos* heart is opposed to the heart "adulterated" by (mixed with) sin. The following example may help us to

¹⁸ Dependence upon God—his wisdom, his power, his grace, his guidance, his commandments, his values—is the true key to the victorious Christian life.

¹⁹ The heart is a term in Scripture that refers to the personality: the seat of moral reflection, choice of the will, and pattern of behavior. The term includes all the mental processes, feelings, affections, and emotions, along with the internal motivations, leading to one's decisions and responses to life situations. See Appendix 2.

²⁰ Trench, *Synonyms*, 41-43, provides the substance of the paragraph.

understand this use of *alethinos*. What is known as 24 karat gold is pure gold, that is, it is unalloyed with another metal. When gold is mixed (alloyed) with other metals (silver, copper, zinc, platinum), the amount of pure gold the alloy contains is identified by a percentage, expressed by the word "karat." Eighteen karat gold is 75% pure gold and 25% other metal. Twelve karat gold is 50% pure gold, 50% other metal. An *alethinos* gold object is 100% pure, unalloyed, 24 karat, gold. Any gold jewelry that is not 24 karat gold is still *alethes*, because it is true that it contains gold, but it is not *alethinos*, because it does not have 100% gold only for its substance; it is not all that it presents itself to be.

The *alethinos* (genuine) heart is in the first instance the one that meets all the requirements of salvation; it is all that it presents itself to be. The *alethinos* heart—the "heart" is a metonym for the person—is one that believes only on Jesus Christ as Savior and thus is forgiven, regenerated, sanctified, "perfected forever," v. 14. The *alethinos* heart is the one that is spiritually alive to God, not spiritually dead in sins. The saved person is *alethinos* because he has ceased believing in the shadows and copies of the old covenant, or in the counterfeits and lies presented to mankind by Satan's "anything-but-Jesus" religions.²¹ The *alethinos* believer is spiritually qualified, spiritually capable, and divinely authorized to enter into the presence of God. His faith in God gives him the full (complete) assurance to be in God's presence, because the spiritual condition of the saved soul, as found by God "in Christ", is in complete and perfect harmony with the spiritual conditions required by God to be in his presence. The saved soul is in fact in harmony with the one true God, who is *aletheuo* (not counterfeit), *alethes* (the true one who cannot lie), and *alethinos* (genuine, not mixed with other gods). This harmony is based upon the complete identification of the believer with the Savior. To use the biblical term, the believer's eternal status before God is "in Christ." Those who are "in Christ" have a "true heart."

I have spoken of the believer having a true heart because he is "in Christ," meaning that God sees in the believer the righteousness of his Son. But, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" And, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). The sin nature always tempts the believer to approach God with a heart adulterated by acts or thoughts of sin. In the practical, day-to-day living of his life, the believer must take care to maintain the spiritual condition of his heart as *alethinos*. His standing with God is eternally righteous, but the state of his soul before God changes if he gives into the temptations of sin. The righteous, holy, and just God does not change: if the believer sins, God's righteousness, holiness and justice demand he turn away from fellowship with the believer; when the believer is obedient, the same righteousness, holiness and justice allow the believer to have fellowship with God. The believer must take care to maintain his "true heart"²² if he would maintain his fellowship with God. Therefore, while the believer's true heart "in Christ" *always* gives him access into the presence of God, it is also true that to gain access for worship, praise, fellowship, etc., he must avoid sin and practice righteousness. In this aspect, we can say that, if the believer has "genuine singleness of purpose and dedication"²³ (a true heart), then he or she can draw near to God. The believer in drawing near to God is genuinely committed to all God is and requires.²⁴ He or she has "a sincere, genuine, honest desire and determination to render unto God that which is his due."²⁵ Beautiful language, an outward emotional earnestness, or clever lines and phrases, will not deceive nor satisfy the God who demands to be worshiped in spirit and in truth, John 4:24. A "true heart" is required. Therefore, there are two aspects to a "true heart." The first is that the believer always stands in Christ before God with a true heart. The second is that he must maintain the sanctity of his true heart by being obedient

²¹ Including those religions, denominations, sects, and churches that name the Name of Christ, but do not believe in his saving power, or add man's good works to his saving grace. Since the new covenant points to Christ alone as the Savior, one must exclude all religious beliefs that do not point to Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, as the one and only way to salvation.

²² This is that daily aspect of experiential sanctification wherein the believer takes care to be obedient to God, working daily, in the power of the Spirit, to be more and more like Christ.

²³ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 410.

²⁴ Guthrie, G., *Hebrews*, 343.

²⁵ Pink, *Hebrews*, 591.

to, and maintaining fellowship with, a holy God. In regard to this second point, God has given the believer the desire, the volition, every spiritual capacity, all divine empowerment and assistance, and an ever-present remedy for sin, to be able to maintain the true heart in its holy condition.

Now, as to acts of sin. The day-to-day circumstances of the believer's life will determine what actions the believer must or may perform while in God's presence, but the believer always has access into the presence of God. A perfect life in this world is impossible, because sin, although "dethroned" remains as a tempter in the believer's soul. Therefore, it is inevitable that a believer will be tempted to sin, and not impossible that the believer will commit one or more acts of sin during his/her Christian life; no believer is perfect in this mortal life. When the believer does commit an act of sin, the believer's response to the Spirit's work of conviction (I know I have sinned) is to enter God's presence to repent and confess the sin, receive spiritual cleansing from God, and restoration to fellowship with God. Although sin creates a barrier to fellowship, it is not a barrier for access to God for repentance, confession, cleansing, and restoration, 1 John 1:9. The spiritual basis for the promise is 1 John 2:1-2, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous . . . the propitiation for our sins." An act of sin limits the fellowship a holy God can have with his child, the believer. God is serious about not having fellowship with anyone who sins. A holy God turned away from his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, when Jesus, on the cross, took upon himself the guilt of mankind's sin. Therefore, access into God's presence, to receive cleansing from sin and restoration to fellowship, is essential for the believer: as the believer spiritually matures he should commit less sin, but he will never be sinless in this mortal life. In the context of Hebrews 10:19-22, the 1 John 1:9-2:2 promise means that when I, a believer in Jesus as Savior, have committed an act of sin, I can enter into the holiest by agreeing with God (confession) that I have sinned. Confession of sin is an act presupposing conviction (I know that I have sinned) and sorrow (godly repentance) for my sin, with a firm resolution not to do this sin again (part of repentance). Repentance and confession of sin is the spiritual action that, when I have sinned, brings me into God's presence. I enter humbled and ashamed, agreeing with the conviction wrought in me by the Holy Spirit that I have sinned, and thereby have dishonored God by failing to reflect his image and glory in my life. Upon my repentance and confession God cleanses my soul from the defilement of sin, an act that restores me to communion and fellowship with him. The believer *always* has a means of access into God's presence.

God's presence is always a throne of grace to the believer, 4:16, not a throne of judgment. "Grace" is a general term for unmerited blessing received from God. God gives grace for prayer, for service, for obedience, for perseverance—God gives grace to enable the believer to succeed in every aspect of his or her Christian life. May a believer come to the throne of grace to meet any need? The actions we discussed above—conviction, repentance, confession, cleansing, restoration—require my soul to be in the presence of God. If, when I have been defiled by an act of sin, I can still enter the Presence, then there is no act or state of being under which I, the believer in Jesus Christ as Savior, cannot enter into God's presence. Christ has opened a new and living way for the believer to enter into the holiest place of all, the immediate presence of God.²⁶ "God sees every believer in Christ, and the feeblest saint has title to immediate access into the holiest through the atoning blood."²⁷ The "full assurance of faith," also means that "if [the believer] cannot consciously come with 'full assurance,' then let him earnestly come unto the throne of grace to get the full assurance"²⁸ needed to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16).

Finally (although the subject admits of much more in the way of devotion and piety than allowed by the explanatory nature of the commentary), it seems obvious to me that a true heart requires—makes of the greatest necessity—that one must enter into God's presence truthfully and respectfully. The believer's privilege

²⁶ The opposite must also be true. There is no entry into God's presence apart from saving faith in Jesus. The unsaved sinner can enter into God's presence only by seeking salvation in Jesus Christ, but he can have confidence that the way is always open to him/her for salvation: God never hinders nor does he turn away anyone truly seeking salvation in Jesus Christ by his free grace through faith in Christ alone, Ephesians 2:8-9.

²⁷ Ironside, *Hebrews*, 120.

²⁸ Pink, *Hebrews*, 592.

is the right of access to God; his duty is to approach; but those who place no value on the privilege cannot understand or perform the duty.²⁹ One should enter the Presence with a great deal of devout awe and reverential fear of the great and gracious God, King and Lover of our souls, but also the Judge of our souls. Boldness does not exclude these things, rather boldness requires this true heart condition, because we know him to whom we must give an accounting of our self, and we know that everything about our soul is naked and open to him. An act of sin will separate us from his presence, until we chose to enter and take care of the problem. Conforming our life to be like Christ's life will keep us in the holiest.

The fifth and sixth reasons the believer can enter the holiest are "hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience," and "our bodies washed with pure water." I have noted before that by the word "heart" the Scripture means the person: who you are, your motivations, volition, conscience, moral/spiritual state, etc. The term "sprinkled" is the Greek word, *rantizo*, used in the New Testament only in this Epistle (9:13, 19, 21; 10:22) and refers to an Old Testament practice in the Mosaic Law. Two Hebrew words are translated "sprinkle" in the Old Testament Scripture. The primary word, *zaraq* means "to toss, throw, scatter in abundance," and probably indicates the use of the entire hand to scatter or smear the blood (and in certain rites to pour out the blood beside the altar.) The other word, the synonym of *zaraq*, is *naza*, a word meaning a spattering, and more in line with our modern idea of "sprinkle." In Leviticus 16 the high priest uses his finger to *naza* blood on the mercy seat. When, Hebrews 10:19, 21, Moses "sprinkled" blood on the book of the covenant, the people, and the tabernacle, the corresponding Hebrew word is *zaraq*: he used his hand. When the Writer, Hebrews 9:13, refers to the "ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean," the corresponding Hebrew word is *naza*. When every use (*zaraq*, 35 times; *naza*, 24 times) is considered, their interpretation is clear. The blood was *zaraq* on the law and the people to confirm the covenant; *zaraq* on the altar to declare that sacrifices offered on the altar were the only way to God; and *zaraq* as purification to indicate sanctification (e.g., Exodus 29:20; Leviticus 1:5). The blood was *naza*, Leviticus 4:6, 17; 16:14, 15, 19, to indicate expiation for sin. *Naza* was also the word used during the purification and consecration of the priests for holy service, Exodus 29:21. The Old Testament *zaraq* and *naza* provided a purification for past sins, and a cleansing of the moral conscience from the immediate sense of guilt. The meaning of the New Testament *rantizo* is based upon the Old Testament *zaraq* and *naza*. The Writer of Hebrews uses these Old Testament examples of spiritual truth to communicate the New Testament truth of the complete propitiation made for the believer's sin: the believing soul has been sprinkled by the blood of Christ from an evil conscience. The believer is qualified to enter the holiest because his "evil conscience" (cf. 9:14). In 10:22 it indicates the sin nature has been perfectly cleansed from the guilt and penalty of sin by the blood of Christ. Put in the terms of *zaraq*, the believer's sin has been "smeared" i.e., completely covered, by Christ's blood. The believer has also been *naza* by Christ's blood for sanctification and service to a holy God (cf. 10:14). "'Hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience' are precisely hearts which have been purged of sin by the blood of Jesus."³⁰ No sin is allowed or to be found in the heavenly sanctuary where God manifests his presence, and into which the believer is invited to enter. The expiation and sanctification caused by the "sprinkling" of Christ's blood is why the believer can enter the holiest with boldness.

The sixth and final reason for the believer to "have boldness to enter the holiest" is that "our bodies [are] washed with pure water." There are two Greek words that are translated by the one English word "wash." The Greek words are *louo* and *nipito*. The word *louo* means to bathe, i.e., to wash the entire body, while *nipito* means to wash a part of the body. John 13:10 provides the perfect Scripture example: "Jesus said to Peter, 'He who is *louo* needs only to *nipito* his feet.'" If we state this verse in terms of salvation and experiential sanctification, "Jesus said to Peter, 'he who is saved needs only to cleanse himself when defiled by an act of sin.'³¹"

In Hebrews 10:22 the Greek word is *louo*. One can enter the holiest because he has been bathed in the

²⁹ Saphir, *Hebrews*, 11:665.

³⁰ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 411.

³¹ The reference to "feet" in John 13:10 is a symbolic reference to one's "walk," that is, one's manner of life in the world, thus in that context *louo* corresponds to the act of salvation, and *nipito* corresponds to confession of an act of sin committed after salvation.

blood of Christ. The meaning of *louo* is the application of Christ's propitiation to the believer (the believer's faith is like the hyssop and scarlet wool that sprinkled, *zaraq*, the blood, cf. 9:19). The guilt and penalty of the believer's sin has been *louo*, "washed away," by the payment Christ made for sin (cf. Titus 3:5-7). The Writer states that it is "our bodies" that have been bathed with pure water. In the first instance, this is in contrast to the sprinkling of the "evil conscience." The Scripture understands human beings as persons comprised of body and soul (not a dichotomy but a union of the material and spiritual). Therefore, one meaning of "sprinkling the evil conscience" when combined with "washing the body" is that the whole person is cleansed from sin, thus made fit/qualified to enter the holiest. Not one trace of the guilt and penalty of sin remains, because the whole person is cleansed from sin. Another way to view this verse is to understand that Scripture views the body as the instrument of sin, Romans 6:13. Also, because the intangible sin nature acts through the physical body, the body is viewed as the seat where sin dwells, Romans 6:12. Because the body and soul are inseparable parts of the whole person, the body, defiled by the actions of sin, must also be cleansed for entry into the holiest. The biblical illustration of this total body-and-soul cleansing is the Old Testament day of atonement ceremony. Blood was shed and bodies were washed to cleanse soul and body from the defilement of sin. These acts illustrated God's forgiveness of sin and sanctification to his service. The spiritual reality communicated by the illustration is that Christ's offering saves the whole person and sanctifies him/her for a relationship with God. Psalm 51:2, the psalm of David's repentance from his sin with Bathsheba, perfectly communicates this truth: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (KJV). David, in conviction, repentance, and confession, was seeking forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration in God's grace alone, through faith alone.

What, then, is the meaning of being washed with "pure water"? As seen in the day of atonement ceremony, washing was an outward act indicating an inward spirituality reality; it was sanctification with a view to consecration for service toward God. Every priest was required to wash before performing any duty at the tabernacle. The requirement to wash symbolically indicated that inner purity from sin is necessary in order to perform service toward God. Serving God meant entering into his presence. When any sacrifice was offered to God, the priest was in the spiritual presence of God during the act of the offering; thus he must be clean; not merely ceremonially, as in the washing, but really, by having offered for himself a sacrifice for his past sins. But, as we have discussed in previous chapters, forgiveness under the old covenant was not permanent. Christ, in his propitiation, made a permanent cleansing of sin. He fully paid for the penalty of sin and he washes (sanctifies) every believer from the guilt (defilement) of sin. The whole person is cleansed by Christ. The reference to "pure" water is a reference to Christ's act, i.e., pure water thoroughly and completely cleanses.³² Pure water has no defiling components, it has no impurities, therefore it must in its cleansing action be able to wash away all defilements: it brings none of its own, and it leaves none behind.³³

The believer can always come into God's presence. Christ has opened the way by his blood. He has dedicated (thus made permanent) the way through the offering of himself. He has given the believer a true heart, and the confidence of faith, making the believer fit for God's presence by cleansing the whole person, body and soul, from the penalty (death) and guilt (defilement) of sin. "What a wonderful Savior is Jesus, my Jesus. What a wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord."³⁴

Now follows, vv. 23-25, three exhortations concerning the practical application of the truth presented in vv. 19-22. Since, as is the case, the Christian can enter the holiest, then what are the practical applications for the earthbound believer? In brief, these are to "hold fast" to all the aspects of our faith, to "stir up" one another in the practice of our faith, and to "not forsake" public worship and exhortation.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

³² Many commentators find in the pure "water" a reference to the Holy Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). Others see a connection with baptism, as a symbol pointing to the spiritual truth of Jesus' cleansing blood (1 John 1:7).

³³ Compare Ezekiel 36:25-27, the prophecy of Israel's return to the land in Messiah's kingdom, when the new covenant will be effective for the nation.

³⁴ Chorus to *What a Wonderful Savior!*, Elisha A. Hoffman, 1891.

25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

These three exhortations are relevant not just to Christian living, but more specifically to the church. I am not using "church" its worldly meaning of a building where professing Christians meet, but in its New Testament meaning of a group of saved people who form a local body of Christ. These exhortations pertain to the individual's responsibilities within his or her local church, and thereby the corporate responsibility of believers to one another. Here is a definition of a local church:

- A local church is a body of baptized believers, joined together upon a credible profession of saved by grace through faith in Christ the only Savior, regularly meeting together under the leadership of elders and deacons, participating together in a common purpose to worship God, to propagate the Gospel locally and worldwide, to make disciples, to observe the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, to present a common witness of faith and doctrine centered on the word of God, and to encourage one another in the daily practice of the principles, precepts, and values of God as expressed in his Word.

That this is the Writer's intended meaning seems apparent from 3:6, as being parallel both in subject matter and word use.

- Hebrews 3:6, "but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."
- Hebrews 10:23, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."

The subject of 10:23 is the same as that of 3:6: Christ's house of salvation. In the larger context of salvation history, Christ's "house" is the total congregation of the faithful from Adam to the last soul saved prior to the end of the millennium, Revelation 20:7-10, because after this event is the dissolution of the heavens and earth Revelation 20:11), the judgment of unsaved souls (Revelation 20:12-15), and the new heavens and new earth of the eternal state (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-22:5), populated by the saved out of all ages of man. Salvation history is made up of various dispensations,³⁵ and each is like viewing the house of salvation from a different perspective. To illustrate, the front of my home looks very different than that of the rear or side of the house, but whether viewing one or the other I am looking at my house. In 3:6 two dispensations of the house are in view: the old covenant and the new covenant. In the specific context of 10:23ff, the New Testament church (as partakers of the new covenant) is the view of Christ's house. One can see, then, that these two verses are parallel in theme. They each address the same subject, but each has a different perspective.

The exhortation to "confidence" and "rejoicing" in 3:6 indicates boundless confidence in one's faith. Here, 10:23, is the result of that boundless confidence, a *homologia*, a "confession" of one's faith. This Greek word *homologia* means "to say the same thing." The confession/profession the Christian makes, is to agree with God's testimony concerning the body of faith (the Scripture revelation) in general and Christ as Savior in particular. The main thrust of 10:23-25 is perseverance in the inward conviction of faith that must lead to its outward practice. In 10:23 the outward practice that is the end result of perseverance is one's *homologia*, one's confession of the faith.³⁶ We are to hold fast to the inner conviction and outward confession of the faith.

What is "the hope" of v. 23? The parallel with 3:6 (to rest in God's land by faith), the use of *homologia* in 3:1 (faith held in common among believers), and the new covenant that underlies 10:19-25, indicate the

³⁵ Formally, a dispensation might be defined as a recognizable economy in salvation history. Less formally, one can recognize that the content of faith necessary to salvation has changed at different points in man's history. For example, fallen Adam's content of saving faith, or Abraham's content of faith, was not the same as that of believer's under the Mosaic Law. In this current age, known as the age of grace or the church age, the content of faith is not the sacrifices under the old covenant (the Law) but the new covenant in Christ.

³⁶ In 10:23-25 public testimony of the salvation message—evangelism—is not in view, but is certainly not excluded.

"hope," *elpis*, is synonymous with the biblical concept of "the faith," which is the body of revealed truth.³⁷ The "hope" is confidence in the future, grounded in "the faith" which is (in this context) that whole body of doctrine that reveals the hope. The commandment to "hold fast the confidence of our hope," is part of the exhortation to persevere in one's faith. The Writer used the word *elpis* (hope) instead of *pistis* (faith) because "hope" more clearly communicates faith in the future. Faith in the certainty of future events is the basis for the perseverance theme announced in vv. 25, 36, and exemplified by the Old Testament saints in chapter eleven (vv. 26-39 are another warning section; vv. 35, 36 are the bridge between vv. 23-25 and chapter eleven). In the New Testament, the return of Christ for the church (the Rapture event) is the usual subject of the Christian's hope. In 10:23-26 the writer is emphasizing daily Christian living, and the hope of Jesus' return is a prominent part of Christian life (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 John 3:2-3). Therefore, although one might have expected the word "faith" rather than "hope," the word hope is used because it includes specific promises regarding the future.³⁸ The "hope" emphasizes that the certainty of future events is the basis for perseverance in the inner conviction and outward confession of our faith.³⁹

The believer is to "hold fast" the confession of his hope. To "hold fast" has several shades of meaning (see 3:6), but theologically the Writer is emphasizing perseverance. Therefore, to hold fast means the believer⁴⁰ is to continue in his original trust in God, Christ, and the Scripture. Two reasons are given. First, one is to hold fast without "waver[ing]." The Greek *aklines*, means "steady; without inclining or giving way."⁴¹ Second, one's faith remains steady—one perseveres in the faith—because "he who promised is faithful." Two questions come to my mind: who is "he," and what did he "promise." The identity of "he" will determine the nature of the promise. That the "he" refers to the Godhead or a member of the Godhead is not in doubt. Therefore, this phrase promising his faithfulness is self-evidently true: God is always faithful, he never breaks his promise. The Writer gave evidence of God's faithfulness in 6:13-18. The "he" who has made the promise could be the Holy Spirit, for the exhortation is based in part on vv. 15-16, where the Writer records the words of the Spirit announcing the new covenant. This "he" might also be God (which in New Testament usage usually indicates God the Father as representing the Trinity⁴²), because God was the one who made the new covenant. If this identification is correct, then the promise would be those terms and conditions of the new covenant, and the relationship between vv. 17-18 and v. 19 may be in view. That "he" may refer to Jesus is also a strong possibility, because it is by reason of his work establishing the new covenant that the believer, who is the immediate subject of vv. 19-25, is able to enter the holiest to find grace to accomplish these various exhortations. In considering "he" as Jesus, one must consider the Writer's choice of "hope" instead of "faith," and the theme of perseverance in connection with the future in chapter eleven. Jesus is the high priest over the house of God, whose house we are, since we (believer's) do hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. If the "he" is Jesus, the promise would most likely refer to Christ returning for his

³⁷ "The faith" may be as broad as the entire Scripture (the extensive body of Bible doctrine which makes up the perfect whole of the truth revealed by God), or as narrow as one's testimony of personal salvation in Christ. E.g., see Jude 3.

³⁸ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 214.

³⁹ Chapter eleven illustrates and confirms this proposition. Note the implicit *inclusio* of 10:23, the "confession of our hope" and 11:39, "a good testimony through faith."

⁴⁰ This is not meant to discount the God-ward side of perseverance, which is Christ's promise of the believer's eternal security in salvation (John 1:27-30), and empowerment by God's grace to persevere. The Writer's discussion focuses on man's responsibilities.

⁴¹ Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 111.

⁴² In the Old Testament, the Trinity was viewed acting as one Person, although there were intimations of the Godhead, e.g., the substitutionary sacrifices for sin made to God, or the several mentions of God's Spirit. In the New Testament, the specific work accomplished by each member of the Trinity is emphasized, e.g., Jesus made the propitiation, the Father accepted his propitiation, and the Spirit applies the benefits of the propitiation. Or, another example, the Spirit is the teacher and administrator of the church of which Christ is the head. A third and final example: Christ is the visible representation of the Trinity: in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). In the 834 uses (NJKV) of the word "God" in the New Testament epistles the word is generally used of the Father as the representative of the Godhead, and specifically defined when not so used, e.g., Colossians 2:2.

church. Each of these possibilities is acceptable and that knowledge guides the choice. To choose one member of the Godhead over the others is probably over thinking the reference. The "he" of the verse is then "God." The most likely interpretation of the "promises" is all the promises of God applicable to Christians under the new covenant, which include the promises concerning the future. The verse may then be interpretively expanded as, "Let us Christians persevere in our faith in Christ, without wavering, looking toward the future promised to believers, for God is faithful to remember his promises."

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

The necessity for the Christian to perform good works is stated throughout the Epistles, and constantly exemplified in the historical books of Scripture. One of the clearest statements of this doctrine is found in Ephesians 2:10, and I find the Writer's reference to the same subject encouraging. Ephesians 2:10 follows the great announcement of "saved by grace through faith, not works," with the practical end God had in mind when he saved sinners. Ephesians 2:10 briefly but clearly instructs the Christian in what must be the character of his or her life after salvation: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Believers are vessels of mercy to display God's glory (Romans 9:23) and are foreordained in Christ to glorify God (Ephesians 1:6). God's decree to save sinners, Ephesians 1:4, incorporated the result, his glory, and the means by which that glory will be displayed, Ephesians 1:5, 6, 11-14, 2:8-10. God's decrees encompass the purpose, plan, processes, and results of his actions, therefore good works are decreed as a result of salvation. The works were prepared that the believer should do them, The emphasis is less on the preparation of the works and more on the believer doing the works. The believer is continuously faced with a choice: to willingly yield to God and do the works, or stubbornly continue in sin and not do the works. God preordained good works for every believer to do; the believer who is in fellowship with God will do them. Note, then, that the believer is to "walk in" good works, not work in them: doing good works is part of a normal Christian life. Since, therefore, good works are an innate part of Christianity, they are an evidence of salvation: a life without these good works is an unsaved life. The purpose of God cannot be frustrated or denied; the good works God has purposed and prepared for his people will be accomplished. Therefore good works are innate to salvation.

Since the believer was saved to live a life of good works, it is necessary to understand what God considers as good works. "Good works" is a term too often misunderstood and thus the exhortation is less often followed. Sometimes good works are viewed solely in the context of being saved. An unsaved sinner may try to earn salvation by doing good works in order to become righteous or justified in God's eyes. God does require righteous works as part of the Christian life, Romans 6:13. The unsaved sinner's desire is to be righteous with God. Acting right is a way to demonstrate being righteous, so unsaved sinners try to make good works labor to accomplish their salvation. However, the righteousness that saves does not come from good works, but is God making the believing sinner righteous by grace through faith in Christ. God makes the believing sinner righteous by imputing Christ's own righteousness to the believer. Righteousness is the condition of being in a right standing before God, and this is accomplished only by faith in Christ. Standing before God in righteousness means sin is forgiven, the soul regenerated (born again), eternal life given, and sanctification accomplished. However, just as there is an experiential aspect to sanctification, there is an experiential aspect to righteousness, in which the believer should live according to God's commands. Just as salvation is not produced by good works, but results in good works, righteousness is not produced by good works, but does result in good works. The Christian's good works demonstrate his or her prior salvation and righteousness, and by doing good works he or she is living a righteous life. Let us not put the proverbial cart before the horse. The horse is salvation, sanctification, and righteousness; the cart is good works. The command to the Christian is (Romans 6:13) that, now having been set free from sin by righteousness, he or she is to yield themselves as instruments of righteousness (right thoughts, right choices, right actions) to God. The result of yielding one's heart, mind, soul, and body as instruments of righteousness to God is the production of good works. Good works, then, is what the practical aspect of the Christian life is all about.

Before I explain the biblical definition of good works, I should explain that God's usual method of

interacting with his creatures is mediately. When God acts immediately, he uses his resources to accomplish his will: God said "Let there be light," and light was created out of nothing by the omnipotent willing and power of God. When God gives a believer spiritual power to accomplish his will, he is acting immediately toward the believer to spiritually empower him. However, in using his power in the believer to accomplish his will, God is working through the believer's life. In a word, he is acting mediately, i.e., through another. God acting mediately through the Christian to accomplish his will is "good works." One example must suffice. How do sinners hear the word of salvation? God sends his word to sinners through the testimony of his saved people, Romans 10:14-15. In yielding him or her self to God for the work of evangelism, the believer has performed a good work.

The believer, then, in being the person through whom God works in the world, is responsible to do God's good works, prepared beforehand for the believer to walk in them. The interaction between "prepared beforehand" and "we should walk," (Ephesians 2:10) indicates that at every point in life where a decision must be made, many choices are available. Put another way, there are many right choices, and many wrong choices, but there is no one perfect choice, because the sovereignty of God works through man's responsibility to accomplish God's purposes, plans, and processes. More plainly, God allows men to make choices, which his sovereignty ensures will accomplish his will. A course of action that is in full agreement with the principles, values, and precepts of God's Word is a right choice. Each choice differs in its mode, method, and progress according to the nature of the person making the choice. Each one of several possible choices at any particular decision point are means leading to some one end ordained by God. The critical difference in each of several possible choices is not in achieving the end goal, which God's sovereignty will infallibly accomplish, but in the consequences each choice contains for the person making the choice. More simply, there may be many paths leading from point "A" to point "B." A person decides on a particular path according to his or her nature, his or her faith, his or her state of fellowship with God. God's sovereignty ensures his purpose and plan will be accomplished, through one path or another, if not by you then by another. The crucial issue for a believer is not so much accomplishing God's will as it is the consequences of the chosen path. Some paths lead to blessing; others do not. The kind and quality of blessings may differ dependent upon the right choices one makes; just as the consequences for a wrong choice will differ depending upon which wrong choices were made. As an example, prayer is an ordained means to accomplish God's plans. However, if a person impressed by the Spirit to pray does not pray, the plan will be accomplished by another means—another person praying(?)—but the blessing for the person who was supposed to pray, and did not, will be lost. Good works have been prepared in advance for each believer, as a vital and necessary part of his or her Christian life. To do or not to do, to serve willingly or by necessity, to chose based upon Scripture principles, precepts, and values—these are the crucial choices that lead to success, defeat, or mediocrity. The blessing comes as part of the doing. The believer's choices in this life shape the character of his life both now and in eternity.

Since one's choices influence blessing, it is important to understand how the Bible defines a good work; the blessing comes from doing the good works God prepared. The biblical view of a "good work" is seen through the context in which this term is found.⁴³ The first use (the first use is very important in Scripture), is in Matthew 5:16, in the context of previous "beatitudes" and Christ's subsequent discourse. When one practices the beatitudes,⁴⁴ then one will be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. These are moral

⁴³ Depending upon your translation version, this list may differ. This is the occurrence of the term "good works" in the KJV: Matthew 5:16, John 10:32, Acts 9:36, Romans 13:3, Ephesians 2:10, 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Timothy 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14; Hebrews 10:24; 1 Peter 2:12. Two Greek words are translated "good," *kalos* and *agathos*. The first means beautiful, thus in a moral sense "virtuous." The second means "good" whether the sense is physical or moral.

⁴⁴ The beatitudes are moral precepts used to express the broader moral principles underlying God's commandments. In the immediate context in which Christ stated them, the "Beatitudes" were intended to reveal the perfection required by the Mosaic Law, and therefore the hopelessness of attaining righteousness and justification through the Law: who is able to be perfect as God is perfect? (Matthew 5:48). For the Christian, who has received righteousness and

(continued...)

concepts expressed symbolically using physical actions. In the ancient world, without refrigeration or other modern means to preserve food, salt was the preservative (bacteria cannot live in salt). To be "the salt of the earth" is to preserve morality, virtue, and truth through your moral convictions and actions (exemplified by the beatitudes). The "light" of the ancient world was a shallow vessel filled with oil, in which a wick was floated. This was the only means of lighting a dark place. To be the "light of the world" is to expose immorality and bring knowledge and understanding; the beatitudes establish the standards for this action also. Moreover, if we go but a little further into Matthew 5, we discover that the beatitudes are a practical summation of God's commandments. To live by the moral principles embedded in the beatitudes is to do good works. Good works are righteous actions, right actions are defined exclusively by Scripture, and the moral principles and precepts in the beatitudes help define right acts.

Another insight into good works is John 10:32. Some Jews were about to kill Jesus (he had declared himself to be God) and he says to them, "Many good works have I shown you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me?" In context, Jesus was trying to help them understand he was fulfilling Old Testament messianic prophecy every time he healed someone, but his reference to good works also included his teachings and the compassion that motivated his healing acts. The modern Christian is not divinely empowered to physically heal people, but is spiritually empowered to preach the Gospel to heal sin-sick souls, and exercise compassion toward others. These things are good works. Let us also notice Paul's comments that governments are "not a terror" to good works, but to the evil. Doing that which is morally right is a good work. Two more references must suffice. Paul writes to his friend Timothy, pastor of a local church, that, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all *good works*" (emphasis mine). For the Christian's work to be a "good" work, the Christian must be informed by Scripture and the work he or she does must conform to the Scripture's standard of what is, in God's sight, right and good. In 1 Peter 2:11-12, the apostle speaks to the believer's witness to the unsaved, "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your *good works* which they observe, glorify God" (emphasis mine). Here good works are spoken of as "honorable conduct" and contrasted with "fleshly lusts," and "doing evil." Prayer is a good work, for in prayer we worship God and announce our dependence on his for all things. Reading, meditating upon, and studying Scripture is a good work, for by it we become more like Christ, and through it we lead a righteous life that glorifies God. Righteous actions affecting one's Christianity, and righteous actions demonstrating one's faith in Christ are good works. If I might sum up all the uses of the term, good works means living according to God's rules and practicing God's values. Scripture is the only means by which the Christian can be informed of God's rules and God's values in this New Testament age.⁴⁵

The exhortation is also to stir up "love" as well as good works. Love is also a term misunderstood, misused, and seldom followed according to Scripture. The several Greek words used for the concept of "love" in the New Testament are somewhat interchangeable, depending upon the context. This particular word is *agape*, and Scripture tends to use it in two ways. One is to speak of self-sacrifice. The total witness of Scripture tells us that God so loved, *agape*, the world that he gave his only begotten Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for sin, that whoever believes on Jesus for salvation shall be saved. God, in the Person of the Son, made a choice to sacrifice himself as a payment for man's sin. The other use of *agape* supports the self-sacrifice view. This *agape* love begins as a choice, an act of the will: I will value this person and seek his or her greatest

⁴⁴(...continued)

justification in Christ, the beatitudes are the moral principles that guide the practice of faith.

⁴⁵ The reader is herein cautioned to take into account the whole counsel of Scripture. For example, the Old Testament Law of Moses is fulfilled and superseded in Christ. Therefore, although Scripture defined a good work as bringing a sacrifice, or as stoning an adulterer/adulteress, those laws have been superseded in Christ. The Christian way is one of peace, compassion, love, testifying of salvation by faith in Christ, and suffering for the testimony of Christ. There are moral principles in the Law to inform and guide our personal behavior. The Christian way is to show the gift of life through his life—good works—willingly suffer when the offer of eternal life is rejected, and rejoice when accepted.

Hebrews 10:19-39

good. God chose to value his fallen creature man, so much so, that he willingly sacrificed himself on man's behalf. This is *agape*: to give to another person out of one's own being and possessions, without regard for any merit or demerit that person may have, and without requiring a return from the recipient. Whether the giving is emotional (compassion), spiritual (prayer) or physical (a good work), to *agape* love another is to give to him or her without thought of recompense or recognition, without regard to merit or demerit. This is hard. Toward some people it may be humanly impossible. But with God, who always loves in this manner, and puts his love into believers, to *agape* another is not impossible. A few verses, out of 117 uses, will illustrate *agape*. I have already, above, given an interpretation of John 3:16. Love is well-defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. John's first epistle is a good source for understanding this word: God loved so much he laid down his life for sinners; God loved so much he adopted believers into his family. In 1 John 3, John applies God's choice of love as the standard for behavior between Christians: "He who does not love his brother abides in death"; "we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"; "whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"; "let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Love seeks to give what is right and good to others, without regard to merit or demerit. Love gives for the good of another, not for self, without requiring recognition or reward. The Old Testament Scripture contains both principles and precepts of charity, honesty, virtue, holiness, righteousness, justice, equity, forgiveness, kindness, and exhortation applicable to *agape* love in modern life. For example, Leviticus 19:9-18

- "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God.
- You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.
- You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.
- You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord.
- You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.
- You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.
- You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.
- You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*: I am the Lord" (emphasis mine).

Consider these New Testament descriptions of love from Jesus:

- Matthew 5:43-48, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.
- Matthew 22:37-39, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Jesus' discourse in these two New Testament passages is based on the Leviticus 19:9-18 passage. One sees that to *agape* love another does not begin as an emotion, but as a choice to do what is right toward another

person, as God defines righteousness. The *agape* love can develop an emotional attachment or commitment, but it begins as a choice: I will give of myself for the benefit of another, without regard to their personal merit or demerit, without thought of recompense, reciprocity, or recognition, without consideration of personal suffering or loss. This is how Jesus loved. In life he gave of himself without expectation of return, then he suffered death for the benefit of all, knowing there would be those who would not accept his love.

Having now a Scriptural understanding of love and good works, we are prepared to "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works." The call to consider "one another" should obviously refer to one's fellow believers. The Writer does not mean the believer is not to express love for the lost (acts of compassion; a witness of the Gospel), it is just that his focus is the church not the world. The Greek word translated "consider," *katanoëo*, is simple enough, meaning, in this verse, "to have respect to, to regard."⁴⁶ That meaning may be applied in several ways. Lane translates "keep on caring,"⁴⁷ for one another, and Wuest, "be giving careful attention to"⁴⁸ one another. Hughes likes the translation "to pay thoughtful attention to"⁴⁹ one another. Westcott seems to capture the meaning: "It is our duty [v. 23] to declare what we are and what we look for: it is our duty [v. 24] also to consider what others are. The well-being of each believer is bound up with the well-being of the whole body. He is therefore constrained to give careful heed [*katanoëo*] to others in the hope that he may rouse them to nobler action; and again that he may himself draw encouragement and inspiration from nobler examples."⁵⁰

When I think about these various but similar opinions, my interpretation is that each believer is responsible to "observe and encourage" other believers within his circle of association and influence. One is to observe a Christian brother or sister to understand their spiritual state and Christian activity. This is not to catch them doing wrong, but to care for them by gaining a sense of how they are doing in regard to this exhortation, so as to know when they need the loving and good act of encouragement. Christian brethren are to encourage love one toward another, and good works one toward one another. Encouragement is needed to stimulate love and good works, when a fellow believer is successful in *agape* love and good works; and when *agape* love and good works fail. Encouragement is needed to help one another not only to practice love and good works, but to persevere in them.

That this needed encouragement is not by personal examples of love and good works, but must be in words and deeds given to the one to be encouraged, is found in the words "to stir up." This Greek word, *paroxusmos*, literally means "to provoke" and is usually used negatively, as in to provoke to anger, or irritation. Here the use is unusual, as it is used in a good sense. Some have suggested the meaning should be "to sharpen" based upon the root meaning and an assumed parallel with Proverbs 27:17. However, root meanings are not the best guides to actual use,⁵¹ and an assumed parallel depends on the root meaning. The better interpretation retains the basic meaning (thus the KJV "provoke") and "can only have the sense of 'incitement,' 'stimulation,'"⁵² and these meanings fit very well with *katanoëo*. Thus, to expand the translation through an interpretation, "each believer is to pay attention to, care for, and encourage one another, in order to excite one another to those acts of love and good works" that tend to the well-being of one another, and thus promote the well-being of the church.

25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

⁴⁶ Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 838.

⁴⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 289.

⁴⁸ Wuest, *Translation*, 529.

⁴⁹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 415.

⁵⁰ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 324.

⁵¹ Who today would interpret "dandelion" by the French root "lion's tooth", or "goodbye" as a contraction of the original, "God be with ye"?

⁵² Kittel and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, V:857.

In my comments I have separated vv. 24 and 25, but they are one sentence in the text, and v. 25 must be interpreted as part of the whole sentence:

- “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

If the believer is to help his or her fellow believers maintain and practice these musts of the Christian life—love and good works—then assembling together is also a must. These believers reading this epistle were not much different than you or I. They had spouses, children, jobs, and other daily commitments. Probably most were slaves, the original 24/7 job. History tells us their masters encouraged religious activities, although beginning at about the time the letter was written, and for about 250 years afterwards, Christianity was not an approved religion, and many risked their lives to “go to church.” History tells us Christians continued to assemble together throughout those 250 years, although many were martyred for their faith. A letter written by Pliny the Younger,⁵³ a Roman governor in Asia, in AD 112 (about 50 years after Hebrews was written) reveals that the believers in his province “met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery, to commit no breach of trust, and not to refuse to return a deposit upon demand. After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and later to take food of an ordinary harmless kind.” Pliny knew this because he was torturing men and women accused of being Christians, then executing those who would not deny Christ. The Roman government considered worship given to the Emperor a political act of loyalty to the Empire, as well as a religious act. Failure to state a formula of invocation to the gods and make offerings of wine and incense to the Emperor’s statue was treason, punishable by death. Although to the Romans this was a token act of allegiance, “Real Christians,” said Pliny, “can never be induced to make an invocation to the gods and make offerings of wine and incense to the Emperor’s statue.” Christian assembly was forbidden by an edict banning all political societies, which in the Roman mind included Christianity. They continued to assemble together, in secret when persecuted, knowing that when they were discovered they faced certain death. They did this because they had respect unto Christ and his word, “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together.” How pathetic are the excuses of modern believers who cannot “make it to church” on a regular basis?

Before considering the Greek text, let us briefly consider where the modern circumstance regarding “assembling together” is the same as the historical circumstance, and where it is different. By this I mean that for the original readers, indeed for centuries to come, there was one local church in the village, town, and perhaps even in the larger cities. Although there is evidence the earliest believers met in several house churches, there is also evidence to indicate these house churches all together made up one local church, and at regular intervals all the believers in a village, town, etc., gathered together in one place for corporate worship. Thus, for the original readers, the exhortation meant to meet regularly in the house churches for small group worship, and also to meet regularly in the corporate group for the same purposes. Here, the modern circumstance is the same as the historical circumstance. Believers are to meet regularly in their corporate place of worship, their local church, and to meet regularly in small groups with fellow believers.⁵⁴ However, to be regular in corporate worship one day each week is not spiritually healthy. Effective exhortation can be accomplished through Spirit empowered preaching during the “Sunday A.M. service,” but effective exhortation requires more than a once-a-week corporate worship experience. That is because in corporate worship there is very little (I am tempted to say none) interaction between believers that will lead to “each believer paying attention to, caring for, and encouraging one another, in order to excite one another to those acts of love and good works that tend to the well-being of one another, and thus promote the well-being of the church.” In modern corporate worship personal interaction between believers is little more than a nod or a handshake, and perhaps the social lubricant of polite, meaningless, conversation:

- “Hi, how are your doing?”

⁵³ See Appendix 3.

⁵⁴ The available small group worship or Bible study may be in the church’s building; perhaps even on a Sunday or Wednesday night. The modern circumstance provides many opportunities for Christian assembly.

- "Ok, how about you?"
- " I'm doing Ok too."
- "Have a good day/week."
- "Ok, you too."

This is not caring for one another, this is not exhorting one another, this is not stirring up one another to love and good works. Physically, this would be less than a crumb of bread and a swallow of water. The Christian cannot spiritually survive on this starvation diet. (This includes a Sunday School/Bible study class where lecture prevails over discussion and interaction.) Every church has one or more small groups meeting at various times during the week, in the church, or at a fellow believer's house. And this is where the modern circumstance differs from that of the original readers. Today's Christians have available multiple places for corporate worship, Bible study, fellowship, service, and social activities. Most villages, almost every town, and certainly every larger city, has more than one church of your particular denominational preference. In addition to any particular church one may choose to attend, there are various groups available for worship and study, good works and love. These range in a diverse spectrum from the local "rescue" mission, to civil protest in support of biblical issues, to a large variety of study groups, fellowship organizations, children's clubs, youth ministry, evangelism outreach, etc., etc., seemingly without end. The modern believer has no excuse as to small groups and corporate place of assembly, nor as to service in his or her group, corporate assembly, and community. Assembling together is a matter of priorities. What is more important to you? The Writer's priority was to "regularly assemble together," which must mean assembling in a setting where v. 24 can be effectively accomplished. Get involved and be spiritually healthy.

Now to the text. The Greek words translated "assembling of ourselves together" are *heautou episunagoge*. The word *heautou* is translated as "ourselves." There is some discussion among the Greek language Authorities as to whether this plural reflexive pronoun is in the first, second, or third person. The reflexive pronoun points back to the subject as doing the action, so when using reflexive pronouns, the subjects and the pronouns must match. A few examples may clarify the use (the reflexive pronoun is italicized):

- First person: We painted our house by *ourselves*.
- Second person: You should push *yourselves* to work harder.
- Third person: They painted their house by *themselves*.

Ellingworth⁵⁵ believes the evidence is for the first person, because this use includes the Writer's tendency to include himself with his readers. However, the second person use is possible, because the Writer is probably not present to attend the meetings. Lane opts for the third person, translating "not discontinuing our meeting together."⁵⁶ Because this sentence begins with "let us," I prefer the first person. Although the Writer may not be physically present at their meetings, he is including himself in the exhortation to "not forsake" meeting together. For his readers (even today) he means their local church, and his personal point of reference is his local church. The word *episunagoge* is a compound word made up of *epi*, and *sunagoge*. The word *epi* is a preposition whose basic meaning is "on, upon." Here, *epi* is combined with the noun *sunagoge* in the accusative case, giving *epi* the idea of rest and motion. In this use *epi* is properly translated "together," as in "coming together." Thus, *epi* + *sunagoge* means "to assemble together." Used with the first person plural reflexive pronoun *heautou*, the meaning is, "Let *us* not forsake *our* assembling *ourselves* together" (emphasis mine).

Adding to the practical meaning of *episunagoge*, Ellingworth⁵⁷ notes that this rare Greek word is always used in an eschatological (prophetic end times) context. The only two uses of *episunagoge* in the New Testament are 2 Thessalonians 2:1 (italicized), "concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our *gathering together* to Him," and here in Hebrews 10:25. Jesus' imminent return emphasizes the necessity and purpose of Christian assembly as a "must do" in the Christian life, and is associated with "the Day" and

⁵⁵ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 529.

⁵⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 273, 276 (note "u").

⁵⁷ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 528.

the command to persevere, v. 36. (in order to receive the promises that are part of the hope). I will, for now, assume the eschatological intent of the hope (v. 23), the Day (v. 25), and the need for endurance (v. 36). Here, we will discuss the practical use Scripture makes of Jesus' return. Christ and the apostles gave the New Testament church certain instructions concerning Jesus' return to gather up his church from the earth and take believers to heaven (the rapture). These instructions can be summed up to two words: "imminent" and "prepared." Since Jesus could come at any time (imminent), the church is to be always prepared for his "at any moment" coming. Preparedness is spiritual. In the context of Hebrews 10:25, the spiritual preparedness required by *episunagoge* is described in 10:19-39, exemplified in 11:1-40, and summarized in 12:1-2 (in a certain sense, 10:19-13:21 expounds on this one theme). The apostle John's instructions, at 1 John 3:3, succinctly expresses the practical preparedness aspect of the believer's life in the light of Jesus' imminent coming for his church. John wrote that the believer who has this assurance of Jesus' coming purifies himself, just as Jesus himself is pure (we shall be like him, v. 2). John does not mean that having an assurance ("hope") of the certainty of Jesus' return causes one to be pure. John means that because one believes with certainty that Jesus is coming, one takes action to purify himself in readiness for his coming (cf. Paul, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, 23; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The requirement for believers to always be prepared for Christ's imminent return intensifies the purpose (v. 24) of "assembling together," as forward-looking to the rapture and judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians, 5:9-10), where each believer's Christian works will be judged for reward or loss of reward.

In the phrase, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," the Greek word translated "forsaking" is *egkataleipo*. The meaning is, to abandon. The meaning is *not*, as some pastors interpret the verse to their congregations, "do not miss" or "be here for every service." The meaning is, do not abandon, or, don't stop gathering together; more positively, continue meeting regularly. In the context of our discussion concerning corporate worship and small groups, and the modern availability of meeting places and many small groups meeting in the church and in the home, *egkataleipo* confirms the regularity required of the Christian in his or her "meeting together." Nothing else is proposed, offered, or commanded in Scripture as the means to keep the church body, and thus its members, spiritually healthy and spiritually prepared. This one fact is why all Scripture, Old and New Testament, is addressed to believers, intended to be read in public worship, explained to the body of Christ, and practiced by every Christian. Note that some had apparently abandoned meeting together. The Writer gives no details, but are any details needed? If the Spirit had given us details, then would not we have been tempted to use these as excuses for not assembling together? Such is the perversity of the sin nature. Instead we are simply told that some had forsaken assembling together, and we are not to imitate their behavior: no excuse is a valid excuse. (There may be a valid reason, but no excuse is valid.)

This exhortation not to abandon Christian meetings must also apply to the eschatological sense of *episunagoge*, as incorporating the exhortations in other scriptures to be prepared for Christ's at any moment—but date unknown—coming. I shall use one prominent historical example to illustrate the point. The "Millerites" [followers of William Miller] were misled to believe Jesus would return in 1844. Historically current sources estimated that about 100,000 people left their jobs, farms, sold their property, to await Jesus' return on October 22, 1844. When Jesus failed to appear, an adjustment of about six months was made, and again, in 1845, the Millerites were disappointed.⁵⁸ Miller was not alone in calculating Jesus' return, then or now, whether through misuse of Scripture's prophecies, or encouraging the believer to look for signs of his return. The biblical view is that Jesus may come at any moment, and therefore the believer is to always be prepared for his coming. Since preparation is spiritual, relating to how one lives his or her Christian life, then abandoning family, property, jobs, and church to wait for Jesus is not Scriptural. Therefore, every believer is to continue meeting together until Jesus himself takes the believer away from the earth (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Note the contrasting "but" in v. 25, putting "not forsaking" in opposition to "exhorting one another."

⁵⁸ The Millerite movement evolved into the Seventh Day Adventist church, with a spiritualized explanation of why Christ did not return; an explanation that violates the sufficiency of the propitiation of Christ and the once-for-all sanctification of the believer.

Meetings are to continue in order to exhort one another. The purpose of the exhortation, vv. 24-25, is clear: stir up love and good works. The subject of the exhortation is the believer's responsibility to pay attention to, care for, and encourage one another, in order to excite one another to those acts of love and good works that tend to the well-being of one another, and thus promote the well-being of the church. To exhort means to encourage, comfort, and rebuke one another, that we might sustain and support one another. This exhortation must be sustained within the church through regular meetings. The Writer's statement "so much the more as you see the day approaching," does not apply exclusively to the act of exhortation, but applies to the actions required in the entire sentence. As "the day" is seen to be approaching, believers are to be diligent to continue meeting together, and in those meetings to consider one another, stir up one another to love and good works, and encourage, comfort, and rebuke one another. The well-being of Christian and church depend upon continuing to meet regularly. As "the day" approaches, these things should not only continue, but increase, as the needs of "the day" may require. The Writer demands the Christian persevere in the several required actions of vv. 23-25, and implies these actions are vital to perseverance.

What does the Writer intend by the phrase, "the day?" There are four plausible interpretations. The first focuses on the words "you see" of v. 25, "so much the more as you see the day approaching." Historically, (depending upon when Hebrews was written) the destruction of the temple was three to six years away. In AD 67 the Roman Emperor Nero sent his army General Titus Vespasian to Israel with an army numbering 60,000 men. The events leading to this war had begun many years before. In AD 70 Vespasian's son Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the nation of Israel, while Vespasian revolted against the Emperor and seized the Empire. Thus, the original readers, reading Hebrews somewhere between AD 64-67, could "see" physically and perceptually, that troubled times were approaching. Many of the first Christians believed that the destruction of Jerusalem was the event required to bring about the second advent, based upon Christ's prophetic words, Matthew 25ff. This view has a certain attraction as applicable to the original readers. However, it historically confines the exhortations of vv. 23-25 to those original readers, making this first interpretation unacceptable.

The second interpretation uses the background of these Hebrews as converted Jews and focuses on the words "the day." The Epistle's use of the Old Testament makes it quite clear that these original readers understood the Old Testament Scripture. In the context of end-time prophecies, their focus may have not been Christ's return for his church, *per se*, but Messiah's (Christ's) second advent to destroy his enemies and set up his kingdom. The *inclusio* of 10:23 and 11:39, connects "the day" with "the promise" the Old Testament saints looked to in faith. This "promise," as developed by the prophets, looked to God's judgment of the unrighteous, and the establishment of Israel in the land by Messiah in his kingdom. Hughes writes, "When spoken of in this absolute manner, 'the Day' can only mean the last day, that ultimate eschatological day, which is the day of reckoning and judgment, known as the Day of the Lord." Hughes is a little too dogmatic. Out of about 180 uses of the term "the day", in the prophets, there are very few uses in "an absolute manner." In the New Testament the "day" can refer to the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Tribulation period and Second Advent, the millennial kingdom, and the great White Throne Judgment, see Appendix 3. In Hughes's view, by the phrase "the day", the Writer meant the day of the Lord, i.e., the tribulation and second advent. If viewing "the day" as the day of the Lord/second advent is the better interpretation, then the message is that believers are to continue to gather together in their local church in view of anticipated persecution as the day of the Lord/second advent is seen approaching. One of the problems in this view is that it tends to focus on the church immediately preceding the Tribulation, and thus limits the applicability of (at the least) vv. 23-25. It is also difficult to justify this view in the light of Old and New Testament prophecies. The day of the Lord/second advent is uniquely the time of Jacob's (Israel's) trouble, the Tribulation, when Israel will be persecuted by the Antichrist and many, perhaps millions, of people will be saved and martyred. The Tribulation ends with the second advent, at which time Christ destroys the Antichrist and his followers. Then he sets up his millennial kingdom of Old Testament prophecy. The synoptic Gospels speak to this time. Jesus gives prophetic warnings and instructions that apply specifically to unbelieving Israel, to Jewish believers saved during the Tribulation, and (secondarily) to Gentiles saved by their witness during the Tribulation. But, these warnings and instructions are not given to the New Testament church: they

are not repeated in John's Gospel, and they are not repeated as a warning to the church in the Epistles. The letter to the Hebrews was written to a New Testament church, or at least to New Testament believers. The implicit instruction to watch for "the Day" seems incompatible to New Testament believers who are instructed—not to watch for the Day of the Lord, but to expect the Day of Christ (the rapture) at any moment, thus to always be prepared. The words of Christ to Israel may be summarized as "unexpected" and "watchful": the world would not expect his second advent; the Tribulation believers were to watch for signs of his coming. The words for the church are "imminent" and prepared." Therefore, to watch for the Day of the Lord is not appropriate to the New Testament church.

A third interpretation views the Day as a day of persecution—any persecution. This view takes its cue from v. 37, "for yet a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry," from Habakkuk 2:3-4. In its original context, Habakkuk was complaining that YHWH had not punished the unrighteous. YHWH's answer was a promise that judgment was coming, and until then the righteous man was to live by his faith. To "live by faith" until God judges the wicked is just the same as to endure by faith until you receive the promise, Hebrews 10:36. The point of referencing Habakkuk is not persecution in general, but enduring persecution until the specific promises associated with "the Day" are received: perseverance under persecution until Christ "who is coming comes" (the subject of the promise in v. 36). In the context of Hebrews 10:25, the Day is not persecution in general, but is the promise of his coming (whether for the church or to establish his kingdom). Although 10:26-39 is a warning passage, this does not mean it is disconnected from the surrounding context. The warning passages are placed to take advantage of the doctrinal sections. If one takes the context of 10:37 into view (which is 10:32-36), then "the day" is a reference to the believer enduring persecution (in light of v. 36), until he receives the promise of "an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven," v. 34. As applied to the New Testament church (the writer's subject in vv. 19-25) the "enduring promise" in v. 34 applies to every believer from Christ's resurrection to the rapture. The reference to the promise (v. 36) looks ahead to chapter eleven, where the Old Testament saints are used as an example of the type of endurance—persevering faith—needed to receive the promise. This larger context is the focus of "the day" as seen by the "therefore" of 12:1, which must look back to not only chapter eleven, but to the various associations the Writer has used to connect 10:22-39 with chapter eleven. Although the Writer may have intended "the Day" to refer to any persecution while waiting for the promise, it is more likely the Day specifically means that particular time when persevering faith is rewarded by receipt of the promise. Therefore, continue to gather together, even when enduring persecution, because the Day when the promises will be received is coming. The term "the day" must connect eschatologically with *episunagoge*. The general persecution view does not make that connection by generalizing a "day" of persecution.

Closely related to the view generalizing "the day" as periods of persecution, is an assumption that recurring persecution of the church will increase as the world draws closer to the event of "the One who is coming and will not tarry."⁵⁹ Therefore, this "persecution" view of "the Day" also asks the New Testament church to look for signs; perhaps not specifically signs of Christ's return for the church (depending upon one's view of when "will not tarry," v. 37, ends), but to that period of increasing persecution that may presage that the Tribulation and second advent may not be far away; thus the rapture would not be not far away. This view may be dealt with by using Paul's advice to the Thessalonian saints. Someone had told them that the persecution they were experiencing was in fact the Tribulation period preceding the second advent. Paul explains to them that 1) they were not enduring the Tribulation, because 2) certain events had not occurred, and 3) he had told them they would not endure the Tribulation (this last being in dispute with those who hold to other than a pretribulational rapture). To use an intense period of persecution, or world events that seem to point to the Tribulation, as a "sign" of the approaching Day of Christ, or the Day of the Lord, is not a reliable means to predict that Day. Historically this view has been completely inaccurate as a predictor of the rapture and the day of the Lord/second advent. It seems unlikely this was the Writer's intent.

The fourth possibility is that "the day" is in fact a reference to the rapture, i.e., the day of Christ, Philippians 1:10; 2:16; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:2. The larger biblical context, not just

⁵⁹ This may not be true. False professions and apostasy could as easily lead to a general apathy concerning genuine Christianity. The point of "as you see the day approaching" is personal spiritual preparedness for the rapture event.

of Hebrews, but of the Scripture, comes into play in this view. The juxtaposition of the promise to the Old Testament saints with the promise (10:36) to the New Testament saints indicates that, just as the Old Testament saints endured persecution, while looking to, but not receiving, the promise, so must the Christian. This idea helps illuminate the meaning of "the day." F. F. Bruce makes a comment in this regard, "It is plain from the closing verses of this chapter that the apparent postponement of the *parousia* (the appearance of Christ) was having its effect on their minds; at least the sense of tension created by the knowledge that they were living in the end-time was weakening."⁶⁰ Whether or not this was true,⁶¹ the Writer's point may well be that patient endurance was required in regard to "the day," an endurance that would be tested by persecution. The identity and contextual meaning of "the day" is to be found in the relationship between the two groups of saints, and the two promises. The promise made to the Old Testament saints began with Abraham, who was promised a posterity, a possession, and a seed through whom the many would be blessed. More details of the promise were revealed in the promise to David of an heir to an eternal kingdom. The Old Testament prophets then developed the promise along two lines. One prophetic line gave more details concerning the promise as fulfilled in an earthly kingdom, ruled by an anointed king (Messiah, Christ), but just prior to the fulfillment, Israel and the world would endure an intense period (Tribulation) of persecution (believers) and judgment (unbelievers), leading to Messiah's advent and kingdom. The other prophetic line indicated the anointed king would personally endure a time of suffering and judgment for the salvation of his people.

When God the Son became the incarnate Son of God, the apparent contradiction between these two prophetic lines was resolved. There would be a first advent, during which the anointed king would suffer to save his people: the incarnation, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Christ. Then, there would be a second advent, preceded by terrible persecution and judgment, at which time the anointed king would establish his kingdom: the Tribulation, second advent, and millennial kingdom. Jesus, the evening before his crucifixion, John 14:2-3, made a new prophetic line, intended for the New Testament church, and related to the first promise, but to be fulfilled separately from it. The details were filled in by the New Testament prophets in the epistles, including the Revelation. This prophetic line indicated that prior to the second advent, Jesus would return and remove the New Testament church from the world. Whether this event, the rapture, occurs before, midway, or toward the end of the period of judgment (the Tribulation) is not an issue in Hebrews 10:25. When one takes into account the eschatological sense of *episunagoge* then the "gathering together" in Hebrews 10:25 also takes on (added to its primary sense) the character given *episunagoge* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, the return of Jesus for his church. This view theologically and contextually coordinates "the day" with the eschatological sense of *episunagoge*.

Several considerations, apart from Hebrews, support this view. That the Writer knew of 2 Thessalonians is possible. The epistle of 2 Thessalonians was written about AD 52-53, and Hebrews about AD 64-67. That there were copies of the Thessalonian letter, or that knowledge of the contents had been disseminated by the church or church members, is a distinct probability. Furthermore, if any theory regarding Paul as the Writer or a companion of the Writer of Hebrews is correct, then Paul's message concerning the return of Christ for the church was probably known to the original readers of Hebrews—at the least to the Writer. When one adds these possibilities to the connections the Writer has made between the Old Testament saints in chapter eleven enduring while not receiving their promises, and the encouragement to patiently endure to receive the New Testament promise of the rapture, 10:36-39, then this view seems the best view.

By the phrase "the day" the Writer means the day of Christ, i.e., the rapture. As the better interpretation, the Writer's message is that believers are to continue to gather together in their local church until Christ gathers them to heaven. This view has the advantages of being applicable to all New Testament believers, of fitting the eschatological use of *episunagoge*, and of encouraging perseverance while waiting for the

⁶⁰ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 258.

⁶¹ There is no indication of this sentiment in the New Testament, other than an assumption of it in Hebrews 10:25; in fact, believers seemed to experience both anticipation and patience in reference to the rapture, e.g., v. 34. In reference to these particular Hebrew Christians, with the Jewish war on the doorstep, it seems unlikely their anticipation of end time events would be weakening.

promise, even if, as with the Old Testament saints, the wait was long and immediately fruitless for the many. This last thought seems to explain the phrase, "so much the more as you see the day approaching." In a few sentences the Writer will example patient waiting in faith toward the promise, without receiving the fruition of that faithful waiting. He states as much in 12:1. The fact that the majority of believers will wait expectantly for the rapture without receiving the promise, is not contradictory to the doctrine of Christ's imminent return, just as it was not contradictory that the majority of Old Testament believers waited expectantly for the first advent. Every believer is to be constantly prepared spiritually for the rapture. What then is the meaning of, v. 25, "and so much the more as you see the day approaching"? Every day any Christian lives on earth is one day closer to the rapture, because any one day in his or her life could be "the day." The doctrine of "imminent return," in fact, demands the Christian believe "the day" could occur in his or her lifetime. Therefore, to be "expectant" is part of being spiritually prepared. It is undeniable that world events and persecution reinforce the "expectation" of Christ's return. Therefore, in consideration of the doctrine of imminent, prepared and expectant, and as being always subject to the conditions of the world, including suffering periods of greater or lesser persecution, the Writer's exhortation to his original readers becomes meaningful to every generation of believers. I see the day approaching. I will therefore enter into the holiest, to find grace and help in my time of need, that I may hold fast to my confession of faith, without wavering, remembering that it was Christ himself who promised to return, and he is faithful. I will remember to pay attention to, care for, and encourage one another, in order to excite one another to those acts of love and good works that tend to the well-being of one another, and thus promote the well-being of the church. I will remember to assemble with other believers, that one may encourage another, never ceasing until Christ returns to take me home.

In regard to the believer's "at any moment" expectation of the rapture, he must remain aware that there have always been various times in world events when, because of "signs," it looked as though the rapture was soon to occur. The use of an intense period of persecution, or world events that seem to point to the Tribulation, as a "sign" of the rapture, is not a reliable means to assume "the Day" will happen to me. One must be expectant, not because of exterior influences, but because the rapture is always imminent. The practical use of the doctrine of imminent return is a moment to moment preparation and expectation of the rapture, just because the time and circumstances of his return are unknowable and imminent. Consider this: Hebrews' original readers were second generation Christians, who saw the signs of Jerusalem's destruction and Israel's demise at the hands of Roman armies, in seeming fulfillment of Matthew 25 and the prophesied Tribulation/Second Advent; yet the rapture and the advent did not happen. Throughout Christian history there have been persecutions and world events seemingly pointing to the fulfillment of end times prophecies; yet the rapture did not happen. The historical evidence says that "signs" have been inaccurate as a predictor of the rapture. Therefore, in view of the original reader's historical circumstances, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who knew the circumstances of all future readers, it seems unlikely that the Writer's intent in "so much the more as you see the day approaching" was to encourage all Christians from the first century until the rapture, to look to any "signs" as indicating the rapture was near. Instead, the intent of Writer and Holy Spirit, in using *episunagoge*, was to encourage all Christians throughout the future history of the church, to not forsake the assembling of themselves together, no matter what conditions—peace, troubling signs, or persecution—the world might bring upon them, in preparation and expectation of his soon return.

As a practical application, vv. 19-25 may be summarized in ten Christian core values:

- I will enter God's presence through prayer, worship, and willing submission to His will.
- I will daily ask God for grace, power, guidance and help for myself and others.
- I will actively seek to know God and understand His word.
- I will live out my faith without wavering and without fear, for God is my strength.
- I will tell others about Christ the Savior, and extend God's offer of salvation to them.
- I will assemble with believers of like faith to worship, fellowship, and serve.
- I will encourage others and myself to practice acts of godly love and good works.
- I will pay attention to and care for the spiritual and physical well-being of others.
- I will remember Christ promised to return, and he is faithful.

Hebrews 10:19-39

- I will continue active in my faith until Christ takes me home to heaven.

26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

What follows now is a warning, extending from verse 26 to the end of the chapter. The warning sections in Hebrews have been used by those unstable in the faith as “proofs” that a Christian can lose his or her salvation. The whole counsel of God, the Old and New Testament writings, reveal that salvation is of the Lord, not man. Salvation depends on the merits of Christ, not the works of man.⁶² Therefore, the Writer’s intention in the warning passages in Hebrews cannot be to warn believers that their salvation may be lost. As I explained at 6:1-9, the Writer included these practical applications of his doctrine as an encouragement to Christians to persevere; the specific exhortation in Hebrews 10 is to persevere until the “promise” is attained. Some commentators believe the warning passages, perhaps the entire, epistle, were written to Jews who were “experimenting” with Christianity, and needed encouragement to go all the way to faith in Christ. This is contrary to the testimony of every book of the Bible, i.e., that Scripture was first written to and for believers. The four gospels, for example, were written to inform second generation Christians (and by the Spirit’s design succeeding generations) of the historical basis for their faith. That the Holy Spirit also intended the gospels to be used by himself and Christians as an evangelistic tool does not deny the identity of original audience; and such may be said for other New Testament books. The book of Hebrews originated as a letter written to second generation Christians, Hebrews and Gentiles, who formerly believed in Judaism. The purpose of Hebrews was to affirm their faith in Christ, and to exhort them to press progressively onward to maturity in the Christian faith.

Therefore, the warning passages, in their first and primary instance, must be applications of the Writer’s doctrinal arguments to believers. But, as with the gospels, these passages may be applied to sinners in need of salvation. In the particular context of Hebrews, the Writer understands there were within that church (churches?) to whom he was writing, believers in Judaism who were investigating Christianity; today they would be called “seekers.” While they were investigating Christianity, they were enjoying the benefits of Christian company, moral standards, love and good works; but they had not yet decided to accept Christ as their Savior. As an application, then, the warning passages can apply to seekers as an exhortation to go on to saving faith.⁶³ However, the interpretation of these passages must apply to believers. If, then, as we did at 6:1-9, we turn to the final verse in the warning passage, 10:39, we shall find the Writer’s view of his readers: “But we” says the Writer, including himself as among the saved, “are not of those who” are unbelieving and “draw back to perdition, but of those who” have saving faith in Christ and “believe to the saving of the soul.”

Sometimes in Bible study, it helps to know the destination before taking the journey. At v. 18, the Writer concludes and summarizes his argument concerning, “what must I do to be saved.” At v. 19, the Writer begins his explanation of what it means to be a Christian: how does a Christian practice his or her faith. He has spoken of the believer’s privileges (access to God in Christ) and the believer’s obligations (to draw near;

⁶² The Scripture view of a sinner’s salvation encompasses the entire period from the sinner’s initial act of saving faith through the resurrection of the body and entry of glorified body and soul into heaven. The Scripture view is that the merit of Christ redeems the sinner, keeps the believer, glorifies the saint, and brings the Christian all the way home to heaven. Although salvation appears as consisting of several stages to man, it is to God all of one work, from election to faith to glorification to eternity with Christ.

⁶³ The Writer and the Spirit intended the application to seekers to be in black and white terms: if one turns back from Christianity there is no hope. The whole counsel of God tells us that unbelief and apostasy are not final until physical death seals the eternal fate of the soul. If one turns back from faith in Christ, there is no other hope of salvation to be found. Because the future is uncertain, and the necessity of possessing saving faith is a moral imperative, “Today” is always the day of salvation, and the Writer is justified in expressing the sinner’s choices in such stark terms. “Don’t turn away from Christ,” is the message to seekers.

to hold fast; to assemble; to love and good works). The Writer's argument in vv. 26-39 depends upon understanding his warning in this context of the practice of faith. If outlined, the argument is:

- The sin: vv. 26
- The result: v. 27
 - Old Testament example: vv. 28-31
- Exhortation: their past perseverance, vv. 32-34
- Exhortation: their assurance of faith, vv. 35-36
- Encouragement: continued perseverance, vv. 37-38
- Encouragement: we are those who persevere, v. 39

The key to the passage is to understand the believer's sin in the context of vv. 18-24. The sin is to forsake one's obligations, vv. 22-24, through, v. 25, "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." The "knowledge of the truth" is the remission of sin in Christ (v. 18), the believer's privilege in Christ (vv. 19-21), and his obligations (vv. 22-24) toward his local New Testament church (the body of Christ). Note the repetition of the same thought in vv. 18, "there is no longer an offering for sin," and v. 26, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins," forming a kind of *inclusio* bracketing the believer's privilege and obligation. Remission of sins is found only in Christ. Therefore, just as for the unsaved there is only one place where salvation can be found, if the believer forsakes the Christian community there is no other place for him to practice the privileges and obligations of the faith. I am not speaking of the church as the visible organization,⁶⁴ but the church as a community of saved, Bible-believing, Scripture-practicing, Christ-expecting believers. The fabric of Christian community is assembly, worship, love, and good works. The thread that binds all Christian communities into one whole is the promise of Christ's return. This warning passage is about perseverance in the practice of one's faith—perseverance all the way to the attainment of the promise—and this can be done *only* in the context of Christian community. The warning to believers is the failure to persevere.

- "The immediate context suggests that [the sin] involves separation from the Christian community (v. 24), thus offending against Christ as Son of God, and failing to become one with Christ's obedience to the will of God (v. 36). The sin appears to involve a voluntary or willful failure, both in worship (Moses' law, v. 28) and in practical acts which express loving solidarity with other members of the believing community (vv. 32-34). The sin is viewed as persistent (v. 26, wilful sin)."⁶⁵

Thus, the sin the Writer warns against in vv. 26-39 is not the failure of saving faith, but the failure to actively practice one's faith, by which is meant perseverance in the faith. The requirement of faith is to persevere all the way to the attainment of the promise, vv. 25, 36.

Therefore, for the believer, if he deliberately turns away from his Christian brethren, after having received the knowledge of the truth—vv. 18-24—there is no other place for him to go. All things related to Christianity must at some point be practiced within the context of the believing community. This does not, of course, mean that personal faith will die if one is separated from the Christian community: faith is a relationship between believer and Savior, maintained all the way to the end by the grace the Savior provides the believer. Nor does it mean the Christian ignores the world, for how shall they hear about Christ unless the Christian gives a witness: the believer is Christ's ambassador to the world (2 Corinthians 5:20). Nor does this mean that love and good works are confined to Christian brethren; God forbid, for we are to be good as God is good, and he makes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust (cf. Luke 6:27-36). Neither does this principle prohibit private worship and study, nor the daily practice of being like Christ in all things in the Christian life. All these things, however, should be practiced within the context of Christian community. The Holy Spirit did not come just to bring spiritual power for ministry, he came to indwell that believers could be a community of faith; ministry assumes community. The warning, then, of v. 26, is that deciding to forsake the community of Christian faith is a sin, because active participation in the faith-community is a necessity required by

⁶⁴ I do not mean the church in the Roman Catholic sense as the mother of faith. The church is the body of Christ, both as individual members and corporately. The knowledge of salvation, vv. 10-18, is communicated to sinners through the testimony of the individual members. One's faith, vv. 19-25, is practiced in the context of the corporate body.

⁶⁵ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 530.

saving, persevering, working faith.⁶⁶ Outside that community there is no sacrifice for sin. More simply, one cannot confess the sin of forsaking the local church without returning to the community and blessings of the local church. If one thinks he has confessed his sin, but remains apart from a local church, then he has not experienced true godly repentance, his confession was false, and he remains separated from God's blessings. In a very real sense he is separated from the one sacrifice, 1 John 1:9-2:2, that will forgive his sin and restore him to fellowship with God. An application can and should be made to the unbeliever, whether he is standing apart from the church or sitting with the church. There is only one effective sacrifice and therefore there is only one place where salvation can be found, and that is in genuine Christianity: the community of saved, bible-believing, Scripture-practicing, Christ-expecting believers.

What does the Writer intend by v. 27, "a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries." How does this apply to the believer? As noted in the brief outline above, this verse should be understood through the example provided in vv. 28-31. Still, from simply a Christian point of view, should not sin and sinning bother Christians? Is there not, when a believer sins, a feeling of shame in having dishonored Christ? Does not the conviction of sin bring the dread of chastisement? The answer to these questions should be Yes! And in that "yes" lies the heart of the warning. When the believer has set himself apart from his faith community, then he has set himself apart from that assurance of faith in Christ that comes from drawing near, holding fast, love, good works, and assembling together. To persevere until the promise is received, without the company, exhortation, and encouragement of fellow-believers, is difficult, if not impossible. One will drop out, if one does not stay connected; not drop out of salvation, but out of the active practice of his or her faith. If the believer decides to leave the community, then what can be left but an expectation of judgment for sinning against the commandment? Because the Writer emphasizes this, I will emphasize it again: Christian community is necessary to faith's perseverance.

28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

The purpose of the example in vv. 28-31 is to drive home the point that there is no salvation for the lost, and there is no faith community for the saved, outside of the covenant with God in Christ, and in that body of Christ that was formed by the covenant. The person whose lawlessness demonstrated he despised Moses' covenant was "cut off" from the covenant. The Writer's is not referring to the sins all believer's commit every day. God knows perfect obedience is the goal, but not the experience, of every believer (the inclusion of 1 John 1:9-2:1 in the New Testament proves this beyond a doubt). The Writer is referring to a class of sins known as "presumptuous sins." The Law discerned a difference between a sin committed "in ignorance" and a "presumptuous" sin. The sin committed in ignorance is most clearly defined in Numbers 15:22-23:

- "If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the Lord has spoken to Moses—all that the Lord has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day the Lord gave that commandment and onward throughout your generations."

Imperfect obedience is a reality when the believer is constantly tempted by sin and persecuted by the world. The Law provided a means of forgiveness for imperfect obedience to all sins, except crimes where death was the prescribed penalty (Appendix 5). A sin committed in ignorance could be atoned for with the proper sacrifice, see Numbers 15:24-29. There was no atonement for a presumptuous crime. The difference between a sin committed in ignorance and a presumptuous sin was not knowledge, but intent. A presumptuous sin was a deliberate choice to forsake the covenant. Today we might call this a pre-meditated sin. A few examples (KJV) will illustrate; note these are death-penalty crimes.

- Exodus 21:14, "But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die."
- Deuteronomy 17:12, "And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more

⁶⁶ The fact this principle has been severely abused does not change the obligation. Rather, the abuse should make us all the more concerned to get it right.

presumptuously."

- Deuteronomy 18:22, "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."

To be executed without recourse to an atoning sacrifice was to die with the guilt of one's sin afflicting one's soul and determining one's eternal destiny.

The following further illustrates the presumptuous sin:

- Numbers 15:30, "But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people."
- Deuteronomy 1:43, "So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, and went presumptuously up into the hill." (See Numbers 13-14)

The Numbers 15:30 passage uses the word "cut -off." This term usually means execution (e.g., Exodus 21:14; 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36). In other contexts in the Law cut off may indicate one is from the covenant, i.e., no longer considered an Israelite as to the covenant blessings (e.g., Exodus 12:15, 19). In practical terms, to be cut off from the covenant was to be denied the means for atoning for sin; thus to be "cut off" was spiritual execution for the crime of sin.

The Deuteronomy 1:43 passage relates Israel's failure to obey God following the incident at Kadesh-barnea. The Lord had brought the people out of Egypt to Kadesh-barnea to enter the promised land. Moses sent out twelve men to investigate the land and its defenses. Ten men brought a negative report, saying Israel could not conquer the land. Based upon this report, Israel refused to obey God and enter the land. God announced all those (20 years old and upward) would die in the wilderness. Subsequently, some tried to enter the land, but were repulsed by the Amalekites, Numbers 14:40-45. In attempting to enter the land after their death sentence was pronounced, they committed a pre-meditated, thus a presumptuous sin. They knew the Lord's will, that they were to continue in the wilderness until they died a natural death, but refused to follow the Lord's will. Take notice that those committing this presumptuous sin were not immediately executed because they were already "cut off" in that they were condemned to not enter the promised land. In effect, the death penalty had been announced for their previous crime (no faith to enter the land), and they were simply awaiting execution of the sentence.

Although one could be "cut off" without being physically executed, usually the presumptuous sin was one of the seventeen death-penalty crimes. All the seventeen death-penalty crimes involve deliberate wrongdoing. This is even true of the Numbers 15:32-35 passage, as everyone else in Israel was not gathering firewood, but were observing the Sabbath: the man knew, at the least from the example of others, that he was doing wrong. Deliberate intent even applies at Exodus 21:28-29, for the presumptuous sin was the result of knowing the oxen was prone to attack others, but doing nothing to restrain the animal or warn potential victims (however, note that in this one instance the owner might be allowed to redeem his life, the only death-penalty crime with this exception). A presumptuous sin, then, was a pre-meditated sin, whether it was a death penalty crime or resulted in removal from the covenant blessings (spiritually a death penalty). A presumptuous sin announced, by its premeditation and action, "I despise the Lord and his covenant." This is the key issue, for in this type of sin, in the words of Numbers 15:30, the sinner "brings reproach on the Lord . . . because he has despised the word of the Lord and broken his commandment." This is the background in which Hebrews 10:28-31 should be interpreted.

In the context of Christianity, to forsake the community of faith is to make a statement that one is abandoning the covenant, because the church was formed by that covenant, Hebrews 8:10, 11; 10:16. As relates to salvation, the church is the instrument by which the Spirit brings more sinners into the covenant. For the believer, forsaking the community of faith by returning to the world (where else can he go?) forsakes the blessings of the new covenant that are to be found within that association. To forsake Moses' covenant through a presumptuous sin was to die by being cut off from the covenant (whether by physical death or spiritually separated from the covenant blessings). To forsake the New Testament faith community established in the new covenant is to suffer a form of spiritual death: sin separates the believer from the fellowship and blessing of God. Sin limits blessing. Sin affects how one interacts with fellow-believers. Sin

corrupts spiritual perceptions, receptivity, use, and enjoyment. Every sin brings some measure of separation from God in terms of intimate fellowship. However, there is more bad news.

29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people."

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The believer's salvation, his or her eternal life in Christ, is secured by the covenant between the Father and Son through the merit of Christ. In regard to this biblical fact, vv. 29-31 communicate an important truth, one also stated elsewhere in the New Testament. That truth is this, God is not going to let that covenant be broken, nor allow the spiritual worth of Christ's merit to be devalued, nor allow Christ to be dishonored. If that means the believer's physical life must be ended to save his spiritual life, then God will bring about the believer's physical death and "prematurely" bring him or her to heaven. Going to heaven is not a bad thing, but being prematurely taken away from one's earthly life is not so good. In this life one grows into spiritual maturity. In this life one learns how to act in obedience, service, and fellowship toward God as preparation for an eternity of obedience, service and fellowship with God. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:9-11, teaches that all believers will be judged for the use they made of their salvation during their Christian life. Did the believer practice drawing near to God and holding fast his faith? Did the believer act out love and do good works of faith in the context of the community of faith that the Holy Spirit created, maintains, guides, and empowers? In 1 Corinthians 3:12-17 Paul illustrates the judgment of Christian works as wood, hay, and straw, or as precious gold, silver, and precious stones. The former symbolizes works without lasting value to be carried over into eternity; the latter those works whose value creates results continuing for eternity. In this physical life there is the opportunity to bring glory to God and prepare for heaven in a way not possible in heaven. To be removed early from this life because of persistent, presumptuous sin is to lose those opportunities. In my understanding of Scripture, the believer's activities in this physical life in large measure determines his capacity for service in the next life. It is all too glib to say that any place in heaven is a good place. The spiritual Christian wants to be the best Christian he can be, for the glory of God in this life, and the blessing to be received in the hereafter. As to the possibility of an early removal from this life due to sin, the apostle John told his readers, 1 John 5:16, "There is sin leading to death."

To deal specifically with the verses, the Writer, continuing his Mosaic example, states that the person who "has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace" should receive "much worse punishment" than that punishment received under Moses' law. Let us not be confused by the sound of fearful words, but let us be sure to be made fearful by them. The phrase "the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified" must indicate believers are in view, if 10:10, 14 have any meaning for the salvation of sinners, which they do. The penalty for a presumptuous sin under Moses' Law was to be cut off from the covenant. The penalty for forsaking the community of faith established by the new covenant is to be cut off from the blessings of the covenant found only through assembling together with one's local faith community— his local church. I am not trying to spiritualize the Writer's words, but I must remain within the boundaries established by the doctrines of assurance of faith and perseverance in faith. Therefore, v. 29 cannot indicate loss of salvation, but can indicate spiritual loss if one doesn't persevere in the faith. Please notice the writer does not state the Christian who forsakes his local assembly will be punished much worse than the one punished under Moses' law, but that he is thought worthy of worse punishment. That is because the sin is so serious. The three phrases of v. 29 quite simply, but so terribly, indicate that the one who forsakes the body that Christ bought with his own blood, has devalued the spiritual worth of Christ's sacrifice (that saved him from eternal death to eternal life), devalued Christ's death that set him apart from sin unto God (that delivered him from sin's dominion), and devalued the Holy Spirit's work of grace in his soul (that regenerated his soul to eternal life).

Friend, think ever so seriously about this, for your actions reflect your heart (Proverbs 4:23). The church is spiritually united with Christ. To forsake one's obligations to the body of believers is as if one has forsaken Christ. An injurious act made against the Christian because he or she is Christ's, is as if it was an injury against Christ personally:

- 1 Corinthians 6:15, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?"
- 1 Corinthians 6:17, "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him."
- Ephesians 5:30-31, "For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."

To sin willfully by forsaking the privileges and obligations of the faith community—forsaking your Christian brethren—is to devalue the spiritual worth of the body of Christ, therefore of Christ himself. Now that is a fearful thing, and God will judge the believer who persists in that sin. In verse 30, where it is said that "Vengeance belongs to the Lord," the Writer borrows from Deuteronomy 32:35. In its Old Testament context this verse speaks of YHWH chastising his people for their sin, as Deuteronomy 32:36 confirms, "For the Lord will judge His people."⁶⁷ Hebrews uses these verses in the same manner, Christ will judge the sins of his people. The term, "the living God," v. 31, is a favorite of the Writer. In 3:12, "the living God" contrasts with the dead faith of the Israelites in the wilderness. In 9:14, one cannot serve a living God with a dead soul producing dead works. In 12:22, the term indicates eternal life, as believers have come, in their faith, to the city of the living God. In 10:31, the Writer comments that to fall into the hands of the living God is a thing to be feared. A living God evaluates the faith of his people: is their faith alive or dead? A faith that is not producing love and good works is a dead faith, James 2:17.⁶⁸ Is a believer practicing a living faith, as per vv. 19-24? Or is their faith a dead faith because they have abandoned the community of Christ's body—the primary place where living faith must be put into practice. God will judge his people. The first form that judgment will take is the Holy Spirit using conviction and chastisement to recover the believer from sin. If, however, the Christian persists in sin—and at some point persistence in sin becomes presumptuous sin—then God may decide to remove the believer from the world; to preserve the Father's covenant with the Son he may require the believer's premature death. The loss of reward in such a case will be great and ever-lasting. As to an application to the unsaved: those who draw back from saving faith have devalued the spiritual worth of Christ; there is no hope for one who despises Christ and his salvation.

32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

In vv. 32-39 is the balancing encouragement to the exhortation. These believers had previously endured persecution. The Jewish community had cast them out for apostasy when they believed on Christ. They had endured initially because they, like Moses, 11:26, had looked to the reward, which was a better and an enduring possession in heaven. Perseverance in the faith is on-going in this mortal life full of trials and tribulations. To "not cast away your confidence" in v. 35 means to apply faith's certainty as needed in order to (v. 36) persevere in Christ in the privileges and obligations of faith, and in the promise of Christ's return. As to the identify of the person who was in chains, i.e., in prison for his faith, speculation is useless. The Spirit has given us what we need to know: the Writer was well-known to them; his exhortations to them had come from his personal experience as persecuted for the faith. They know the proof of his faith; he knows their heart and salvation.

⁶⁷ That the Lord will judge "his people" provides additional confirmation the Writer is primarily addressing believers.

⁶⁸ Again, the issue is not salvation, but the practical outworking of saving faith in those good works that God has appointed beforehand that we should live in them, Ephesians 2:10.

36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

37 "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

In brief, perseverance is required to do the will of God all the way to the time when the promise will be received. In the immediate context of the New Testament church age, the promise is the return of Jesus Christ. In my understanding, the return looked for is the rapture of the church prior to the beginning of the Tribulation period. In the larger view, as related to the Old Testament believers of chapter eleven—whose lives are the example of perseverance—the promise is that of David's greater heir, the Messiah, and the Davidic kingdom to be inaugurated at Messiah's Second Advent. This is not contradictory to the rapture, for the rapture, the Tribulation period, the Second Advent, and setting up the millennial kingdom, are parts of the greater whole encompassed by the "promise." (As noted earlier in Hebrews, the "promise" is that made to Abraham of a seed in whom all the world would be blessed, as clarified by succeeding covenants: Palestinian [possession of the land], Davidic, [Messiah's kingdom], New [spiritual regeneration].) Chapter eleven explains how the promise was received in faith by all those who did not receive it by actual possession. Over 1900 years has passed since Hebrews was written, yet the exhortation is as valid to believer's today as it was to the original readers.

Perseverance in the faith to do the will of God is required in order to receive the promise. Genuine believers are known (in part) by the fact that they do so endure. Their perseverance in the faith exhibits that they are among the saved, both in the fact they endure, and in the underlying spiritual truth that their endurance is made possible by the grace God gives for their perseverance; the grace needed to persevere in the faith is given only to those who are the saved in Christ. Although neither the original readers, nor their spiritual descendants in the intervening years, nor perhaps myself and other believers alive at this writing, shall physically receive the promise of experiencing Christ's return, yet all those who persevere in the faith do receive the promise. Their faith in the promise, which is (part of) the ground by which they persevere, is itself both the guarantee of receipt, and in spiritual fact the actuality of receipt: faith gives substance to the promise.

Verses 37 and 38 are probably from one or more Old Testament sources, and the context of the original serves the Writer's purpose very well. The phrase "for yet a little while," may be from Psalm⁶⁹ 37:9-11 (emphasis mine):

- "For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. *For yet a little while* and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

The promise implicit in the Psalm is that the righteous, of any age, are justified in their perseverance. Here it (in Hebrews 10) it fits well into the promise of the Lord's return, when the wicked shall be judged, and the meek—the saved—shall inherit the millennial kingdom. The next phrase of v. 37 and the first sentence of v. 38 probably come from Habakkuk 2:3-4 (emphasis mine):

- "For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. *Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.* Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; but *the just shall live by his faith.*"

In Habakkuk's context, he has been complaining that YHWH has not punished the wicked. He rhetorically asks, when will YHWH punish the wicked? Then in 2:1, Habakkuk cries out that he will "stand my watch" to see "what YHWH will say to me." The answer, vv. 2-20, is that there will be a coming day in which the Lord will punish the wicked. When the day of punishment arrives, the Lord will come and will not tarry. Until that day the righteous man is to live by his faith, secure in the knowledge that God will punish the unrighteous. To live by faith until the time the Lord's vengeance upon the unrighteous has come, is just the same thing

⁶⁹ Some commentators find an echo of the phrase in the LXX version of Isaiah 26:20, "a little while, until the wrath of God is past."

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as to "endure, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." The final sentence of v. 38, "But if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him," may be original with the Writer, as a conclusion made from "the just shall by faith." God has no pleasure in those who do not live by faith, and the exhortation to the believer should be plain: persevere in the privileges and obligations of the faith (to the unsaved: do not draw back from saving faith). However, I believe the Writer may have had the following two Old Testament verses in mind. Both relate to a sinning Israel, and are a plea from the Lord that his people would turn away from sin and get a "new heart and a new spirit."

- Ezekiel 18:32, "'For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord God. 'Therefore turn and live!'"
- Ezekiel 33:11, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

The exhortation to Old Testament Israel is true to the needs of every sinner, unsaved or saved: turn from sin, and then persevere in the faith all the way to the attainment of the promise.

39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

As I noted at v. 26, the Writer considers his readers as among those who are saved. More to the contextual point, the Writer is certain his readers are those who persevere. May we be counted with them.

HEBREWS ELEVEN

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Now, because those who are saved by faith live by faith, the writer will describe the kind of faith required to live a life pleasing to God, through the example of others who lived by faith. There is one faith (Ephesians 4:5), which may be categorized by its two main uses in Scripture. Those uses are “saving” faith, that brings deliverance from the penalty of sin, and “persevering” faith, that delivers the saved soul intact to heaven through the trials and tribulations of this life. Saving faith opens the car door and by persevering faith we drive to heaven. “Faith” in chapter eleven is not saving faith, it is persevering faith. The Writer is not defining faith, so much as he is describing the character of faith in which perseverance is accomplished.¹ Chapter eleven illustrates (through historical example) the exhortation of 10:35-36: endurance receives the promise. Here are men and women of faith who were able to persevere under trial and disappointment because they had unshakeable confidence in the fulfillment of God’s promises. Just as the Old Testament saints endured through faith to receive the promises, even so Christians must endure through faith to receive God’s promises made to them.

Faith in chapter eleven is specifically viewed through the lens of the promise of God’s imminent presence. I am using the term “imminent presence” because many generations of saints lived before the Spirit gave the specific prophecies of Christ’s first and second advents through David, Isaiah, etc. Yet, every saint from Adam forward has lived “by faith” in the expectation of the imminent presence (“soon appearing”) of God. Abel and his contemporaries looked forward to the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 and their return to God’s presence; their worship was performed within the context of that expectation. Noah looked forward to God’s soon arrival to execute justice against a hopelessly sin-filled world; he worshiped and worked within that context. These believers received prophetic promises that caused them to look to God’s imminent presence in worship (Abel), judgment (Noah), inheritance (Abraham), deliverance (Moses), rest (Joshua), or advent (11:39-40). In the New Testament context set by 10:19-25, the exercise of faith is still that same unwavering continuance practiced by Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc., because one has an unshakable confidence that the promise of the imminent presence of God is certain, 10:25, 36-38; 11:13-16, 39; 12:1. Thus, beginning with Abel, the Writer presents persevering faith in the “imminent presence” promise in two ways: objectively, as to the spiritual reality of the promise; subjectively, as to its effect on the heirs to the promises.

Faith is, in the first instance, the substance (*hupostasis*) of things “hoped” for. The word “hope” in Scripture, *elpizo*, means to expect with desire; the word “expect” is the key to understanding Bible-based hope. This is not the “I hope it does (or doesn’t) . . .” of common speech; that brand of hope indicates uncertainty, perhaps anxiety. The hope of Scripture is certain: “I know with absolute assurance that Jesus is returning, because he who promised, John 14:3, is faithful.” The “things hoped for” are the promises God has made to believers concerning the future. How then is “faith is the *hupostasis* (substance) of the promises?” The Writer’s point is that faith gives certainty to the promises (the things hoped for/not seen). In an earlier discussion of faith, 10:19, I wrote, “Faith is not blind nor is it ignorant. Faith is not taking a step into the darkness hoping (in the sense of anxiety) there is a floor, not a chasm. Faith is taking that step into darkness because God’s word says that, even if I cannot see it, there is solid ground; I act because I believe God who cannot lie. Faith is informed by God’s word, and therefore acts on the basis of that word.” Faith, then, is the *hupostasis* of the promises—their substance, their present reality—that gives certainty to the expectation of receiving those promises.

How is faith itself the *hupostasis*? The word always means the real presence. A photograph of a person is representation; a sculpture is a manifestation. When the person the photograph represents or the sculpture manifests is literally, physically standing before you, that is *hupostasis*, the real presence. This Greek word occurs in Hebrews 1:3. There the Writer says that Jesus is the visible “exact reproduction” (*charakter*) of the

¹ As with many biblical words, a different context brings out different aspects. For example, in Hebrews 3:7-4:13, faith might be defined as that practical exercise of belief that brings the believer to live settled in God’s rest, living in God’s land.

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hupostasis (person-essence-substance) of the invisible God. The word *hupostasis* at 1:3 means the Person of God was literally present: to see Jesus was and is to see God. Jesus was not a sculpture of God, not a photograph, not a hologram, not an appearance or manifestation, he was God in person. As Jesus said to Philip, "he who has seen me has seen the Father," a statement indicative of sensual perception; compare the heard, seen and touched of 1 John 1:1. The incarnate God-man, Jesus the Christ, revealed the transcendent² reality of the Father. Jesus the Christ is the presence of the reality of God. In the second use of this word, 3:14, the Writer exhorted the believer to "hold the beginning of our *hupostasis* (confidence) steadfast to the end." The word in the context of 3:14 could be translated "title deed." A title deed describes real property, such as land, a home, or a car. When one legitimately possesses the title deed, then he holds physical proof of possession of the property. Therefore, in 3:14, *hupostasis* refers to that certain reality in which one's faith is resting confident and assured. Just as Jesus is the real presence of the reality of God, 1:3, even so, the proclamation of saving faith in Jesus, 3:1, 2, is a description of the reality, 3:14, on which faith rests "steadfast to the end." As the messenger of the confession of faith, 3:1, Jesus is the real presence of the reality of God in which believers share, 3:14.³ In 11:1, faith is the real presence of things hoped for. When a believer has genuine, God-given faith in the promises, then the reality of those promises is really present with the believer. Not wished for, not wondered about, not an anxious "I hope so," but the steadfast assurance that the promises are real, genuine, imminent. By faith I am absolutely and completely assured of the reality of the things God has promised, and do in fact by faith hold them in the hand of my soul as a present reality.

In 11:1, the word "substance," *hupostasis*, and the word "evidence," *elegchos*, are parallel descriptions of faith: faith is itself the substance and evidence of the promises, 10:36-37; 11:39, hoped for but not seen. Faith is the presence of the reality, *hupostasis*, of things hoped for. Faith is the "evidence," *elegchos*, of things not seen. The Greek word *elegchos* is used in one other place in the New Testament, 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture . . . is profitable . . . for *elegchos*, where it is translated "reproof" in the NKJV, a subjective use of the word. *Elegchos* can be used objectively, "proof", or subjectively, "means of proof." In Timothy *elegchos* bears the subjective meaning "means of proof with a view to refuting," thus translated "reproof" or "rebuke." In 11:1, is *elegchos* subjective or objective? The answer affects whether *hupostasis* is subjective or objective, because *hupostasis* and *elegchos* are parallel descriptions of faith. In one interpretation of Hebrews 11:1, *hupostasis* and *elegchos* are interpreted as subjective: faith is the means of proof and persuasion of the things hoped for, not seen. A subjective interpretation means that the more faith you have (the quantity of faith), the stronger your belief in the promises. A small or weak faith cannot hold onto the promises; a large or strong faith holds fast to the promises. This puts the burden of perseverance solely on the believer, but Scripture teaches that God gives grace to persevere,⁴ grace which the believer is to receive and put to use in his or her life.

An objective interpretation is more in keeping with the use Hebrews makes of *hupostasis*. For example, at 1:3, Jesus is not the means of proof demonstrating there is a God. Jesus is, objectively, the very presence of God. Since *hupostasis* and *elegchos* are parallel descriptions of persevering faith, then both must bear an objective meaning: faith is the reality and demonstration of things hoped for, not seen. An objective interpretation means God gives a believer that quality of faith that results in the steadfast assurance that the promises are genuine and imminent. An objective faith places the burden of "proof" on God and emphasizes the believer's moral responsibility to receive and use the grace God gives for perseverance.

There are two reasons for an objective interpretation of *hupostasis* and *elegchos*. The first I have briefly discussed. *Elegchos* is in parallel with *hupostasis*, therefore both words must be either subjective or objective. In Hebrews *hupostasis* bears an objective meaning. Christ is not, in 1:3, the subjective *charakter* of the *hupostasis* of God. Christ is the "exact reproduction" (*charakter*) of the "essence" (*hupostasis*) of God: the

² Transcendent: existing apart from and not subject to the limitations of the material universe. Not subject to normal, physical human perception/experience.

³ Kittle and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, VIII:587.

⁴ For example, Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:28-39.

objective presence of God within his created universe. To carry this reasoning further, God is self-existent Spirit, unknowable unless he manifests his presence, as he has in creation. Man, through his sensual and rational faculties,⁵ can perceive some things concerning God's existence by viewing the manifestation of God in his creation. This is subjective perception, because God is seen as he chooses to manifest his existence. However, God exists independent of, apart from, and outside the boundaries of, the universe he created. The universe is not part of God, it is something God created. In manifesting himself prior to the incarnation, God, so-to-speak, stuck his finger into the created universe to interact with his creatures. This interaction revealed the existence of God to man's sensual and rational faculties, giving man a subjective perception of God.

In the incarnation God permanently placed his real and objective presence into his created spiritual and material universe. God the Son incarnate, the God-man Jesus the Christ, is the real spiritual and material presence⁶ of God within the boundaries of the universe he created. Viewed another way, Christ is more than might be perceived (the subjective view) through our physical or rational senses.⁷ Christ is the very presence of the reality of God in the universe he created. Not a perceptual presence, not a manifested presence, but the real presence of God in the Person of Jesus. Therefore, when the Writer states, 1:3, that Christ is the *hupostasis* of God, he means Christ is the continuing objective presence of the reality of God within the boundaries of his creation. *Hupostasis* bears an objective meaning, therefore *elegchos* must bear an objective meaning.

The second reason *hupostasis* and *elegchos* must bear an objective meaning is that the things promised, hoped for, and not seen are of the spiritual realities of heaven. If faith is subjective, then man is trying to discern the reality of spiritual things through his sensual and rational faculties. This is not possible. Spiritual things are perceived through the spiritual faculty of the soul, not the sensual and rational faculties of that subjectively understand the material world. The unsaved sinner cannot understand the things of God, just because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14), but the unsaved sinner's spiritual perception is dead because of sin. Nor can the saved sinner perceive spiritual things through his material senses. Faith perceives spiritual realities because God the Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual perception (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). A subjective faith originates in the worshiper, not God. If faith is subjective, then faith is limited by man's sensual and rational faculties. For example, The Old Testament worshipers could not sensually or rationally perceive the spiritual reality of the heavenly tabernacle and the greater and better offering of Christ underlying the earthly tabernacle and Levitical services (8:5). Even so, the spiritual realities of the promises of God cannot in or of themselves be sensually or rationally perceived within the limitations of our material existence. But through objective faith these spiritual realities can be perceived. The source of objective faith is God, Ephesians 2:8. What I mean is that God gives faith, man does not self-generate faith. Man receives the gift of faith from God and puts that faith to practical use: he believes and is saved; he believes and perseveres. An objective faith is itself the reality of the spiritual presence of the things hoped for and not seen. Faith does not *make* these things real to the believer, for that would be persuasion, a subjective reality. Faith itself *is* the reality of the things hoped for and not seen. Faith in the soul is the *hupostasis*, the objective substance, of the spiritual realities the believer is certain to receive; and they will be received through persevering in life by means of that faith (10:36). To state this in more familiar terms: just as Jesus is the real presence of the Spirit-being God, faith is the real presence of spiritual realities hoped for and not seen. When one has faith in the certainty of the promises, one has certainty he will receive the promises, because that faith is itself the real presence of the promises. Faith itself is the continuing objective presence of the

⁵ "Sensual faculties" means, perception through the physical senses. The "rational faculties" are those of thought and reason.

⁶ Material and spirit beings have a defined presence, a "substance," that is suited to life in their respective domains. Jesus is as present in the spirit domain (plane, dimension, realm) of existence as he is in the material domain of existence.

⁷ I am not contradicting truth such as 1 John 1:1-4. Christ had a real existence on earth, he was truly man, God the Son incarnate in humanity. But, he also had an objective reality that was greater than the sensual or rational faculties of man could perceive: he was very God living within his creation. Jesus Christ was not a theophany, a subjective presence of God in the universe. Jesus Christ was God-in-humanity, the objective presence of the reality of God living within the boundaries of the universe he created.

reality of the promises.

Faith is not being persuaded by means of sensual or rational proof that spiritual things are true. No proof susceptible to man's sensual or rational faculties will be sufficient to cause faith in, for example, the second advent of Christ. The "proof" of this proposition is seen in the lack of faith the Jews had concerning Jesus's claim to be their Christ (Messiah). Although Jesus fulfilled all the several parts of Jewish Scripture relating to the first advent of Messiah, the Jews were not convinced by any proof susceptible to their sensual or rational faculties. Even when they compared the declarations of Scripture against the actions of Jesus, they were not convinced. Some of them did later become convinced, but that conviction was directly caused by the act of God the Holy Spirit, Acts 2, 8, 10. Faith is certainty that God's testimony is absolute truth; only God can cause certainty in man's soul concerning his testimony (1 Corinthians 2:9-14). Faith is not the subjective persuasion that God's promises are genuine. The spiritual reality the Old Testament saints looked toward in faith was the promise of the imminent presence of God in worship, judgment, promise, rest, or advent. For New Testament saints the spiritual reality is the promise of Christ to return, take them to heaven, and set up his kingdom on earth. Faith (itself) is the objective presence of the spiritual reality of God's promises. The presence of faith in the believer objectively demonstrates the presence of the spiritual reality we are certain of, but do not yet see. What then is faith?

We are too used to thinking of faith as a feeling, a subjective perception or persuasion of spiritual reality. Faith is nothing of the sort. Yes, it is true that since we are sensual and rational creatures we tend to understand and express our personal faith in terms of emotions and reason; and God uses our emotions and reason to help us understand our immediate spiritual state (in sin; in fellowship). But faith, whether saving faith or persevering faith, is not based in subjective perception. The efficient cause of faith is God. Faith is the objective certainty that what God has said is true. That objective certainty can only be given by God. God's written word is the revelation of absolute truth.⁸ Through his rational faculties, a person can develop an understanding of God's word. However, the certainty that God's word is absolute truth is a conviction given only by God. When, for example, one believes with undoubting certainty that the God revealed in the Bible is the one and only supreme being, that "act of faith" is caused by Holy Spirit informing the soul of the absolute truth of God's objective existence. That certainty is 100% spiritual. Yes, the Spirit does work through our rational faculties to create understanding, but the absolute certainty that God's testimony is genuine absolute truth without error is a conviction that only God can impart. Scripture facts may be rationally known by natural intelligence, and spiritually comprehended when revealed and explained by the Spirit; but the *certainty* that these facts are God's absolute genuine truth comes only from God. The certainty of spiritual reality is beyond the finite limitations of material existence. Only God can give an absolute assurance of the certainty of spiritual reality.

When the Holy Spirit informs the soul that God exists, this is not a matter of "feeling" God exists, but is a matter of absolute and certain knowledge that God exists, because God has revealed his existence to a man's essential being, i.e., to his soul. The same is true of saving faith, which is a matter of Holy Spirit-revealed absolute and certain knowledge that I am a sinner and Jesus is "my" Savior. Yes, the soul does make a subjective response to the knowledge of the guilt of sin and of redemption in the Savior. That subjective response—repentance of sin and confession of faith in Jesus as Savior—is based in the objective knowledge of the spiritual reality that I am a sinner and only Jesus can save "me." The Holy Spirit communicates to the soul the objective spiritual reality of sin and salvation. Perceptually, i.e., through the

⁸ The original writings of Scripture were God's inspired word accurately recorded by human authors superintended by the Holy Spirit. Therefore the original writings were authentically God's word and credible as God's testimony. Since the word God originally communicated is accurate, authentic, and credible, then I believe he intended to preserve his word in order to communicate it to future generations in forms (copies, translations) that are substantially accurate, authentic, and credible, within the limitations imposed by actions of the uninspired finite human beings making the copies and translations. Divine inspiration was not promised by God for copies and translations. But when the thousands of copies of the Hebrew and Greek biblical texts are compared side-by-side, the comparisons reveal only slight differences in grammar and unimportant words, attributable to minor errors made by those copying the texts by hand. The testimony God gave is unimpaired by these minor copyist's errors.

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senses and reason, the sinner understands his personal crime of sin, his personal sentence of condemnation, and his personal need of salvation. Objectively, in his soul, he is persuaded by Holy Spirit-revealed absolute knowledge, of the reality of Jesus as the only Savior; faith in the knowledge of sin, the Savior, and salvation is certain or sure because the certainty of it comes from God. Thus saving faith is not a matter of feeling salvation, but a matter of the presence of the reality (*hupostasis*) of sin, and the presence of the reality (*hupostasis*) of the Savior. We call this spiritual presence of reality "conviction," and because we "feel" convicted (guilt, need), we associate conviction with our senses, i.e., subjectively. The spiritual reality is that conviction of sin, the Savior, and salvation must begin as objective revelation from God the Holy Spirit, if it is to consummate in the subjective reality of choosing salvation in Jesus "my" Savior (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Conviction is first knowing, then feeling; first absolute knowledge, then taking action because our understanding of that knowledge is certain. Conviction, as concerning biblical, scriptural, spiritual matters, is knowing truth after the same manner God knows truth: as absolute, objective, genuine truth. Conviction of spiritual reality is knowing because God has effectively communicated both knowledge and certainty. Persevering faith is based on the absolute knowledge—the objective conviction—that spiritual realities hoped for but not seen are real and certain to be received.

Persevering faith, the subject of Hebrews 11, is possible because I know that God keeps his promises.⁹ Faith itself is the objective presence of spiritual reality. Persevering faith begins as, and is always supported by, God-given conviction: I know God is keeping his promises because God has convicted me that he is faithful. That certainty is the basis of persevering faith. Therefore, my choice to persevere in my Christian life must be based upon that Holy Spirit-revealed knowledge of absolute, genuine spiritual reality. Worldly circumstances can discourage, but not destroy. I can endure a great struggle with sufferings because I know, by Spirit-given, Spirit-convicting absolute knowledge, that God who cannot lie will be faithful to his promises to me. The presence of Holy Spirit-given faith is itself the objective reality of God's promises. We can say, then, that faith itself is the substance (*hupostasis*) of God's promise (the things hoped for) in exactly the same sense in which Jesus is called (1:3) the exact reproduction (*charakter*) of the substance (*hupostasis*) of God.

Faith is also the objective demonstration (*elegchos*) of the spiritual reality of the things not seen. I can't say this more plainly: objective faith is given by God, not created by man.¹⁰ Because one has faith, one has certainty in the things not seen: the presence of faith is the demonstration of the things not seen. Since we are sensual, rational creatures, I will say this in a more familiar way: one's faith gives a sense of immediate presence to spiritual realities. Put another way, perseverance is knowing that God said it, that settles it, I'm going to do it. In secular Greek *hupostasis* could be used to describe real property, thus, faith is the "title deed"¹¹ of things hoped for; a title deed is the objective proof of legal possession. The objective certainty that God gives in the promises is itself the proof the believer possesses the promises, because that (kind or quality of) faith comes only from God. If one has God-given faith, then one has the certainty needed to persevere and receive the promises.

Excursus: On Faith

⁹ This is not a matter of human perception, nor is it a matter of feeling persuaded. I objectively know God keeps his promises, because the spiritual reality of the matter has been revealed to me by God. Yes, a personal rational comprehension of Scripture is essential to perseverance, because God has created us to be rational beings whose choices are supported by reason. There is a difference, however, between being certain because of experience, and having experience validated by the certainty of faith. The certainty of faith validates our experiences as genuine or false. The certainty of faith causes us to make the choice to persevere and informs us when the practice of our faith, perseverance, is based upon spiritual reality. In v. 1 the writer is not talking about the choice to persevere, he is addressing the basis for perseverance.

¹⁰ Man's faith is more subjective: I know, therefore I act. I persevere in faith, a subjective act, because I have an objective faith in the reality of the promise.

¹¹ Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*, 659-660.

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The abuses the sin nature causes in the name of "faith" require some additional discussion of this vital subject. Genuine biblical faith is the result of God giving certainty concerning his revelation in Scripture. However, every reader knows or has heard of some person claiming certainty from God as the justification for heinous acts. Committing a heinous act in God's name is the certainty of sin, not of God, for God never contradicts himself. God has revealed himself, his will, his purposes, his plans, and his ways and means, in the Scripture. Any act that contradicts that which God has revealed as truth is a wrongful act originating in the certainty of sin, not the certainty of faith.

A biblical example of this kind of wrongful certainty is found in Genesis, in the first sin. The revelation from God was simple to understand: do not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. No unusual intelligence nor deep spirituality was required to know rationally that God had forbidden the eating of the fruit of this tree. Sin, however, gave the Woman certainty that to eat the fruit was acceptable: she listened to sin's words and used those words as the basis for her sin. She saw the fruit was good for food, was pleasant to sight, and was capable of satisfying her desire to be wise, that is, to satisfy the wrong desire sin had given her to be "like God, knowing good and evil." The Woman acted against God's word, "do not eat the fruit," based upon knowledge contradictory to that word, "it is good to eat the fruit." She was certain her new knowledge was truth. She was wrong. The sin nature gives the sinner the feeling of certainty that rebellion and disobedience toward God is correct behavior. Any knowledge, understanding, or "certainty" that contradicts God's written revelation is sin. I have (partially) defined faith as the result of God giving certainty concerning his revelation in Scripture. The starting point for faith must be God's word: the Scripture, the Bible. The Woman did not require spiritual discernment to rationally understand and apply God's simple word, "do not eat the fruit." She accepted a lie as the basis for her rational reasoning and ended with a wrong conviction and wrong action. Reasoning that begins with a wrong premise ends in a wrong action. The wrong premise that ended in man's first sin were the lies, "you shall not die," "you will be like God." The right premise was, "do not eat this one fruit." The greater part of God's word is composed of similarly simple and understandable commandments. The Woman apparently lacked a spiritual comprehension of sin's consequences, but she did not lack a rational understanding of God's commandment. A complete spiritual comprehension is not required to understand and obey God when his commandments are clear; the "do this" and "don't do that" clarity of God's commandments makes them rationally understandable.

For the record, in these New Testament times, for those who may be confused by the past or present history of the visible church, Christianity is not a "conquer and rule," nor a "believe or be killed" faith. The way of the Christian is testimony, tribulation, and persecution. The Christian is Christ's ambassador in a hostile world, prepared, willing, and active in presenting the claims of Christ as Savior, as well as prepared, willing and submitting to rejection, persecution, and even death for the Name of Christ. The requirement for faith in Christ must be presented to sinners, but never, by the very nature of faith, can sinners be forced to faith in Christ. Judgment belongs to God, not God's people, therefore violence, inequity, and injustice is not the way of the Christian. Neither is murder, kidnaping, theft, dishonesty, fraud, or any other declared sin, the Christian way. When in doubt, the Christian's life is to conform to Christ; all Jesus did was tell the truth and act out God's commandments in his life.

This brings up the other side of faith, which is to take action based upon the certainty of God-given faith. Again, the first sin provides an example, albeit an example of the wrong behavior, in which the truth may be seen. Adam did know with spiritual certainty that to eat the fruit was wrong: "Adam was not deceived,"¹ Timothy 1:10. Whether or not the Woman had spiritual certainty regarding the commandment, Adam did. Just as the Woman was required to act on what she rationally knew to be the truth, even so Adam had a greater responsibility to act on what he knew by faith to be the truth. Faith is not only the certainty or conviction of truth, faith is taking appropriate action based upon that certainty. Adam recognized the lie the Woman had accepted, because he had God given-conviction of truth. He was required to act on the basis of that truth and conviction. To act on the basis of his God-given conviction was not something impossible or difficult; this was not something for which an extra measure of intelligence or spiritual comprehension was required. Adam was required to act on the basis of his conviction: what God had said was true, therefore what Satan was saying (through the Woman) was a lie.

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Nor can it be said that you or I must have unusual intelligence or spiritual capability to act by faith. If the conviction of faith is God-given certainty, then acting on faith is the God-given requirement. A complete comprehension is not required; acting on the conviction is the requirement. When I believed on Christ as "my" Savior, my spiritual comprehension was limited to two convictions: I was a sinner; Jesus was the Savior. A choice was required: to act on the conviction, or to reject salvation in Jesus Christ. Today I have a more complete understanding of the nature of these things and their spiritual consequences; but the requirement remains the same. In contrast, I have a thoroughly incomplete understanding as to how God joined himself to humanity—the incarnation of God the Son. I can quote the Scripture. I have a sufficient understanding of the Scripture to tell you that God the Son laid aside the outward manifestations and prerogatives of deity without quitting his essential deity. But those are just the facts, I have no understanding of how this was accomplished. I can tell you that on the cross, when Jesus became the sin-bearer, God the Father separated himself from his Son. I cannot tell you how that was accomplished; I can't even tell you what that really means. I simply accept the conviction, based upon the Scripture, that God cannot have fellowship with sin, and therefore separated himself from Jesus when Jesus "became sin for us." The God-given conviction that these things are truth is present, but a comprehension of the means and consequences, apart from that which God reveals in Scripture, is lacking. In things that are beyond the finite capabilities of my comprehension, where God has given certainty as to faith, I am to believe and act on that belief.

A more complete definition of faith has a God-ward component and a man-ward component. Faith is inwardly believing the testimony of God through the infallible conviction of the Holy Spirit, and outwardly acting by the power of the Spirit to conform one's thoughts and actions to that conviction. Both the inner conviction and the outward action is based solely upon God's revelation in Scripture. This requires more than a casual or passing familiarity with Scripture. There are lies in the Scripture: Satan lied to the Woman. There are wrong actions in the Scripture: Jonah fled from God's commandment. There are improper conclusions and choices in the Scripture: Solomon married many women to make political alliances. What is in Scripture is an accurate record of persons, places and events. There are things that subsequent events have changed or superseded: the Old Testament animal sacrifices are superseded by Christ's one sacrifice. There are commandments that are no longer in effect. In this age of Christianity one does not stone the adulterer or adulteress, one does not execute the homosexual or pornographer; one testifies to the sinner to repent of the sin and accept salvation in Christ. What the Christian must do is obey the simple do's and don'ts of God's commandments that are given and designed for this Christian dispensation. We hear the word of God, we are convicted by it, we hasten to do it, we conform our lives to it: that is faith.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

For by faith the elders obtained a good testimony. This is the announcement of the Writer's theme in chapter eleven. I have dwelt on the spiritual basis of faith in verse one, but the Writer will concern himself with the fruits and consequences which follow faith. Faith is the basis of perseverance, for without spiritual conviction there is nothing upon which to base one's perseverance. More simply, how may one persevere if the reason for perseverance is unknown? Faith in the promises provides that basis: I have God-given certainty concerning the goal or end result of perseverance: to receive the promises. Faith is not, however, the efficient cause of perseverance. The act of persevering is a choice: I am persevering in the practice of my faith because I intend to receive the reward. If this were not true, if a decision need not be made to persevere, then the Writer would not have written 10:25-29, nor 11:1-39; indeed, he could have ended his epistle at 10:25. The exhortation, "do not cast away your confidence," 10:35, has its counterpart in "you have need of endurance," v. 36. Both express choices to be made, and the exhortations, as illustrated by the example of the elders (patriarchs, ancestors), are intended to encourage the believer to make the right choice, which is, to have endurance, i.e., to persevere in the faith by faith. Manton calls this faith "sanctifying faith,"¹² a typically Puritan emphasis. The testimony of the elders illustrates the experiential sanctification required of

¹² Manton, *By Faith*, 51.

believers, meaning, that what one believes must influence all the parts of the spiritual life. Without faith perseverance is noble morality (or ignoble stubbornness). Perseverance by means of faith is the pursuit of that experiential sanctification which conforms the life to God's commandments, in this case, to maintain unswerving confidence in God's promises.

The choice to persevere includes the choice to use the means of grace to maintain one's faith. Here again I am not speaking of certainty, but the use one makes of that certainty: the inner conviction should result in an appropriate outward action. The text here is *en tauta gar*, "for in this" ("for by this"), that is, "because of this kind of faith," the elders obtained, etc. What is intended is that through the exercise of their faith the elders obtained a good report or testimony concerning their perseverance in and by their faith. The inner conviction was the basis for an appropriate choice. That this phrase, *en tauta*, is meant to guide the interpretation of subsequent verses is seen in the word translated "by faith", the Greek *pistei*. The use is anarthrous, i.e., without the definite article. Use of the definite article, "the" faith would have indicated the body of revealed truth. Without the definite article the kind or quality of faith is emphasized, corresponding to the grammar of *en tauta* in v. 2. Ellingworth notes that *pistei* is "essentially synonymous with *en tauta* in v. 2, *kata pistin* in v. 13, *dia pisteos* in v. 33, and *dia tas pisteos* in v. 39"¹³ and later states that "*pistei* denotes means."¹⁴ Lane opines that *pistei* "can be read as an instrumental dative ('by means of faith'), or a dative of manner ('accordance with the modality of faith'), or a causal dative ('because of faith')."¹⁵ In keeping with these opinions, the use of *en tauta* and *pistei* indicates that in the exercise of their faith ("Abel offered," "Enoch . . . pleased God," "Noah prepared," "Abraham obeyed," etc.) the elders maintained their perseverance. Thus, the choice to persevere includes the choice to use the means of grace necessary to maintain one's faith.

We should never forget that in this mortal life, in all things spiritual, there is a God-ward side and a man-ward side. God's responsibility is convicting his people of the certainty of spiritual reality, and empowering their soul to achieve the goal of successful perseverance: receiving the promises. Man's responsibility is to use the appropriate means to strengthen, mature, and encourage himself in his faith, in order to continue to live according to his faith, that he might endure and receive the promises. What, then, are the means by which we are enabled to persevere? The persevering faith of the elders is demonstrated in that they took action based upon what they held to be true—were convicted was true. The Writer has not only presented the truths of the Christian faith in his epistle, he has exhorted his readers to the practical expression of these truths. The more immediate context is what I have called the privileges and obligations, or duties, of the faith, 10:19-25. Faith is not some ambiguous feeling; faith, if it is genuine, God-given, soul-saving faith, looks toward the promised future as a solid and sure reality that demands appropriate action. The certainty of faith causes the believer to make the choice to persevere and informs him (or her) when the practice of faith, perseverance, is based on spiritual reality. The choice and the practice are essential to the maintenance of faith. Although the conviction of truth is objective and absolute, the recognition and practical application of that conviction is subjective within the soul. One might liken faith to a spiritual "muscle" that requires constant exercise to maintain its tone and strength. Without constant exercise through practical application the subjective recognition of faith weakens. The result is that one comes less often into God's presence, uses prayer and devotion less frequently, becomes apathetic toward his believing brethren, and calloused toward the suffering in the world; ultimately, one abandons gathering together with his Christian brethren. We are, in this physical frame, creatures of subjective sense and rationality, whose faith must be practiced in practical expressions to be maintained all the way through the end of life to the promised reward. The certainty of faith causes us to make the choice to persevere and informs us when the practice of our faith, perseverance, is based upon spiritual reality. No wonder, then, the Writer energetically exhorts his readers to press forward to spiritual maturity, by putting their faith into practice.

¹³ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 561.

¹⁴ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 592.

¹⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 326, note "h".

3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

The Writer begins his exposition of persevering faith at the beginning, where faith must choose to believe in God. If God is not Creator, then he cannot be Savior—the damaged creature cannot repair his damaged soul, only his maker can. The current worldly challenges to God's creation of the world were not, of course, part of the Writer's historical circumstances, but there were competing theories his contemporaries would have been aware of, perhaps even believed. God's account of creating the universe is an essential test of faith. Only the Creator can answer man's most basic questions of existence: who am I, what am I doing here; where am I going? More than this, salvation history begins in the Garden. If Adam and the Woman did not sin, then all subsequent faith is merely man-made religion created to give human atonement for morally bad actions. If God's account of his creating man is a myth, then religion is man's effort to reign in his habit of injuring others by establishing moral codes. If God did not create man and set a standard for his behavior, then the promise of salvation now and heaven later is a polite fiction created by smarter men to falsely encourage moral behavior in people too dumb to recognize it for what it is: a lie.

Far too many Christians are so ignorant of their faith as to not recognize the connections between biblical history and doctrine, let alone the connections between various, seemingly unrelated, doctrines. In the context of the God-given conviction that I am a sinner and Jesus is "my" Savior, many things may be temporarily set aside as not immediately essential for salvation. But in the context of an informed faith that stands the tests of trial and persecution, these things become essential. One need not, for example, know the connection between Adam and Christ in order to be saved; but understanding how they are connected supports persevering faith. Allow me to give an example in the virgin birth of Christ. I have spoken earlier in Hebrews of Adam's federal and seminal representation of the human race. All men are guilty of Adam's sin because he represented the human race in his probation in the Garden: God has imputed the guilt of the racial head to his descendants. In addition to his federal representation, Adam's sin corrupted his human nature, adding to it the attribute of self-determination and the characteristics of rebellion toward God and disobedience toward his commandments. This corrupted human nature was procreated to the race descending from Adam, Genesis 5:3. If Christ had been born through natural procreation, then he would have possessed the same sin nature, and born the same sin-guilt, as all other descendants from Adam. Jesus was, however, born otherwise than the normal process of procreation, and therefore did not inherit Adam's corrupted human nature. Moreover, although possessing a genuine human nature, because it was not corrupted by sin, it was not subject to sin's guilt nor penalty. Therefore, in being virgin born, Christ did not share Adam's guilt. Because Jesus did not have a share in Adam's guilt, and did not have the sin nature Adam passed along to his descendants, then Jesus could federally, i.e., on behalf of others, assume the guilt of Adam's race, and make a propitiation for that guilt, because he had no guilt of his own. The virgin birth is essential to salvation, and that one fact alone (there are others that could be considered) makes the biblical account of creation history essential, just as the creation account is essential to understanding the virgin birth.

That the Writer considers the biblical account of creation essential to persevering faith appears from the relation between this verse and subsequent verses. He has, in his choices and order of presentation, given a small history of redemption, beginning with the environment in which salvation history takes place. The Son is Creator as well as Redeemer, Hebrews 1:2-3. The first truth must be believed if the latter truth is to be effectual. One cannot physically demonstrate the universe was created by divine act; at some point the scientific process must end and there must be faith in things not seen. The forgiveness of sin that results from the salvation of the sinner's soul is also a divine act, not demonstrable by physical means.¹⁶ If by faith I can understand that the Son of God saved my soul, then by faith I can understand God the Son made the

¹⁶ Those seeking to prove salvation through some sensual or rational perception point to the changed life of the redeemed. This change is easily dismissed, by those who are without faith, as reformation, not regeneration. Because the counterfeit, the reformation of one's behavior, is so easily demonstrable, the spiritual reality, regeneration of the soul, is not acceptable to those who do not possess the conviction of faith.

universe. The Greek text of this verse reads slightly different than the English translations, literally: "by faith we understand the ages to have been ordered by a word of God, so as the thing being seen not to have become out of things appearing." The word *aion*, "ages," usually refers to a period of time. The context, however, is of the phenomenal "things" having been brought into existence out of nothing. The word *aion* can also mean the phenomenal. The translation "world," (or "universe" NIV, HCSB), is correct, because what we perceive, the phenomenal, was not created out of that which is perceptible. More simply, the universe was not formed out of preexisting materials, but was brought into existence by God speaking. The word translated "framed" (NIV: formed; HCSB: created), is the Greek *cathartes*, which in the particular form it is here (*katartisthai*) means to set in order. "In this context *katartisthai* means 'to furnish completely or equip' and thus draws attention to the perfection of the total number of creative acts and sees the whole as a balanced and complete unity. . . . an unseen power was the effective causation of the phenomenal world."¹⁷ This is creation *ex nihilo*, "from nothing," and it is important to note that the Writer's Greco-Roman historical contemporaries did not agree with the Genesis account. This phrase (*ex nihilo*), and this verse, capture the essence of faith, which is to be convicted that what is seen was not created out of the things that are visible (the universe is not self-existent nor self-originating). If one cannot have faith that God created the universe out of nothing more than his word commanding its existence, how then can one have faith in the much more incredibly complex and important salvation of a soul from sin? How can we persevere toward the unseen future, if we cannot believe in an unseen God who created us, loves us, saved us from sin, and has an unseen inheritance reserved for us in heaven? Only by means of faith.

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

The scope of this commentary does not permit a rehearsal of history, nor a defense of the historical record. The biblical historical record is accepted as authentic, accurate, and credible. The reader is encouraged to become familiar with the historical record as may be required. The story of Abel and Cain is found in Genesis 4. Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. That Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith" implies that Cain did not make his offering by faith. The Writer's focus is not on the things that were brought, but the heart attitude in which they were brought: by faith, or not by faith. In the words "a more excellent [better] sacrifice," we are to understand the difference in acceptability was in the faith through which the offerings were offered. We may assume that these men had been previously instructed as to the proper manner, time, place and result of a sacrificial offering. We may also assume that both men brought an offering that each believed conformed to the prior instruction. The purposes of a sacrificial offering are twofold. First, to be made acceptable to God; then, on the basis of being made acceptable, to offer worship. It is all too easy to dismiss Cain's offering as unacceptable to God because the things offered resulted from the work of his hands. However, each man brought God an offering of his labor; do not Christians do the same when we offer our possessions and talents to God for his blessing? The issue is faith, not works. Abel's faith made his offering acceptable. The apostle John (1 John 3:12) comments on Cain's offering as "evil." Jude cautions the believer to defend the faith (v. 3) by not going "in the way of Cain" (v. 11). The way of faith is the Christian's only righteous path. Cain's lack of faith made his offering unacceptable.

Usually, Abel's sacrifice is considered as more excellent because it was of blood, and Cain's unacceptable because there was no blood. While it is true that the proper expression of saving faith is in the death of the substitute, that is not the Writer's point. Let us reason from the Mosaic law. Two men bring exactly the same sacrifice for sin, a spotless lamb. One man is forgiven, the other is not. What has made the difference? The forgiven man brought the sacrifice to express his repentance of his sin, in faith believing God's testimony that God would forgive his sin through a sacrifice offered by means of faith. The unforgiven man brought the sacrifice in response to the ceremonial requirement of the law, and expected God to forgive because he had ritualistically fulfilled the law's requirement. Shall we bring this illustration up to date? The sinner who says

¹⁷ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 227.

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the “Sinner’s Prayer”¹⁸ as a formula to effect salvation, thereby making the prayer itself the object of his faith, cannot be saved by that offering. The sinner who uses the “Sinner’s Prayer” as a means to express repentance and faith in Christ, who is the sole object of his faith, will be saved through that offering. An offering, whether of sheep, vegetables, or words, does not save, only faith in the Savior saves a soul from sin. Christ himself is the bridge between sin and salvation; faith is the signpost exclaiming “Go this way!” What was in Cain’s heart is not stated, except to say that his offering was not acceptable, Genesis 4:5, 7, because he made his offering without acceptable faith, Hebrews 11:4. Abel’s faith testifies that he was righteous; Abel was in a right standing with God because he had faith in God’s proclaimed means of salvation. God’s record of his faith testifies that to be acceptable every offering must be offered in faith. What faith is required? To believe that what God has testified concerning salvation is true, and therefore to act in accordance with that belief. I believe I am a sinner needing salvation from God’s just wrath; I believe on Jesus Christ as the one whose death on the cross is able to save me from sin.

The Writer chose these examples of faith in chapter eleven, beginning with Abel and Cain, to make his point regarding perseverance. Abel conformed his faith to God’s requirements, despite pressure to adapt or adjust to the conditions of the world, or worldly religion (for so we may view Cain’s offering). God had set a standard by which he was to be approached by man for worship and salvation. In some way not clearly specified by the biblical record, Cain failed that standard. The specifics of Cain’s failure are not important; that he failed to conform his worship to God’s standards, even when given a second opportunity, is the fulcrum of the example. Cain’s failure to be accepted by God extended itself to opposition toward Abel, the man of faith. Abel did respond to God in faith; even when he was opposed by natural religion, he persisted in his faith unto death. Both in living by faith, and dying in faith, Abel persevered in his faith all the way through to the end.

5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Enoch’s story is found in Genesis 5:18-24, Hebrews 11:5, and Jude 14. The Genesis account is profound in its simplicity: Enoch walked with God 300 years . . . Enoch walked with God; and he was not, because God took him. The implication is that Enoch went directly to heaven without passing through death. The Writer of Hebrews confirms this interpretation. The Writer says that the reason Enoch did not physically die is because by his faith he pleased God. Two things may be noted, drawn from the Genesis and Jude scriptures. One, Enoch is said to have lived 65 years, and then, after he begot Methuselah, he walked with God for 300 years. Enoch was on the earth for 365 years, and we should not think Enoch walked with God from the moment of his birth. His personal faith grew and matured, until he came to the place of spiritual maturity where the manner of his life was consistently pleasing to God. His pleasing God did not reside solely in his works, but in his faith that gave motivation and expression to his works. Jude reveals something of this. Enoch prophetically saw—God revealed to him—that the ungodly would be judged. Enoch stood out in his community. Others were speaking ungodly things, harsh words, against God. They were committing ungodly acts because of their ungodly ways. Enoch committed godly acts because of his godly ways. We know not what light of spiritual understanding Enoch may have had beyond that which God communicated to Adam and Eve, his prophetic testimony excepted. Whatever Enoch understood about God he lived it out in the daily practice of his life, in such a manner that the inner conviction and outward expression of his faith was pleasing to God. By means of his faith he was not found because God had taken him. The message here is not that God may take us out of the world if we should please him as much as Enoch pleased God. The message is that Enoch walked by faith all his adult life despite the example and opposition of the ungodly. The consistency of his faith, even when surrounded by ungodliness, indicates the quality of faith required in order to have persevering faith.

¹⁸ The “Sinner’s Prayer” is an invention of 20th century evangelism that is totally lacking Scripture support. The intent was benign, to help a sinner express his new found faith; the result is a grotesque mockery of faith, wherein the sinner and his prayer replace Christ as the object of faith.

6 But 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 diligently seek Him.

Persevering faith is acting by faith (Abel) and continuing in faith (Enoch). One cannot please God without faith. The stories of Cain and Enoch vividly illustrate the point. The former did not approach nor worship God by faith; the latter pleased God by faith. We must not think of God physically, or in some manifested form, walking with Enoch; the reverse was the case, Enoch walked with God. Enoch conformed his thoughts, attitudes and behavior to God's standards. Throughout the normal course of his normal life, in toil or leisure, in labor or pleasure, "Enoch had God always in his eyes, whether he were alone, or in company, about duties of piety, or other affairs. Thereby he was moved carefully and consciously to avoid what might be displeasing unto God, and diligently to do what was agreeable to the will of God."¹⁹ Cain did the works God required, but without that faith which gives spiritual value to the works, as his behavior afterwards revealed (Genesis 4:5-8). Enoch made a conscious effort to avoid rebellion and disobedience (sin) and to actively seek to do God's will in all aspects of his life. In his person Enoch pleased God, because his faith in God made him righteous; and in his actions he pleased God, because by faith he conformed himself to God's will. That is the kind and quality and activity of faith that alone can please God. That is what the Writer means by coming to God and believing that he is.

To come to God is to approach with the intent to worship. Oh, how deceitful is the heart in this place. All men who come to God come with the intent to worship him. Yet, like Cain, most come to worship on their own terms, in a way or manner that seems right to them. They bring themselves to God and require God to accept them as they are, on the terms of their faith.²⁰ Both Cain and Abel came to God to effect worship; both brought a sacrifice to the place God had specified and at the time God required. Both physically made their offering after the manner God had required of man. But the inner spiritual condition of the soul in which each brought his offering was different in kind and quality. Both brought an offering in faith, but Abel's faith made his offering acceptable. Both believed they came to God in faith, but only Abel's faith made him acceptable. Cain's faith was that God would accept his offering because he came as required; Abel came to God in faith seeking acceptance. Cain came to fulfill the religious requirement to make an offering; Abel came because his faith required his offering. Cain's faith was that he would be accepted because he had fulfilled the requirement for an offering; Abel came to God seeking acceptance through his offering. There is only one way to God. Only that one way is pleasing to God. Only that one way makes man's approach effective. In this New Testament age, Jesus said that faith in him alone was the one way through which man must approach God for salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life and fellowship with God. Any other way that adds something, anything, to the one way is not the way of faith. Cain's faith failed to please God. Abel made an acceptable offering to God, and Enoch lived a life always pleasing to God, because by their faith they made and sustained a vital relationship with God that was according to God's one way to please God.

Those that come to God must believe that he is. To believe in God is not mere acceptance of truth, it is faith taking action because of truth, that is, to consciously strive to put truth into effect throughout all aspects of one's life. To believe in God is more than mere intellectual assent. To believe in God is more than an outward act of worship. To believe that God is, is to act to take the eternal destiny of your soul out of your self-keeping and place it into Christ's hands: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. To believe that God is, is to take action to be imitators of God, and live like Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. This cannot be done through mere human effort, but must be done by faith in, and continued dependence upon, the spiritual power God supplies to the soul who believes. A life lived by faith is a life lived by human action empowered and sustained by God; a partnership in which the believer is the working partner and God supplies all else; the God-given conviction that we depend upon God to enable us do all things necessary to please him. To believe that God is, is to reject the arguments and temptations of the sin nature; to turn away from all that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. To believe that God is, is to take the

¹⁹ Gouge, *Hebrews*, 11:767.

²⁰ God accepts sinners seeking salvation while they are in their sinful state, because they come to God bearing faith in the blood of Christ, not their own works.

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action necessary to bring every thought to conform to obedience to Christ. To believe that God is, is to actively, passionately cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who is acting on his part to conform every believer to be like Christ; to be cautious that one's faith and thoughts and deed are not like the world; to seek and know the power of faith that conforms my life to be like Christ's in life, even in the face of opposition, rejection, suffering, tribulation, trial, persecution, and death.

To believe that God is, is to believe that he has a reward waiting for the person who perseveres in his or her faith. The reward of faith is in view in the examples of Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. The Writer had previously reminded his readers of that reward, vv. 35, 36. But take note, God is a rewarder of those who "diligently seek him." First, let me remind the reader that the Writer is addressing believers, so that to diligently "seek him" is not in reference to salvation. Listen again to the Writer, v. 36, "For you have need of endurance, so that *after* you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (emphasis mine). To diligently seek God is, in the Writer's context, the positive action required of the believer to discover and perform God's will. The Writer is not speaking of some specific will of God for an individual believer; this is God's general will that applies to every believer, and which I have exemplified somewhat in the preceding paragraph. This means to find God's will as expressed in his word, and allow that will to transform one's thinking and attitudes and deeds; in Paul's words, Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Being conformed to the word of God, not to the will of the world, is the demonstration within one's soul of God's good and acceptable and perfect will. From the aspect of things to avoid, one passage from Paul should sufficiently example diligently seeking God:

- Ephesians 5:3-13 (NIV), "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret."

Therefore, in both things to do, and things not to do, the believer is to pursue both the knowledge of, and the practical application of, God's will, as revealed in Scripture. That passionate pursuit of knowledge and application is "diligence." He who believes that God is, believes that God rewards those who diligently seek him. Faith is "that trustful reliance which finds expression in willing obedience and submission to the sovereign word of God, in grateful acknowledgment of the unmixed goodness of all his works, and in confident recognition of the complete trustworthiness of his promises."²¹ Life-long perseverance in that faith, such as exemplified by Enoch, is the result of the genuine faith that believes that God is, and that he rewards those who diligently seek him.

7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

The story of Noah is found in Genesis 6-9. The Writer is interested in Noah's actions, the cause of those actions, and the result of his actions. Several parts call for notice. First, that Noah was moved by, and acted in, faith. Second, that he was divinely warned. Third, he was warned of things not yet seen. Fourth, the warning resulted in Noah being moved with godly fear. Fifth, that he prepared a means to save his family. Sixth, that his action by faith condemned a faithless world, and seventh, that Noah by faith became the heir

²¹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 460

of righteousness.

Noah was moved by and acted in faith. Noah was born about seventy years after Enoch died. He lived for nearly five hundred years before God visited him with the warning of judgment from a world-wide flood. The flood took place about one hundred twenty years after God's warning. The comment (Moses makes) concerning mankind is that the Lord saw "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." The ungodliness of Enoch's time had increased to the point God "was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart." Noah lived a righteous life in the midst of an ungodly world. We should note that he was not alone during that time.²² Not every human being in Noah's lifetime had rejected God. Seth, Enosh, Cainan, Mahalalel, Jared, and Lamech were alive during Noah's life before the flood, and Noah's grandfather, Methusaleh, died in the year of the flood. Noah lived by faith in a community of faith. Because of his faith he was chosen by God to represent God to an ungodly world, and to perpetuate the human species following the world-wide judgment. We should remember that although faith is a personal decision between a sinner and God, individual faith does not come into existence, nor does it continue to exist, in a vacuum of ungodliness and unbelief. God always perpetuates a community of faith. Noah's faith community supported him for the six hundred years up to the flood, and he had the support of his immediate family, his sons, their wives, and his wife, in the difficult years following the flood (Noah lived for three hundred fifty years after the flood).

Moreover, Noah and his wife gave birth to Shem, Ham and Japheth, his three sons, in the one hundred years before the flood. If the annotation of one hundred twenty years in Genesis 6:3 indicates the time between God warning Noah and the day the flood began, then Noah exercised faith in an unseen future by having children. The average age when Noah's ancestors had children was 117 years. Noah waited for almost 500 years before he had children, and perhaps his delay was in response to the ungodliness of the age. It may be that Noah had children only because God's warning had given him faith in an unseen future. When the flood came these men were adults and married (Shem was 98 years old the year of the flood) and who is to say Noah didn't encourage their marriages in view of his certainty of life after the flood. We see then that "by faith" was the rule of his life.

Second, Noah was divinely warned of the coming judgment. Here is the certainty of God-given faith. There was no perceptible reason for Noah to believe the ungodliness of his world was going to change; no reason to believe God had taken notice and would act to correct the problem. Jesus makes it a point to tell us that in Noah's day everything was malfunctioning normally: Matthew 24:38-39, ". . . in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know [judgment was coming] until the flood came and took them all away." Knowledge of the coming judgment was not a matter of sensual or rational perception. Noah knew because God said; the world did not know because they did not believe Noah. Third, let us also consider that Noah was warned of things not yet seen. In at least one sense, this refers to the judgment itself. Yet, this might also refer to physical conditions in the world. Certainly there had never been a flood of such proportions prior to Noah's time. Indeed, several things in Genesis 1-9 work together to indicate rainfall, at least as we know it, may have been unknown in Noah's world. Genesis 2:6 describes a mist that "went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground." The notice given to the rainbow in Genesis 9 may indicate this was a new physical phenomenon. The word translated "windows" in the NKJV is more properly "floodgates" (NIV, HCSB), indicating a previously undisclosed amount of water in the upper atmosphere. Regardless, whether the reference is to unseen judgment, or a previously unknown physical phenomenon, Noah believed in things not yet seen because he believed God's warning. The coming judgment God has promised at the end of the New Testament age is also not yet seen: a time of great tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of the world unto this time (Matthew 24:21). God has warned his people of judgment not yet seen, but surely impending. By faith we persevere.

²² The genealogies in Genesis five present about 1350 years between Seth and the flood. Whether or not the genealogies are concurrent, or there are gaps in the record, is not important to the story of "by faith." The fact that ungodliness persisted and increased is relevant. The presentation of the genealogies as indicating Noah did not stand alone in his faith is important, especially in light of the context Hebrews 10:25 affords chapter eleven.

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Fourth, the warning resulted in Noah being moved with godly fear. Noah took God at his word and acted in response to the warning he had received. Because of his godly fear he (fifth) prepared a means to save his family. He had need to fear: the world as he knew it was coming to an end. The fear of the wicked ends in despair and torment. The fear of the godly ends in reverence and work.²³ Godly fear is sometimes synonymous with reverence, sometimes synonymous with duty. Godly fear causes caution, so that we are careful to work out our faith with fear and trembling, lest we stumble in sin or unbelief. Godly fear causes diligence in regard to duty—we walk in godly fear to keep us from sin—so that we are careful to do what God commands, and persevere in it. Godly fear causes reverence for who God is and what he has done; and a certain dread, lest we offend his holiness and majesty, and become subject to his power in justice against our sins. In the wicked, love and fear are incompatible. In the godly, love and fear are joined together, so that believers love God and are in awe of his goodness and his judgments: in love for God we turn from sin. Noah was awed by the goodness of God in saving him and his family, and awed by the severity of God toward an unbelieving world. His fear of the Lord resulted in his being moved to duty, he prepared the ark. Paul wrote to Christians that (2 Corinthians 5:11) knowing the terror of the Lord, “we persuade men.” The foregoing context indicates Paul was trying to persuade the Corinthians to live godly lives. If today’s believers are to “receive the promise” (10:36), then they must persevere with godly fear in the privileges and duties of faith.

Sixth, by his action Noah condemned a faithless world. His action, to build an ark, was based in his faith.²⁴ His neighbors saw the ark as foolish or insane; any workers he may have employed (carpenters, shipwrights, etc.) were also unmoved by his piety and testimony. But the ark was a continuing, undeniable testimony of impending judgment and potential salvation for all. Noah, however, did more than build an ark, he built a testimony. He persisted in his godly fear; he continued in the privileges and duties of his faith. According to 2 Peter 2:5, Noah preached the message of God’s righteousness. We should be careful to note that Peter describes Noah as a preacher of “righteousness” not a preacher of impending judgment. The need of the ungodly people in Noah’s time was not the ark. God did not want ungodly people to enter the ark and be delivered from their deserved judgment; the purpose of the flood was to rid the world of the ungodly. God wanted ungodly people to repent of their sins, turn to him in faith, and then, having received the righteousness which is by faith alone, to enter the ark as men and women of faith living by faith. Salvation is not “fire insurance”; it is not offered as deliverance from eternal judgment. Salvation is the judgment of the believer’s sin and receiving the righteousness of Christ that changes the soul from ungodly to godly. Noah’s faith condemned the world because his faith was a testimony that the world did not have saving faith. He was, in the positive sense, God’s means to convert sinners from their sins. He did, in the negative sense, leave the ungodly without excuse. His life of faith pressed upon the ungodly to seek God, or pressed them into condemnation because they rejected God. In New Testament terms, the believer is the fragrance of life to those being saved, or the smell of death to those denying Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

The seventh thing to consider in this verse is that by his faith Noah became the heir of righteousness. What the Writer means is that Noah received those things promised to the righteous. Noah received the conviction of faith and the grace to persevere. He received the intimacy of fellowship with God. He had the satisfaction that comes with being on the Lord’s side. He experienced deliverance for himself and his house. He became a participant in a new covenant with God that would affect God’s relationship with the world until the end of the ages. He inherited a new world inhabited by God and believers. In all these things he more than conquered the ungodly world God had condemned and destroyed. In New Testament terms, he received a kingdom, prepared for him from the foundation of the world, Matthew 25:34. Yet, let us not forget that righteousness reveals itself in works. Noah built the ark. He designed it according to God’s instructions. He paid for the materials and laborers. Throughout the long years while the ark was being built, he labored in the fields to “take for yourself all food that is eaten,” to sustain himself, his family, and the animals during

²³ Manton, *By Faith*, 364-365, several thoughts in this paragraph were suggested by Manton.

²⁴ The indefinite reference “by which” must be resolved by the reader or translator. The most likely solution is that “by which” refers to the ark as the visible presentation of his faith to the unbelieving world (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 356). Compare the NIV: “by his faith.” The HCSB leaves the reference indefinite: “by this.”

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the time they were in the ark. He caused his family and the animals to enter the ark. Four times the Scripture records that "Noah did all that God commanded him." Had Noah not obeyed, then he would not have inherited the world. By faith—diligently seeking God, diligently believing God, diligently obeying God—Noah became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Abraham, like Noah, diligently sought, believed, and obeyed God. I do not want to spiritualize or allegorize Abraham and his experience by faith. However, this verse is a good working description of the believer at the beginning of his or her life of faith. By faith, the sinner obeys God's call to believe in Christ as Savior, and thus in being saved the believer goes out to receive an inheritance, not knowing where he is going. The call to salvation is a call to forsake the land of sin, where we had all our possessions, where our old life existed, and where it seemed as if it would always live, and remove ourselves to a new land, the boundaries and content of which are unknown, simply on the basis that God has called us to forsake the one and journey to the other. I have had some small taste of Abraham's experience in my life, when the military called me to move out of the United States to a foreign country, there to dwell for a long period of time. I went to a strange land, about which I knew almost nothing, and knew no one there, and I went with my wife and children, not knowing where I was going, beyond the name of the place I was going to. Abraham was called to leave his old life behind and journey to a place unknown; he knew he had arrived only when God said to him, you are here. Abraham gave up all his past history and experience to receive a future promise. Meditate on that for a moment: he gave up everything tangible to receive an intangible promise. In some fashion God communicated to him, "leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (NIV). That was it: go because I God said so; go because I God have made a promise. The promise was scarcely more believable than the call to leave. At the time, Abraham was prosperous, childless, and seventy-five years old. In all respects we would have counted him among the ordinary men of his times. Compare his ordinary life against God's seemingly outrageous promises: "I will make you into a great nation; in you all the families of earth shall be blessed." What kind of down payment or token did God give to help Abraham believe? Initially, nothing but the certainty of faith in the promises. To make sure we understand the struggle and the victory of faith, let us cast Abraham's faith in the terms of 11:1, 3. "Now Abraham's faith was the substance of the promise hoped for, the demonstration of the promise not seen. By faith Abraham understood that the promise was framed by the word of God, so that the promise he went to receive would not be made out of the things he already had." Faith led him out of his old life into the promise of a new life and eternal inheritance.

Several language Authorities note that the juxtaposition of the present passive participle *kaloumenos*, "called," with the aorist indicative active tense of the main verb, *hupakousen*, "obeyed" emphasizes Abraham's immediate act of obedience: as he was being called, he obeyed; "He obeyed the call while (so to say) it was still sounding in his ears."²⁵ However, let us also take care not to elevate Abraham's faith above what we ourselves are able to exercise. Abraham also experienced a process of spiritual growth and maturity. The Genesis 11:31-12:5 account leaves some doubt as to whether Abraham received the call in Ur of the Chaldeans, or in Haran, or perhaps he was called twice, once in Ur and then again in Haran. From Ur he journeyed with his father Terah and his nephew Lot to Haran. From Haran, after his father had died, he went to Canaan but took Lot with him, in disobedience to the command to "get away from your kindred." His faith grew as his journey continued, until, Genesis 12:7, God appeared to him, in Canaan, and said "To your descendants I will give this land" (a promise repeated when nephew Lot, the heir apparent, left the camp). This man who had no children to receive God's promise, built an altar to the Lord to commemorate the promise. The point is, although there is a process by which faith grows, yet that process is initiated by faith, grows by faith, and perseveres by faith.

²⁵ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 358.

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9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;

10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Although Abraham had arrived in the land of promise, he did not receive the land, but remained within the land as a stranger and pilgrim, looking to it as an inheritance, not a possession. The Writer's point is that Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob persevered through their faith in the promise God made to Abraham and his heirs. In the sense of believing in the promise, Abraham and his immediate heirs received it; in the sense of actual possession, they waited for it with the expectation of one who knows the certainty of possession. Let us remember the Writer is not presenting a history, but is using the Old Testament histories to illustrate the New Testament believer's need to persevere in the promises Christ has made to him. The New Testament believer has the promise of a home in heaven, the promise of "where Jesus is, there will we be also," the promise of reigning with him in his millennial, Davidic kingdom, and the promise of an eternity living face-to-face with God. There are also the numerous promises of divine assistance, empowerment, and guidance to ensure the believer attains the promise of a future home in heaven. The New Testament believer has received the promises by his or her faith, but is also looking toward actual receipt with the expectation of one who knows the certainty of possession. The Christian has the promises by faith, and waits to receive the promises, just as Abraham did. The reference to a "city which has foundations" is a contrast to "dwelling in tents," as showing the certainty of faith amidst uncertain times and circumstances. The reference is designed to contrast Abraham's faith in exchanging the permanent foundations of Ur for the tents of Palestine—the foundations of worldly expectations for the certainty of the promised inheritance. These contrasts dramatically testify that the foundations of Abraham's life were not in this present world.²⁶ He persevered as a pilgrim, perceiving the foundations of God's promises as more certain than the possibilities of an uncertain world. He deliberately did not seek to establish permanent foundations in the promised land, because he understood his personal inheritance in the promises was future, not present, except as might be realized in the promised heir to the promises God had made to him and his heirs. In everything, Abraham responded with assurance, the certainty of God-given faith, that all God had said would be accomplished. Take note then, of the final contrast, that the city of God is not the accomplishment of man in his sciences, civilization, or religion, but is the city whose builder and maker is God. There is, in the words of Paul (Galatians 4:25ff) a Jerusalem which is above, i.e., a heavenly dwelling waiting for the persevering believer, who is, as was Isaac, a child coming from and going to the promise.

11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

There is some debate at v. 11 as to whether Sarah or Abraham is the subject of "by faith." Some have thought Sarah cannot be the subject because "seed" comes from the man. The words, "strength to conceive seed," are *dynamis eis katabolen spermatos* are literally "power for depositing seed." The word translated "seed," *spermatos*, was used of any seed, from plants to animals to man, and here may be legitimately translated as "semen." Since man, not woman, deposits "seed" then Abraham would seem to be the more likely subject. However, *spermatos* may also be used metaphorically in the senses of procreation or conception, and this use would be appropriate to Sarah. The word *katabolen* is literally to cast down or lay down. The word is found eleven times in Scripture, and ten times²⁷ is translated "foundation," always in reference to the foundation of the world. Thus, the word carries the idea of creation in the New Testament, and can be legitimately translated conception. The sense of 11:11, is procreation, that is, conception. The

²⁶ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 469.

²⁷ Matthew 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 4:3; 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; 17:8.

Greek *dynamin eis katabolen spermatos*, should be translated “power for conception of seed,” in keeping with the context. Abraham deposited his seed by faith and Sarah conceived by faith. After all, it takes both partners to produce a child. Sarah certainly was physically incapable of conceiving. That she engaged in sexual intercourse with Abraham in order to fulfill the promise of a son explicitly demonstrates her faith—that she believed in the promise and took action according to her faith.

The NIV resolves the interpretive issue by changing the Greek text. The NIV changes the noun “Sarah” from the nominative to the dative case and adds the word “Abraham” to the text, to make the following translation:

- “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.”

However, there is no reason not to accept the NKJV translation based on the Greek text:

- “By faith also Sara herself received power (*dynamin*) for (*eis*) conception (*katabolen*) of seed (*spermatos*) even beyond time of age (or seasonable age), since she deemed faithful the [one] having promised.”

That Sarah received strength to conceive with seed from Abraham is consistent with the New Testament Greek text, and the testimony of the Old Testament Scripture:

- Genesis 17:16, 19, 21, “I [God] will bless her and also give you a son by her . . . Sarah your wife shall bear you a son . . . Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.”
- Genesis 18:10, 14, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son . . . Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”
- Genesis 21:1-2, “And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age.”

Therefore, in considering the Old Testament testimony, and the consistent translation of *katabolen* in reference to the creation of the world supports a metaphorical use of *spermatos* to mean the Writer intended Sarah as the subject of “by faith.” Sarah took Abraham’s seed and conceived a child. God caused Sarah to conceive from Abraham’s seed. The HCSB agrees: “By faith even Sarah herself, when she was barren, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the One who had promised was faithful.”

Sarah’s laughter (Genesis 18:12) at the prospect of bearing a child in her old age does not disqualify her from being an example of faith, or from acting “by faith” to conceive Isaac; remember, Abraham also laughed (Genesis 17:17). At the age of 90, one may assume Sarah was well past menopause, so incredulous laughter from both her and Abraham was a natural response. One should note that, whatever feelings either expressed as each heard the prophecy, Sarah cooperated with Abraham to achieve conception. God had stated he would enable Sarah to conceive and bear a child. By faith she acted on that promise. Abraham fathered Isaac at the age of 100 and he died at 175 years of age. Therefore, when the Writer says that Abraham was “as good as dead” he means he was well past the age when fathering a child might have been expected. From Abraham, from this one as good as dead, were born an innumerable number of children, both an earthly (Israel) and a spiritual (the redeemed) posterity. All of Abraham’s seed were the result of supernatural power, born, as it were, out of the grave (“as good as dead”). The Writer may be thinking ahead to 11:19, where Abraham received Isaac “even from the dead” in a figurative sense. An analogy between the grave and Abraham, Isaac and Christ, may be in view. For Isaac was conceived in a childless womb—born out of one as good as dead—and was received (vv. 17-19) in a figure from the dead. Similarly, Christ was born in a childless womb and was resurrected out from among the dead. Therefore, their (Abraham and Jesus) respective posterity originated supernaturally. Whatever the means—Sarah conceiving Isaac, the Holy Spirit “conceiving” believers—the children of the promise are born through supernatural power, and received from the grave (of sin) into life eternal. The lesson here is still that of persevering faith. Abraham and Sarah persevered in their faith in God’s promise of an heir, and through a physical, literal act of faith worked out their faith from Isaac’s conception to his birth. Because they persevered in their faith, a multitude of sinners have been born again by faith.

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

"They lived believing, and they died believing."²⁸ Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob continued active in their faith to their death. As the NIV states, "All these people were still living by faith when they died." Abraham and Sarah did literally receive the promise of an heir, but did not literally receive the promised posterity "as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore;" nor did they possess the land in which they continued as foreigners. Yet, they were enabled to persevere as strangers and pilgrims, because they saw the fulfillment of the promises—not literally, but through the certainty of God-given faith. The expectation of fulfillment formed the core of their life—they embraced the promises—and wove them into the fabric of their life as they practiced their faith, remaining strangers and pilgrims on the earth. That is, their belief in the promises restrained them from accepting the world as their home, or fully adopting worldly values as the principles, values, and precepts of their life. As long as a believer keeps the promises in view, he or she will never be fully "settled" in the world. Therefore, to remain active in the faith (to live by faith) until Christ takes me to home to heaven by rapture or death (one of the core values developed from chapter ten) is to persevere in the faith. This is made possible only when one embraces the promises as sure and genuine, seeing them afar off, but assured by faith of possession.

14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

The Greek word *patris* is perfectly translated by "homeland." A *patris* is "the country where a man's father dwells, which he possesses as his own, and in which his children have a right to dwell with him. This is exactly opposed to a strange or foreign land."²⁹ Abraham and his children were not seeking an earthly homeland, but a heavenly, where their heavenly father dwelt, a land that they possessed by faith, where they themselves would dwell for eternity, and where their posterity had a right to dwell with them. That they sought a homeland indicates they had become strangers and foreigners to their former homeland, to gain another one, a better one. The implications are profound. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not consider themselves expatriates of the old land, but citizens of the new. Their natural home, in Ur of the Chaldees, was no longer their home, but rather this new land of Palestine, in which they had no possession, was their new home. A mere short step is all that is required to translate these things into the language of spiritual realities. Abraham and his family had become in spirit, if not yet in fact, expatriates³⁰ of a heavenly home. Believers look toward a home, heaven, they have not seen, but have heard of from God's testimony. They now long for and hope for their homeland by faith, and are now, as living in the world, expatriates who are temporarily away from that heavenly homeland. Believers have made a commitment to Christ and his promises, and as a result of that commitment they are now spiritual expatriates³¹ who have left behind citizenship in one country, the world, to commit themselves to the promise of a better country, an eternal life with Christ.

Let us put this into the context of one of the major themes of this epistle, which is to press on to spiritual maturity despite trials and persecutions. There were those among the original readers (and those among current readers), for whom the hardships and afflictions of the pilgrimage to the better country had tempted

²⁸ Brown, *Hebrews*, 515.

²⁹ Brown, *Hebrews*, 517.

³⁰ An expatriate is a person living outside their native country. Believers, wherever their natural origin might be, are now citizens of a heavenly country, and therefore expatriates of heaven, waiting to return to their heavenly homeland.

³¹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 479.

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them to turn back.³² The example of perseverance is, "always look forward, never look back." Abraham could have easily returned to Ur, or even closer, to Haran. He had left home and family, a house and possessions, for nothing more than tents and promises. He and his heirs endured various hardships and afflictions. Yet they never looked back to Ur or Haran as their homeland; they looked forward to their new country, waiting expectantly for God to repatriate them. So too, the New Testament believer sets his heart on the "land" of heaven described for him in Scripture. The believer knows he has not lost a home but has gained a homeland. Therefore he looks forward by faith in the promises, not looking back as though something had been lost, but always looking forward in expectation to his heavenly homeland. There is nothing I have left behind in the world that is equal to that which I have gained in the heavenly homeland promised to me by God in Christ. Therefore, to persevere is to live by faith all the way through physical death, even though I have not physically received the promises; for by faith I know I have literally received them, and I expectantly await the time when I take possession of them. I will remember Christ has promised to return, and he is faithful. I will continue active in my faith until Christ takes me home to heaven. God owns people who own up to their faith in him; not merely a verbal witness, but an actively working testimony seen in the practical practice of one's faith. The tense in v. 16, "God . . . has prepared a city," is important. The place promised, and of which faith is the conviction, is not a possibility needing preparation, but a reality existing in the time of Abraham. God has already prepared the eternal dwelling place, and our faith and perseverance is all that is required to enter.³³

*17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,
18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.*

Barclay has made a very good explanatory translation that gives the sense of vv. 17-19.

- "It was through faith that Abraham, when he was tested, as good as offered up Isaac as a sacrifice to God. Isaac was his only son, and God had told him that the line of his descendants would descend through Isaac, and yet he was ready to offer him in sacrifice to God. He had reasoned it out that God could raise his son to life again even from the dead—and symbolically he did indeed receive him back again."³⁴

The story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac is often told as though it was a severe trial to Abraham's faith, and as though Isaac was too young to resist his father. Neither is true from the Scripture point of view. Isaac was old enough to carry the wood for the fire to the top of the mountain, therefore old enough to resist an old man. The Writer of Hebrews discerns that Abraham did not hesitate to sacrifice Isaac, for he "had reasoned it out" that, should he kill Isaac, then God would raise him to life again. How did Abraham come to that conclusion? He was convicted that the promise was true, "in Isaac your seed shall be called," Genesis 21:12 (quoted by Paul in Romans 9:7 and here in Hebrews). I am not saying there wasn't emotional distress in Abraham over the grisly task of killing his son; nor that there was no similar feeling in Isaac on discovering he was the lamb God would provide for the sacrifice. But the faith of both men led them to trust the God who had convicted them of the promise. Here I must refer to the point I made at the beginning of this chapter: faith is certainty that God's testimony is absolute truth; certainty concerning spiritual matters can come only from God. Abraham and Isaac had the God-given certainty that "in Isaac your seed shall be called."

³² Hughes, *Hebrews*, 479.

³³ Do not be confused by John 14:1, where Jesus tells the disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you." Jesus "prepares" a place for believers in two senses. One, he goes first that we may follow, i.e., he goes first to prepare the way. Second, the disciples, and through their testimony all New Testament believers, are assured of the same dwelling place promised to the Old Testament believers. The disciples knew there was a heavenly home for the Old Testament believers, Jesus reassures them there is a place in heaven for them also.

³⁴ Barclay, *Translation*, 481-482.

Therefore, death could not break God's promise. The Writer would have us take notice that it was "by faith" that Abraham offered Isaac. Despite all outward appearances, despite human reasoning and experience (no one had been resurrected before this time, according to the Scripture record) Abraham persisted—he persevered—in his belief that God would fulfill his word concerning Isaac.

Abraham's certainty "by faith" in the promises raises the question, "how was this a test of his faith?" Both Old and New Testaments indicate this was a test of what was important to Abraham. Did he believe in and trust God to fulfill his promise in Isaac, or was having Isaac an end unto itself for Abraham? What was more important, obedience in faith to the promise, or disobedience in order to rescue his son from an untimely death; or perhaps disobedience to save himself from grief and loss, and preserve the continuity of family through the only heir? To answer these questions, the "test" must be considered in connection with the one and only prior declaration of Abraham's faith. In Genesis 15:6, God proclaims Abraham's faith about twenty to twenty-five years prior to Isaac's near-sacrifice (Genesis 22:2). Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac demonstrates the claim was justly made. The near-sacrifice of Isaac was a test to clearly demonstrate the genuineness of Abraham's faith, thus justifying (demonstrating, validating) the prior claim that "Abraham believed in YHWH, and he [YHWH] accounted it [Abraham's faith] to him for righteousness." The Epistle of James asks, Was not Abraham our father justified³⁵ by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar (James 2:21)? The answer is that Abraham's work in offering Isaac demonstrated the reality of God's prior declaration of Abraham's faith. In enduring this test by faith, I am not denying Abraham had genuine emotional distress. Viewed simply from that point of view this was a great effort by Abraham to overcome all reasons not to obey God. He faced the challenge of a deep, personal, supremely painful trial, defending his faith with no more than a God-given conviction—and how sin does argue against that conviction, trying to convince us that what we know from God is only a feeling, a persuasion and preference, but never conviction. The trial of Abraham's and Isaac's faith shows the necessity of God-given conviction, for only God-given faith can overcome such trials; or as from Isaac's perspective, certain death. Believers constantly come face to face with sufficient reasons to abandon obedience and perseverance, to call a preference what they believed was conviction, and be persuaded to discard that conviction with every contrary wind of experience. The Writer's point is that genuine, persevering faith overcomes all obstacles, just because God-given faith is more certain than all else that might argue against persevering in one's faith.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. 21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

The references are to Genesis chapters twenty-seven (Isaac) and forty-eight (Jacob). The issue is the passing of the promise to the succeeding generation. The point is that each man in the generational chain believed in the promises made to Abraham, just as though those promises had been made to them personally by God. Was John 14:2-3,³⁶ for the apostles, or for all Christians? Was John 17:20-21³⁷ for all Christians? The promises of God are to all who believe. And that is the point, these promises of a homeland in heaven are to all who believe in the promises, to all who have by faith received salvation. Isaac believed and passed the promise to Jacob; Jacob believed and blessed his sons and his son's sons. If we believe, then the promises are ours; and therefore the exhortation must also be for every believer, Hebrews 10:36, "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise."

22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

³⁵ James uses the word "justified" in the sense of demonstrate or validate. Paul uses "justified" in its legal sense: to declare a person innocent of the guilt of sin and freed from its penalty.

³⁶ "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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."

³⁷ "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one."

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Joseph told his peers to instruct succeeding generations to bury his remains in the land of promise when God brought them into the promised land. He did this because he had faith in the promise of rest in the promised land, a promise which at the time of his death, was about 285 years³⁸ old. This is perseverance in the faith. Another 145 years and four generations of believers would pass before Israel left Egypt (Exodus 13:19), and an additional 65 years and two generations would pass before Joseph's bones would be buried in the land of his inheritance (Joshua 24:32). The promise was passed to the generations, and individuals in those generations maintained their perseverance in hope of the promise, most dying in a foreign land, without having received the inheritance, except by faith.

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

The Writer's point may not seem apparent, especially as the "by faith" is that of Moses parents. To understand, one must refer to the history of the Israelites in Egypt at the time Moses was born.

- Exodus 1:8-10, 15-22: "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we. . . . Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; and he said, 'When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.' But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?' And the midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them.' Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them. So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, 'Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.'

The Writer's point is perseverance under persecution. The Pharaoh was determined to weaken the Israelite nation by killing any male children, for if they lived they would be the political and military leaders of the future. Moses' parents were, in one sense, afraid of the king's commandment, because they hid Moses, knowing that if he was discovered both he and they would be killed. Yet, "by faith" they were not afraid, because we see that they hid Moses from the king's commandment. They revered God more than worldly kings, more than their own lives; therefore they did not purchase security for themselves³⁹ at the price of Moses' life and their faith.

The Exodus account bases their action on the fact that Moses was a *tob* child. The Hebrew word *tob* means "good" but may be used in five general senses: 1) practical, economic, or material good; 2) abstract goodness such as pleasant or beautiful; 3) quality or expense; 4) moral goodness; 5) technical philosophical good.⁴⁰ We may dismiss senses one, three, and five as inappropriate to the context. Moses' parents saw that Moses was a pleasant or beautiful child, as the word is usually translated, or they saw some moral goodness in preserving his life. The latter is the view of Stephen, Acts 7:20-21, "At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing [acceptable⁴¹] to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months." The Greek *asteios*, in Acts translated "well pleasing" (in Hebrews 11:23, "beautiful") is the semantic equivalent of the Hebrew *tob*. Although Moses may have been saved by his parents out of sentiment (he was beautiful),

³⁸ The original promise to Abraham was made when he was 75 years old. Isaac was born when Abraham was 100. Jacob was born when Isaac was 60. Joseph was born when Jacob was about 91. Joseph lived for 110 years. Thus, 25+60+91+110=286 years. Jacob's age when Joseph was born is not stated but is calculated from Genesis 41:46, 53-54; 45:6; 47:9 and thus is approximate.

³⁹ Brown, *Hebrews*, 538.

⁴⁰ Harris et al., *Wordbook*, I:345.

⁴¹ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 610.

it is more likely that a moral principle was involved: saving Moses was morally right. Amram and Jochebed (Moses' parents) were not afraid of the king's command because they respected God's commandments (e.g., Genesis 4:10; 9:5-6). They did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. This is living in and persevering by faith, despite threats and persecutions from worldly circumstances.

There is another view of "moral goodness" to consider as an underlying basis for saving the infant Moses. In Genesis 15 God said to Abraham, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. . . . But in the fourth generation they shall return here [to Palestine]." Now, Moses' parents, Amram and Jochebed, were both of the house of Levi. Levi went to Egypt with his father, Jacob, and his brothers (Genesis 46:11). To Levi was born Kohath (Genesis 46:11); to Kohath was born Amram (Exodus 6:18); to Amram was born Aaron and Moses (Exodus 6:20). Moses was of the fourth generation, the generation of whom it was promised, "in the fourth generation they shall return to this promised land of Palestine." Could this be the reason the Writer of Hebrews mentions the faith of Moses' parents? His theme has been faith in the promises. Here is faith in the promise, the faith of two parents believing their son would receive the promise of returning to the land promised to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and (through their great ancestor Levi) to them. We need not believe they had received special revelation concerning Moses' future as leader of his people.⁴² We need not suppose they believed Moses might be the one to lead his people out of Egypt. Their faith rested not in future knowledge, but in the certainty of the promise made to Abraham 350 years⁴³ earlier: "in the fourth generation they shall return."⁴⁴ Since their Moses was of the fourth generation, they saved him because they believed he would be among those who inherited the promise. By faith they saw the moral good in saving⁴⁵ an heir of the promises. The Writer's point is that perseverance "by faith" inherits the promises (10:36).

*24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,
26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.*

The Writer skips over Moses' rescue from the Nile river by Pharaoh's daughter, as not important to his theme. However, for me, as a writer and teacher, this is an opportunity to explore how an interpreter can think about and understand Scripture. We tend to devise neat and simple solutions for complex problems, and one might suppose Pharaoh's daughter rescued Moses because the baby was crying; and indeed, the account states "the baby wept. So she had compassion on him." However, let us place ourselves in her sandals, and consider the moment from her point of view. She had gone to the Nile to bathe. Now, consider that the daughter of Pharaoh need not go the Nile river to take a bath, because, as the ruler's daughter she had numerous slaves to fetch water from the river to the palace. Why then did she go the river to wash? As good Bible students we might consult a Bible dictionary⁴⁶ or encyclopedia,⁴⁷ or a commentary. There we would discover that the Pharaoh was considered a god, one of whose duties was to protect the Nile river.

⁴² In the Writer's contemporary Judaism, many Jews believed Amram had received a special revelation from God concerning Moses. Neither the Writer of Hebrews, nor Moses in writing the Exodus account, support this view.

⁴³ Israel left Egypt 430 years after Genesis 15:16, see Exodus 12:40-41. Moses was eighty years old when he led Israel out of Egypt, Exodus 7:7. Thus, 430-80=350. The promise of Genesis 15:16 was made 350 years before Moses was born.

⁴⁴ Compare Owen, *Hebrews*, VII:139ff, who refers to Genesis 15:16. Owen also supposes they might have had faith respecting the promises of an innumerable posterity, thus the king's plan to exterminate future generations of Israel by killing all the males would be divinely frustrated on the basis of the promises.

⁴⁵ From ancient times commentators have believed Moses was saved because "the child possessed a more beautiful appearance than ordinary" (Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 370). Compare Bruce, *Hebrews*, 309, and Hughes, *Hebrews*, 492, who suppose God used Moses' physical appearance to impress upon the parents that Moses had a divinely appointed future. Such a view misses the Writer's point of perseverance by faith in the promises.

⁴⁶ Unger, *Dictionary*, 291.

⁴⁷ Bromiley, *Encyclopedia*, Kitchen, "Pharaoh," III: 821; Archer, Lasor, "Religions, Egypt," IV:101.

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The Nile itself was considered a god, Hapi, and the god of fertility, Osiris, was a god of the Nile river. Pharaoh's daughter may have gone to the river to perform a religious ceremony,⁴⁸ or bathed in the river because its waters were considered sacred.⁴⁹ With these facts in mind, the statement, "So she called his name Moses, saying, 'Because I drew him out of the water,'" takes on more meaning. The Nile god Hapi and Osiris the god of life, had brought her a new life through the river. She may also have reasoned that, because her father was a god responsible for the Nile, her father the god was delivering a child to her through the river. Her compassion was therefore aided by her religious beliefs. Moses's mother may have had an understanding of these things, since she placed Moses in the river on that particular day at a particular time. These things argue that Pharaoh's daughter washing in the Nile was a religious ceremony, that Moses's mother took advantage of her beliefs to save his life.

We might also consider that Pharaoh's daughter may not have agreed with her father's edict to kill all the Hebrew males, for she did not drown Moses as he had commanded. Thus, she may have opposed the edict for personal, i.e., on philosophical grounds, and this would have helped her decision to rescue Moses. In fact, since the Hebrew males were the work force used as slaves in building the cities of Pithom and Raamses, his edict could not have been popular with most of his subjects for economic reasons, and their political dissent resulted eighty years later in a population of 603,550 males aged 20 years old and above, Exodus 12:37; 38:26. There may also have been a moral reason motivating Pharaoh's daughter. Infanticide, which in this instance was a gradual genocide, has never been a solution broadly embraced by most societies, especially of male children. Infanticide was practiced from ancient times, but the reasons were usually specific, such as for deformed or injured infants, or when economic circumstances, or pandemic diseases, would lead to the eventual death of newborns. Some societies have practiced infanticide for female children, but even when practiced it was not a wholesale slaughter of all female newborns. And some societies would sacrifice their newborns to their gods, which in Egypt meant leaving the infant at water's edge for the crocodiles. Few societies have practiced infanticide as political policy, as Pharaoh did (and as Europe and America do by aborting the unborn). Therefore, to considerations of sentiment, religion, philosophy, economics, and politics we must add moral dissent. Finally, from the Scripture point of view, God the Holy Spirit influenced Pharaoh's daughter to rescue and adopt Moses, because God had future plans for the child. We see then, that the reason for the rescue was not simple, but as complex as our own lives; we should remember that the problems and issues of our lives are of the same kinds as in the lives of biblical characters. When seeking to understand any passage in Scripture, we should seek to identify and understand the many complex reasons life brings to seemingly simple problems. Place yourself in the sandals of the biblical characters, and ask how this problem or that circumstance would affect you, and how you might have thought, felt, and responded, had you lived at that time and place.

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

There were times and events in Moses' life when he had to make critical decisions concerning his place in the world, his relationship to his adopted race, the Egyptians, his relationship to his natural brethren, Israel, and his relationship with the God of his fathers, YHWH. There were conflicting influences in his life guiding him toward two different futures. On the one hand, his natural parents and ancestry influenced him to his Hebrew heritage. The Scripture tells us his mother took care of him until he was weaned, having been hired by Pharaoh's daughter, through his sister's suggestion, to nurse the infant Moses. The natural conditions for breast-feeding an infant (multiple times during the day) suggest Moses may have remained in his parent's home until he was weaned. Weaning normally occurs around three years of age, and he would have been taken to Pharaoh's daughter at that time (although children may nurse irregularly from three to

⁴⁸ Bush, *Exodus*, 26.

⁴⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 1:278.

five years of age, and she may have continued nursing him from time to time at the palace). Therefore, his parents had some influence during his early years. After he was weaned, he went to live in Pharaoh's household as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. His origins must have been well-known to ruler, priest, governmental official, and slave alike, and his circumcision revealed him to one and all, and to himself, as a Hebrew. Curiosity about his natural heritage could have been satisfied through his constant contact with the Hebrew slaves in Pharaoh's household, and attendance at official meetings (Exodus 5:15 provides an example) where he would see his Hebrew brethren, and as he matured interact with them. Exodus 2:11 clearly indicates Moses knew he was a Hebrew, and that he identified with them as his people.

On the other hand, his Egyptian upbringing influenced him to a completely different identity. He was a member of the ruling family, heir to all its privileges and obligations. He received his education in Egyptian schools, he was part of the ruling class, and he was a participating member in the Egyptian religion. Historical circumstances suggest he may have been destined for the throne.⁵⁰ In any governmental position he might held as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses could have been another Joseph, assisting his Hebrew brethren, relieving them of their burdens, perhaps even restoring their freedom.

As Moses grew into manhood he made many choices concerning his dual heritage. Some particular act might be chosen as the "defining moment" that revealed his choices, but as with any other any person the decisions that caused the "defining moment" were made long before that moment occurred. The Writer of Hebrews simply states that Moses grew-up, "when he became of age," but our common experience tells us that "growing-up" is a time of many decisions that develop character and affect one's future. Although we could point to Exodus 2:11-13 as the "defining moment" that revealed Moses' choice, I tend to view Hebrews 11:24-26 as an overview of Moses' faith, rather than pointing to a chronologically specific moment when Moses decided to align his life with his Hebrew heritage. What seems likely in Exodus 2:11 is that Moses had decided to use his position as an Egyptian ruler to help, or even influence and guide, his Hebrew brethren; perhaps he thought of becoming their leader, but retaining the privileges his Egyptian heritage would give to his leadership. Perhaps, thinking of Joseph, Moses envisioned himself as God's man for that time and place; if so, then he did what so many of us do, he tried to help God. But God's ways are not man's ways. He failed, and then spent the next forty years learning from his failure. The interview at the burning bush, Exodus 3, 4, reveal a far more humble man than the one who decided he had the personal authority to kill another in what he considered a good cause. At the burning bush we find a Moses who had to be commanded—he had to be coerced—to go and lead, not his people as he had once thought of them, but as God's man leading God's people. Here, at last, we do not find the arrogant man of Exodus 2:12, nor the fearful man of Exodus 2:14-15, but the humble man available to be used by God as God's man for that time and place. Beginning at an early age, Moses identified himself as a Hebrew. As his life matured he continued to make internal decisions that ultimately led him to refuse his royal heritage and suffer affliction with the people of God. For he did not suffer affliction with them until he had returned, at God's command, to lead them out of Egypt; therefore, vv. 24-25 describe a lifetime process, a span of 80 years, culminating in that "defining moment" when, by faith, Moses stands before Pharaoh and declares himself a Hebrew and a servant of YHWH.

This process Moses went through, the continuing act of choice to be a man or woman of God, is part of the "by faith" persevering principle. Life is seldom a moment defined by one momentous choice. For example, in salvation one makes a number of choices leading to the one defining moment of faith in Christ as Savior: I am a sinner; I will repent; I will confess; I believe Jesus can save me from my sins; I choose Jesus as my Savior. The same is true of life as a believer, there is a continuing process of defining personal faith through life's decisions. Moses defined his faith as "I am not the son of Pharaoh's daughter," and "I choose to set aside the privileges and pleasures of Egypt." Through those momentous, life changing decisions he chose to be a Hebrew, to suffer with them, and inherit the promises with them. In every right choice one makes the decision to persevere in the faith to receive the reward.

The Writer's perspective, that Moses "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures

⁵⁰ Pentecost, *Faith*, 188.

in Egypt; for he looked to the reward," may seem an anachronistic reading of New Testament theology into Old Testament history. However, the Writer has repeatedly proclaimed the Old Testament histories, types, and symbols as proclaiming Christ. Moses may not have had direct knowledge of Christ (if he was given a divine revelation it is not revealed in the Old Testament Scripture), but through his faith in God's promises, he by faith looked forward to Christ. Lest one believe Moses did not know the promises, let us remember that Moses wrote Genesis. Let us remember he was of the fourth generation, a fact that could not have escaped his notice as he explored his Hebrew heritage as a young boy, then as a man, in Pharaoh's household. Let us see that God need not explain how he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because these people and their relationship with God were a history well-known to Moses. Let us remember Joseph's story was well-known: Exodus 13:19, "*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him*" when he led Israel out of Egypt (emphasis mine). Moses knew of and understood the reward of faith. The Writer's point is that his readers, and we are included, should esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world; for we look to the reward.

27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

There is some discussion as to whether this verse applies to Exodus 2, when Moses fled Egypt after killing the Egyptian, or should be connected with 11:28 (below), as part of the entire exodus of the nation from Egypt. Those who connect "he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king" with his flight to avoid execution must deal with Moses' fear, Exodus 2:14-15. Hughes expresses the usual view (the majority view of most commentators, ancient and modern):

- "It was not personal fear of Pharaoh but the awareness of his destiny as the deliverer of the covenant people that caused him to take flight. Had he remained, at that juncture, this destiny would have been thwarted, humanly speaking, by his execution; and so, impelled by faith in the divine purpose for his life, Moses took refuge in Midian."⁵¹

Hughes cites Moses' "risk" to help his brethren, by killing the Egyptian, and "the boldness of his return at God's command after the lapse of forty years to withstand the Egyptian king face to face,"⁵² as evidences Moses was not afraid when he "forsook Egypt." However, the Scripture record shows that Moses tried to limit his risk by burying the Egyptian's body, and that he had to be persuaded—I would say he had to be coerced—to return to Egypt at God's command.

The alternate view⁵³ is that v. 27, "he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king," is to be associated with v. 28, "he kept the Passover," as being part of an overall view of the exodus from Egypt. Certainly during forty years in Midian Moses could have "called to mind that country from which he had come out," and found opportunity to return to his former place, if he had desired to do so. By not seeking to return he reveals that he had made a choice to forsake all the privileges of his Egyptian heritage. Why he made that choice is the issue. These things were not done in faith, for he fled from fright, to avoid execution, and he remained in Midian for forty years, a strong indication he had no intention of ever returning. His initial actions, killing the Egyptian and trying to mediate a dispute between Hebrew brethren, may have been due to his knowledge of the promises, and that he intended to use his royal position to fulfill them, but his actions were not that faith God gives to persevere: he acted in sin—he murdered—and he fled when confronted. It was when he did return and declare himself a Hebrew and God's man, that he then forsook any possibility of returning as an Egyptian prince. Then he acted in faith, then he was not afraid, then he looked to God to reward him with the promises. Although we see Moses complaining, Exodus 5:22-23,⁵⁴ we do not see him fleeing; we see him persevering to finishing his task and receive the reward of his faith. How was Moses able

⁵¹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 499.

⁵² Hughes, *Hebrews*, 499.

⁵³ For example, Owen, *Hebrews*, VII:160ff. Owen lists three reasons: Moses fled in fear, not in faith; to flee in fear is an unlikely choice by Hebrews to exemplify faith; Hebrews intends the association of v. 27 with v. 28. Owen also refers to Exodus 10:28-29 as the example of forsaking Egypt.

⁵⁴ This is the only time during the trial between God and Pharaoh that Moses turned to God in frustration and complaint.

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to withstand the anger of his own people and the threats of Pharaoh? He endured, that is he persevered in his faith in God's word, because "by faith" he saw the invisible God, not in the things that appeared, but in the conviction God had placed in his soul (Exodus 3:4-6). He had the assurance and conviction faith alone gives to the soul.

28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

The author gives two outstanding examples of Moses' faith. In the first, an act of faith was required to believe that, 1) God would kill the firstborn, and 2) that smearing lamb's or goats's blood on the door would save the firstborn. Bear in mind that at this time there was no precedent for faith to hold onto. Abel offered a lamb in Genesis 4, Abraham offered a lamb in Genesis 22, and Jacob offered a sacrifice in Genesis 31, but none of these, if remembered at all by the idolatrous Israelites, would have prepared them for this decisive moment of faith. As background for their faith they had the powerful example of a destructive God for motivation: nine plagues on Egypt. Was God trying to save them or kill them? Was Moses God's messenger of salvation or destruction? To keep the Passover was an act of conviction concerning God and his word, that he had come as a plague to the Egyptians⁵⁵ and a deliverer to the Israelites. "By faith" they overcame their doubts and kept the Passover.

Passing between the divided and heaped-up waters of the Red Sea may have been as much an act of desperation as an act of faith for the Israelites, but an act of faith it was. The Egyptians had pursued the Israelites and now they were caught between death by the Egyptian army or death by drowning. I believe it is important to see what God says at this point: "Why do you [Moses] cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward" (Exodus 14:15). Faith should have led them forward into the sea, trusting God to provide in the very act of faith (cf. Joshua 3:11-17). The power of faith is present in the moment when faith acts. God had made clear his intent, to Moses and the people, that he would rescue them from Egypt and bring them to his mountain where they would worship him. What more was needed? If they had moved forward into the Sea, in that very moment when they acted by faith the Sea would have parted before them. But God understands his people, that our faith is sometimes held captive to the weaknesses of flesh, and he continues in v. 16, saying to Moses, "But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea." Faith was required to lift up the rod, and faith was required to pass between the walls of water. Faith in God's word, no matter how unlikely or unbelievable it may seem to human experience, is required of every believer. Did Christ our Passover die for us? We have God's testimony as proof and we believe "by faith" to the saving of our souls. Will God protect and preserve his people during times of trial as they seek to do his will? "By faith" Israel kept the Passover and were untouched by death, and "by faith" they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land.

The Egyptians pursued the Israelites onto the dry bed of the Red Sea, but were drowned. Belief in the miracle was not impossible for a people whose religious beliefs populated their world with numerous gods taking shape in nature and nature's forces. The Egyptians believed the Nile river was a god, the crocodiles and frogs in the river were their gods taking a living form, and the forces of nature were manifestations of their gods. To believe the Red Sea was parted by the Israelite God was not too large a step for them to take. That God held them back with a pillar of fire also did not disturb them, for when the opportunity arose, when the pillar lifted out of their way, they drove their chariots onto the dry sea bed. Only when their chariot wheels fell off did they sense they were in trouble, Exodus 14:25, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for YHWH fights for them against the Egyptians." Faith in the miracle is not faith in the God who gave the miracle. Fear of judgment is not faith, a fact repeatedly demonstrated by Pharaoh. The only proper object of faith is God. "By faith" in God Israel passed through the Red Sea. By faith one endures and receives the

⁵⁵ Although this plague was not announced in advance to Pharaoh, one should note that any person, not just a Hebrew, might save their firstborn by applying the blood of the Passover sacrifice.

promise.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.

31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

Two more prominent examples of faith from Israel's history. At Jericho, the nation marched around the walled city of Jericho once each day for seven days. For six days they marched in near silence, the only sound being the tramp of hundreds of thousands of feet, the rubbing hiss of clothes, the rough breath of hundreds of thousands of people, and the occasional sound of the priests blowing on their ram's horns. On the seventh day they marched in silence around the city seven times, and after the seventh time the priests once more blew their ram's horns, the people shouted, and the walls fell. What could be sillier? Some skeptics say the walls fell because of the vibrations of marching feet; others that this is a story, a fable, a religious myth. The Writer of Hebrews says "God did it." Isn't that what he means when he says "by faith"? God said to Joshua,

- "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him" (Joshua 6:2-5)

Then Joshua said to the people:

- "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord. Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the Lord. You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout" (Joshua 6:6-11).

Then the people did as Joshua said:

- "The priests took up the ark of the Lord. Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the Lord, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. And the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. So they did six days. But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times. And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: 'Shout, for the Lord has given you the city!' So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" (Joshua 6:12-20).

We see in this incident what the Writer means when he writes "by faith": God said it, that settles it, I believe it, I will do it. The walls of Jericho fell because God had said, "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor." The walls fell because the people followed God's word, "You shall march around the city, all you men of war . . . all around the city once [each day for] six days . . . But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and [after the seventh time] . . . all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat." By faith they heard, by faith they believed, by faith they worked, and by faith God's will was accomplished. This pattern of "hear, believe, do, and succeed" is the pattern of "by faith," and that pattern never changes. Here is a New Testament example:

- Acts 5:19ff, "But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought the Apostles out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.' And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught . . . And the high priest asked them, saying, 'Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled

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Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!' But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"

Do you want to have the same faith Joshua had, the same successes the Apostles had? When God says something is wrong, it is wrong; when he says something is right, it is right; when he says "Believe this," we are to believe it, and when he says "Do this," we are to do it. This is the way of "by faith."

Rahab of Jericho is an example of this principle of "hear, believe, do." She is known in the epistle of James as a person whose faith was demonstrated by her works, James 2:25, "Was not Rahab the harlot⁵⁶ also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" The actions she took demonstrated her faith. She had heard of the works of YHWH. She believed in the unlikely and unbelievable, that her mighty and impenetrable walled city could be overcome by the Israelites through the power of their God. Therefore, she hid the spies and received her reward. In the book of Joshua we find her speaking of the miracles, how the Red Sea was dried up, and the two kings of the Amorites were destroyed. Her faith, however, was not in the miracles, but in the God who gave the miracles:

- Joshua 2:11ff, "And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."

The works of God had led Rahab to faith in God, but let us be clear on the matter, her faith was in God, not in the works. In the historical context of her life she had been raised to believe in many deities. She abandoned these life-long beliefs for faith in the one true God. She heard God's words and she believed. And how did she, an idolater living among idolaters, hear God's words? God's works spoke to her as clearly as God's words in your Bible speak to you (cf. John 5:36; 10:25, 38). Moreover, she is an example of the perseverance of faith. She believed before the spies arrived. She hid the spies from her king at great risk of her life. She helped them escape. She asked them to take an oath, Joshua 2:12-13"

- "Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."

To fulfill their oath they instructed her, Joshua 2:17-21:

- "So the men said to her: "We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home. So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear."

And by faith she responded, "According to your words, so be it." And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window." Now, let us think on this for a moment, this line of scarlet rope hanging out the window above the city wall. How long did that line of scarlet hang out the window for all to see, for someone in Jericho to see and ask why? The spies hid for three days in the mountains, then returned across the Jordan river to the Israelite camp. Israel walked to the Jordan, and waited there three days before crossing over. How long did it take this nation, perhaps a million people,⁵⁷ to cross the river? The entire nation was in Canaan on Nisan 10th, and celebrated the Passover Nisan 14th. Then they walked to Jericho, encamped, received their instructions, marched around the city six days. On the seventh day YHWH conquered Jericho and Joshua rescued Rahab and her family. How long did that line of scarlet hang

⁵⁶ Rahab may not have been a prostitute when she met these men. There is some justification in the Hebrew language for understanding her as an innkeeper. Regardless, the Bible identifies her as having been a prostitute to teach that anyone can be saved by faith, and by faith and obedience anyone can be God's friend.

⁵⁷ The last census before entering the land, taken after the forty years of wilderness wandering, which counted those males old enough for war, from twenty years old and upward, was, Numbers 26:51, six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty. A conservative assumption is that the number of women plus the children under 20 years of age amounted to an equal number.

out the window? If she put it as soon as the spies left then it hung in the window least two weeks before Israel arrived at Jericho, although a month seems more likely. If she put it out when Israel arrived at Jericho, then it hung in the window for at least a week. Yet, throughout this time of possible danger Rahab kept the scarlet thread hanging out the window. She persevered in her faith, and received the reward, Joshua 6:22ff:

- "Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the country, "Go into the harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her." And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel. . . . And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho."

The reward of Rahab's faith had consequences extending beyond her immediate historical circumstances. As a Gentile she is proof of the promise to Abraham that, Genesis 22:18, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." As a woman she was, to many generations, proof that the Lord is no respecter of persons, and she is listed in this pantheon of faith partly for that purpose. As a prostitute, she was proof that salvation extends to any who believe. Because of her faith in YHWH the past life of this Gentile woman was cleansed from immorality and idolatry so she could marry an Israelite man, Salmon. Boaz⁵⁸ was descended from Rahab and Salmon. Boaz, married Ruth. Ruth gave birth to Obed (Ruth 4:17), who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of king David,⁵⁹ who was the ancestor of Jesus the Christ. The principle of "by faith" propagates itself throughout generations of believers. Rahab the Gentile, the prostitute, the woman of faith adopted by faith into the covenant people, is by her faith the (spiritual) ancestor of all who have believed on Jesus Christ as Savior. We would do well to imitate her perseverance in faith.

32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

If we view vv. 32-38 in the relationship this chapter bears to chapter ten, the Writer is letting us know that he could indefinitely multiply examples of persevering faith. To build on that thought, the historical examples of faith reveal that the *sine qua non*⁶⁰ of faith is perseverance. The doctrine of perseverance is much neglected. Most prefer to hear about assurance of faith, never realizing that assurance without perseverance is like paying the mortgage but not living in the house. Like all doctrines in which the nature of man is a participant, the doctrine of *assurance* has a twofold aspect. One aspect is God-ward: the Holy Spirit gives his testimony in the believer's soul to assure him that he is a child of God. The second and equally important aspect is man-ward: the believer works out his salvation with fear and trembling, proving (demonstrating) that which is good (godliness) and holding fast to that which is true (Scripture, faith, perseverance). More simply, through his or her Christian works the believer has the proof of assurance, just as Abraham's and Rahab's works demonstrated the substance of their faith. The doctrine of *perseverance* is also God-ward and man-ward. God gives grace so that the believer can persevere; he secures the believer's salvation so that the believer will persevere; he preserves the believer in his faith so that he must infallibly prevail in his Christianity all the way to receipt of the promises. The Christian's duty is to receive and use the grace the Spirit provides, and by that grace to press forward in righteousness toward the promises, overcoming all obstacles to his faith. The believer must receive and use all the means God has given to sustain the Spirit's work of grace in his life, and by that grace overcome human frailty, sin, doubt and fear.

⁵⁸ The Jericho incident was about 25 years before the period of Judges began, and Boaz was born toward the end of the Judges. About 250 years passed between the rescue of Rahab and the birth of Boaz. Ruth 4:21 states "Salmon beget Boaz," but it was common in Hebrew genealogies to list only the most prominent ancestors. Additionally, there was no word in Hebrew for grandparent.

⁵⁹ David was probably the one who caused the book of Ruth to be written, or perhaps wrote it himself, a record to him of a romantic family story, a record of faith given to us by the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁰ A Latin phrase literally translated "without which not" and meaning "a thing that is absolutely essential."

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There is a spiritual logic at work: when one consistently uses the means of grace, it indicates God has given him grace; when one does through his efforts consistently persevere by faith, it means God has given him all the faith necessary to persevere. Thus, the spiritual logic is both the believer striving to persevere, and God causing him to persevere. This is not illogical, irrational, nor unreasonable, when one understands that God has chosen to work his will through his people, therefore his people are required to actively cooperate with him to that end. God does not expect perfection from redeemed sinners, but he does expect the obedience that results from faith. Striving to persevere is the appointed path of the believer. The warnings to persevere are appropriate for a people whose desire is "Speak Lord, for your servant hears." A temptation to fall away is a stone on which the believer may stumble, but he does not fall. The doctrine of perseverance is steadfast continuance in the word, faith, and grace that God gives to each believer.

to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets⁶¹

The Writer is not commending every act these men committed in their lifetime, but is using one major event in their lives when they by their faith accomplished God's will. Gideon, Barak, Sampson, and Jephthah were used by God to rescue Israel from foreign oppressors. Gideon was sure about God but unsure about himself. God strengthened Gideon by creating a circumstance, Gideon's three hundred-man army (he began with 32,000 men) against the Midianite armies,⁶² where he must depend on God, not his own devices, for victory. Gideon's beginning was small, he toppled an idol of Baal, but his end was great, he delivered his nation. Barak was also a man without confidence. When told by the prophetess Deborah that he would lead Israel against an oppressor's army and 900 chariots, he said to her, Judges 4:8, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" She accompanied Barak, but he was the one who led Israel into battle and to victory.

Jephthah is not someone the reader might have expected to find in a list of heroes who succeeded "by faith." Jephthah is first introduced as a "mighty man of valor," Judges 11:1. He was rejected by his people, the Gileadites, because his mother was a harlot. He turned to a life of crime. Then Israel turned to idolatry and YHWH punished them with oppression from the Ammonites. In desperation the Gileadites turned to Jephthah and offered to make him their leader if he would fight the Ammonites and deliver them from oppression. Jephthah had faith in the Lord. He confronted the Ammonites with the history of Israel's previous victory over them during the time of Moses and Joshua. Jephthah's faith, however, is more than a recitation of history of victory over the Ammonites. He challenges them to "possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess," a denunciation of their idolatry and an affirmation that YHWH is the God of Israel and Jephthah. He demanded the Ammonites retreat because the Lord who had given Israel past victory would again defeat the Ammonites. By faith Jephthah won the victory, "the Lord delivered the Ammonites into Jephthah's hands, and he defeated them." His example is that by faith he received God's promise of victory over Israel's enemies.

There is a troubling incident in Jephthah's life associated with his victory over the Ammonites. I noted previously that the Writer did not select these men because they were sinless, but because there are actions in their lives that example faith in the Lord. Yet, the troubling incident in Jephthah's life is so interrelated with his victory that we must deal with it. Here are the relevant verses:

- Judges 11:29-31, "Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, 'If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and

⁶¹ Interestingly, these men are listed out of chronological order. Barak was before Gideon, Samson was after Jephthah, and Samuel was before David. The Writer's order may have been influenced by 1 Samuel 12:11. Together these six encompass Israel's history from the theocracy under the Judges to the monarchy under the kings.

⁶² Judges 7:12, "as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude."

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I will offer it up as a burnt offering.'

- (11:34-40) "When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it.' So she said to him, 'My father, if you have given your word to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon.' Then she said to her father, 'Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I.' So he said, 'Go.' And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite."

Let us first note that God used Jephthah's faith because Jephthah honored God in confronting the Ammonites and challenging their idolatry with his faith. God always honors those who honor and obey his word. In dealing with Ammon Jephthah indicated the glory of God was at stake, and that the God of Israel would judge Ammon for their sin against Israel. Jephthah, wittingly or unwittingly, depended on the promises made to Israel through Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you." He probably knew of God's word to the Gileadites, their confession of sin, and that they had put away their idols and were serving the Lord, 10:10-16. When Jephthah in faith depended on God for his victory, and gave God all the glory, then God honored the man's faith and his mission to deliver Israel. This does not mean God approved of all that Jephthah did, nor does it mean that the Spirit of God came upon Jephthah in every deed. The Holy Spirit used Jephthah to accomplish His purposes in delivering Israel, Judges 11:32, but after that deliverance we should not expect that the Holy Spirit remained with him. When Jephthah failed to follow the Lord, his works were done in his own strength, not God's.

There is, therefore, a serious lesson in the life of Jephthah (this lesson is also seen in the life of Samson). God will honor His word, but that does not automatically mean God honors the man or woman he uses to fulfill his word. Let me illustrate with a gross example. An apostate "preaches" the gospel of Christ by deriding its truth and denouncing its salvation; yet in doing so he presents a clear message of salvation. There will be those who effectively hear that Gospel message, and God can use it to bring salvation because he honors his word. This is what Paul said in Philippians 1:15-18. The reason God can bring good things out of wrong circumstances is because he honors both his word and faith in his word, no matter how small that faith may be. This is the lesson of "by faith" in Jephthah's life.

There is a better lesson for the believer: God will honor us when we go where and when he calls us, whether it is through what we have read in his word, or through that unmistakable combination of his word at work in the circumstances found in our life. We are to:

- Do the work God calls us to do, being dependent on him for the strength and guidance to do the work.
- Be clean vessels, holy, set apart from the world and unto God.
- Give God the glory. If we do these things, then we will be profitable servants, and will receive the Lord's blessing.

So, God gave Jephthah the victory, but don't you believe for one moment it was because of his vow. Delivering Israel was in the plan and purpose of God, as is plainly seen in Judges 10:16. God had heard Jephthah, 11:27, 29. Jephthah's vow was absolutely wrong and absolutely not necessary, a work of vanity and arrogance, not faith. Second, the vow was unlawful. God had already appointed celebratory offerings in the Law of Moses; the peace offering, which could be offered as an offering of thanksgiving. Third, there is an appearance that Jephthah is intending to offer to God a human sacrifice, a thing abhorrent to God. Jephthah vows to sacrifice whatever comes out of the doors of his house to *meet* him. This cannot be an animal. The language is such that only a person will fit the requirement, for only a person would "come out

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of the house" and "meet" him. God cannot honor a vow to sacrifice a human being. Neither the Law of Moses nor God Himself required Jephthah to make or carry out such a vow.

Did Jephthah kill his daughter? Opinion has been divided over the centuries. The scripture says he carried out his vow, v. 39, and the Hebrew translated "burnt offering" in v. 31 is actually "bleeding burnt offering," about the strongest term one could use for sacrifice. Several considerations are against the view that he sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering. One is the knowledge of the Law. The Law of Moses was not forgotten, and in fact, if the priests were at all true to their calling, it was being read every seven years in public concourse. The Law forbid such sacrifices. A second consideration is the character of Jephthah. Few religions have ever required human sacrifice. It is an indicator of the greatest possible degradation of the human spirit. In ancient days only the god Molech, or certain of the Egyptian gods, required human sacrifice. God could not deliver his people by the hand of a worshiper of Molech. Jephthah believed in YHWH and God sent his Spirit upon him, but before, not after, the vow. Another consideration is the people of Gilead. It is difficult to believe the three tribes in Gilead would have allowed human sacrifice, or would have submitted themselves to the leadership of a man who did such a thing. The sacrificial system in the Law of Moses must also be taken into consideration. Jephthah vowed a "burnt offering," yet where is the priest of YHWH who would administer such an abomination. Finally, consider Jephthah's daughter. Two things seem difficult to understand. How could she leave her father for two months, knowing her life was ended when she returned. I think she would have spent all her remaining time with her family. Two, why would she bewail that she was to die a virgin; her virginity would seem inconsequential. But, if her father's vow meant she was to remain a virgin throughout her life, then crying because she was to remain unmarried and childless for life was worth two months on the mountains; and the mountains would be a private location for her and her friends to "bewail" her perpetual virginity, far from the eyes and ears of men.

Probably the best solution is to believe she lived a life of perpetual virginity in response to her father's vow. A burnt offering could be understood in its spiritual significance, which is the dedication of the entire person to God. The idea of complete dedication to the service of God may be what Jephthah had in mind; or at least what he required of his daughter to fulfill his vow. Two things should be kept in mind: the vow was not required by God, nor was it an act of a biblically-based faith. The faith that led to the victory over the Ammonites is the example of "by faith."

Samson is another cautionary tale. Throughout his life he was the strong man weakened by his sins and lusts. God honored Samson's works only where Samson honored God's calling in his life to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Samson himself did not, until the end of his life, receive any honor from the Lord. Don't miss this point: God is with Samson for the sake of his word, Judges 13:5, 7, and for the sake of His people Israel. No blessing accrued to Samson throughout his life. This is easy to determine. Throughout the course of his life, does Samson grow in spirituality, or decline? Do his actions reveal a godly man, or a carnal believer? Does God bring personal blessing into Samson's life? His wife is burned to death (15:6); his countrymen come out in arms against him (15:9-13) and deliver him to the Philistines; he commits fornication multiple times; his eyes are gouged out; he takes his own life in order to kill his enemies. This does not seem to be a man whom God blessed. Remember, just because God's work is being done does not mean there is blessing to the worker. To work the works of God and receive the blessing from God, one must do God's work, God's way, in God's time. That's just the opposite of the way Samson did God's work. Believers must learn to think biblically: where was Samson's daily fellowship with God? There was none. Where was the holiness of life that a consistent walk with God brings to the believer? There was none. Where was the deliverance that a strong man of faith leading a sanctified life could have brought to Israel? Samson did not deliver Israel during his life, he merely harassed his people and his enemies. Where was the discernment, the wisdom, the intelligence which true spirituality brings? These things are the blessing of God in a believer's life. These things were missing from Samson's life. We see the result of a misused life: God delivered Samson to his enemies; perhaps the spirit could be saved even though the flesh was destroyed. Note the severity of God. Samson was led into sin because he looked and lusted: his eyes are put out. Note the chastisement of God. Samson's strength, his gift from the Lord, was misused: he now uses his strength to grind food for his enemy's benefit. Note the mercy of God: his enemies forgot his Nazirite vow and his hair began to grow again. Note the

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justice of God: God honored his vow and Samson was afforded one last opportunity to be the deliverer of Israel. Samson is a man of "by faith" in Hebrews because of his final act. Through faith, by sacrificing all he had for the Lord, Samson achieved a final and decisive victory over Israel's enemies, Judges 16:23-31, but at the cost of his life. Only after this dedication of himself by faith to God's purposes, only when he forsook his ego and his sin, do we find God honoring Samson as he could not during Samson's life: he was buried in his family's land, in his father's tomb.

Samuel used Samson's sacrifice to consolidate Israel's victory over the Philistines. He led Israel as priest and prophet, anointed Saul, and then David, to be king of Israel. Samuel is perhaps best known for his declaration, when Israel had rejected his leadership and God's theocracy, 1 Samuel 12:23-24, "far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way." David, anointed to be king in Saul's place, persevered for many years under persecution from Saul before he was able to take his rightful place. His faithfulness under persecution examples a life of "by faith."

None of these men were paragon's of virtue; all had failures in their lives. But they heard the word of the Lord, accepted his call and purpose for their lives, and worked hard to do his will. They succeeded and they persevered by faith. At the "defining moment" of their lives, Gideon worshiped and warred, Barak fought the enemy, Jephthah trusted the Lord, Samson prayed for victory, David believed and persevered through persecution, and Samuel remained true to his calling. The general mention of "the prophets" is a reminder that they too believed, worked, and succeeded because they depended upon God to sustain their faith and lead them to accomplish his purpose and plans for their life.

33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Here is a summary of their faith. Their whole life is not in view, for sin afflicts even the best life lived by faith. The Writer knew his readers were aware of the failures of these men as well as their victories. Through his choices of "heroes" of faith, he exemplified for his readers real struggles against personal sin, persecution from world, and the opposition of the devil. Persevering faith is defined by overcoming failure to succeed as God's people doing God's work, bringing glory to God by the persistent exercise of personal faith. Take note that these men of faith were "out of weakness made strong" and became courageous. From the man-ward point of view, the testimony about past heroes of faith is meant as an encouragement for current readers to depend on God's present faithfulness. Jephthah is an example. He went out to fight the Ammonites because he believed in testimony about a God who had defeated the Ammonites 300 years earlier.⁶³ He persisted in his faith because he believed the promises of God found in the word of God. He received the reward of his faith, victory over his enemies, because he believed.

It is faith that raises a man or woman to do great things. From day to day one's faith is sometimes strong, sometimes weak; present day believers labor, as did these men and women of faith, under many infirmities of sin. The Writer passes by all these failures, because only persistence in faith is significant in the eternal record. Of all the great things that may be done in one's life, only that which was done by faith is worthy of remembrance. "God honors his own work, faith."⁶⁴

35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented —

⁶³ The number of years is according to Jephthah, Judges 11:26.

⁶⁴ Saphir, *Hebrews*, II:782, note 1.

38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

And, says the Writer, there are other examples of faith. Faith is found not only in great works and great victories, but also in great trials, sufferings, and painful death.⁶⁵ Faith endures evil. This appears foolish to faith's enemies. If God is really a great God, the only God, the sovereign God, then why, to quote Gideon as he hid from Israel's enemies, "has all this happened to us? And where are all his miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." God's answer to this nobody from the smallest of families in the smallest of tribes is pretty significant: "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" The Midianites would have laughed themselves silly to hear that, for in their recent experience Israel's God had not proven himself to be stronger than their god. They would have pointed to the Israelites hiding in caves, or to Gideon threshing his grain in a winepress to hide it, and himself, from them and their unchallenged right to take what they wanted and slay whom they wanted, when they wanted. What the Midianites failed to see is that the people of God had endured suffering until God decided it was time to act. Sometimes the purpose of God is served through a great deliverance.

Sometimes not. In God's response to Gideon's complaint we should also be able to see that sometimes the purpose of God is served through suffering. The answer to those who did not accept deliverance, who suffered mocking and scourging, chains and imprisonments, death by stoning, being sawn in two, or executed with the sword, is the same answer God gave to Gideon, "Go in this might of yours . . . Have I not sent you?" When faith takes us to suffering, faith keeps us through suffering, because it is God who has sent us. I have a Scripture in mind but have hesitated to use it, because familiarity has trivialize its meaning; but here it is, so applicable to Gideon and all those who suffer in faith waiting, sometimes receiving deliverance, sometimes not: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Sometimes God's will is to lead his people through suffering—not specifically or only for their good, but always for his glory, because his perfect strength is perfectly seen against the contrast of his people's insufficiency, helplessness, and inability to deliver themselves.

When one's own strength, talents, skills, intelligence and ingenuity cannot deliver him (or her) from suffering, and the circumstances are such that only God can deliver, is God glorified when he does not give deliverance? when he seemingly abandons his people? If God is the sovereign, omnipotent, grace-giving, soul-redeeming, always-blessing God in the good times, does he cease to be the sovereign, omnipotent, grace-giving, soul-redeeming, always-blessing God in the bad times? Is the faith and grace he gives for perseverance good only if one can endure until deliverance? Believers expect deliverance to always be like that given to Gideon, a little suffering, then victory over the enemy and relief from the suffering. What if the suffering endures for a long, long time? What if the suffering continues all the way to the end? What if the deliverance received is poverty, a tragic loss, disability, disfigurement, or death? "Others," says the Writer, "did not accept deliverance, that they might obtain the reward." The Spirit says, 10:36, "You have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." When the will of God is suffering until. . .? then the sovereign, omnipotent, grace-giving, soul-redeeming, always-blessing God gives endurance to perform his will: "Have I not sent you? Then go in this might I have given you." Therefore, whether we are delivered, or whether we are tortured, slain, mocked, beaten, imprisoned, executed, destitute, afflicted, tormented, living in substandard housing, or living on the street, we are to endure by faith.

*39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,
40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*

The testimony given concerning their lives is that they persisted in their faith. All these people, and the

⁶⁵ Saphir, *Hebrews*, II:784.

many more whom they represent, lived in the assurance of the promises, but did not receive them. The promise was not the salvation of their soul from the guilt and penalty of sin (many commentators), for God provided this salvation for them. As I have noted before, the content of faith has differed throughout the distinctive eras of man's history. What Abel needed to believe for salvation was not the same as what God required of Abraham. The content of faith under Moses' Law was not that of Abel, Noah, or Abraham, nor of this New Testament age of Christ crucified and resurrected. The basis of salvation has never changed: the salvific benefits of Christ's propitiating death extends from eternity past to eternity future. How one enters into those benefits has changed from dispensation to dispensation, but all these past saints of the faith have had the faith God required of them, and therefore experienced forgiveness of sins and a saving relationship with God. Therefore, the promise given to the Old Testament saints was not going to heaven after death, for all saved persons go to heaven after physical death (see *Excursus*, below).

Nor has the "promise" been fulfilled in this New Testament dispensation. The Writer says that the heroes of the faith, his examples of perseverance, were not to be made perfect apart from "us." Two things require our attention. First, the "us" includes more than the Writer's original readers, it includes all who have been or will be saved from the Resurrection to the Rapture. Second, none of "us" saved since the Resurrection have received the promise, for if they had, or if we had, then the Writer would not be writing to them, and the Holy Spirit would not be writing to all subsequent believers, to "endure, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (10:36). God's intention is that all believers should receive the promise at the same time, to be "made perfect" together. Therefore, the saved, from righteous Abel to the present moment, and more souls yet to be saved, have not received the promise. That is why we, just as they, must patiently and persistently endure in our faith and hope all the way to the end, that having so endured, we may receive the promise.

What is the promise? In answer, one should first consider v. 40. "that the Old Testament saints should not be made *telioo*, perfect, apart from the New Testament believers." The Greek word *telioo* is a favorite of the Writer, having been used ten times previous to this verse, and to be used once again at 12:23. The word means to be complete, or to finish something in the sense of reaching the goal. In reference to Christ as Redeemer, I have previously defined this word in the sense of qualified. Through suffering Christ became qualified to be the originator and completer of our salvation, 2:10. The same thought is in 5:9 and 7:28. In 7:19 the law could not "perfect" the believer because it was not designed by God to overcome the dominating power of the sin nature, and the same thought is present at 9:9. Christ did, however, overcome the dominating power of sin in the believer, 10:1, bringing the believer to justification and sanctification with God, 10:14, a completed salvation in the sense of standing righteous before God in Christ. In 12:23, the use of *telioo* is that the saved person is the spiritually completed person; the word looks toward those who have persevered, in faith and by faith, all the way through the end of this earthly existence. Looking at these uses, and considering the context of 10:25-11:40, it seems apparent the Writer is speaking of believers of both Old and New Testaments as reaching the place of spiritual completeness together. The Old Testament saints did not receive "the" promise, because they were to experience spiritual completeness with the New Testament saints. That spiritual completeness cannot be in the here and now, for although the living New Testament believer is "perfected forever" that is a view of the believer in his standing before God; in his current state of life he is not *telioo* but remains afflicted by the sin nature. Therefore, there is a *telioo*, a completeness, yet to come for all saints. John Brown had this in view when he wrote, "The comparison is not between what the saints under the old economy enjoyed and what saints under the New Testament economy enjoy on earth, but [the comparison is] between what the saints under the new economy enjoy on earth, and what they are ultimately to enjoy in heaven."⁶⁶ From this point of view the Old Testament saints were not perfected while on earth, but are perfected now, and the New Testament saints will enjoy the same perfection once they reach heaven. This is a plausible argument in light of 10:36.

What is the promise? There were and are many promises, some of which have been fulfilled, some waiting for fulfillment. I tend to look at the promise from the point of view that the Old Testament saints

⁶⁶ Brown, *Hebrews*, 596.

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endured without receiving the fulfillment of all the promises, just as the New Testament saint is to endure regarding the unfulfilled promises given to the church. In that sense, though, we must think not only of the promises to Israel and the New Testament church, because the Writer has included Abel, Enoch, and Noah as among those who “did not receive the promise.” Yet, we must not exclude Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Israel, and the New Testament church, because they and we are included in the promise yet to be received. Yet again, if the Old Testament saints would not be made perfect apart from the New Testament saints, then the Writer must be referring to either receipt of the promises under the new covenant (therefore all are perfected through Christ’s propitiation), or he is saying that the Old Testament saints, just like the New Testament saints, have yet to receive all the promises.

What is the promise? If both Old Testament and New Testament saints are to be made “complete” together, then I believe there is one promise not yet fulfilled, that effectively includes all believers, and fulfills the promises made to all: the promise of the millennial kingdom. Someone will immediately object that this is a promise to national Israel, the Davidic kingdom of 2 Samuel 7:12, 16, and many subsequent prophecies. Others will say that national Israel is excluded, because in their view the New Testament church has become the Israel to whom the promises were made. However, God has not cast away his people Israel, and the promises of God are irrevocable. National Israel will, in the future, at the Messianic Kingdom, receive the promises, Zechariah 14. The New Testament church is also included, for New Testament church believers shall reign with Christ in the kingdom, Revelation 5:10; 20:6; cf. 2 Timothy 2:12. Included also are those New Testament believers yet to come, including the Tribulation era believers. So are the pre-Abraham/pre-Mosaic believers. The very first promise in the Scripture, Genesis 3:15, is essentially a promise of the restoration of what was lost, a promise that Enoch’s life illustrated, that of God and man walking together. God will give Jesus the throne of David, Luke 1:32, and all who are of the first resurrection, Revelation 20:4, from righteous Abel to the kingdom, Matthew 25:34, will receive the promise of God on earth with man, in the Person of Jesus the Messiah reigning on the earth. This is the promise that encompasses all the unfulfilled promises made to the Old Testament and New Testament believers.⁶⁷ National Israel’s and the Tribulation era believers are to look for his appearing, i.e., his second advent. The New Testament church is to be prepared for the rapture. At the millennial kingdom, all the saints of the first resurrection—the old and New Testament saints—will be spiritually completed, forever.

Excursus: The state of saved Old Testament souls after death

All saved souls go to heaven after death, which means all souls saved from Abel forward. The contrary view is that the Old Testament believers did not go to heaven at death, but went to paradise, or “Abraham’s bosom” as the Rabbis called it, there to wait for the resurrection. Abraham’s bosom, in Jewish belief, was a room in *sheol* (New Testament: *hades*) separated by a “great gulf fixed” from the other room in *sheol* where the wicked dead resided. This implies that the sins of the Old Testament believers were only partially forgiven, therefore they had to wait, after their death, until sin was *really* forgiven through the crucifixion. But the “great gulf fixed” is unforgiven sin. What separates the wicked dead from the saints is the forgiveness of sin. There are not two or more ways to salvation. The one only basis for salvation is Jesus’ propitiating death, the one way to salvation is faith in God’s testimony concerning the means of salvation. The means, i.e., the content of faith, has changed in the dispensations, but the one basis, the propitiation made by Jesus, and the one requirement, faith in God’s testimony, has remained the same.

As the Writer of Hebrews has argued, and I have, hopefully, been able to explain, the Mosaic Law dealt with those sins the believer confessed at the time he brought the sacrifice; in a word, past sins. The Day of Atonement dealt with all Israel’s sins of the past year. Therefore, a sacrifice needed to be offered every time one sinned. Yet, let us not forget that perfect obedience is not possible in the flesh, and therefore, there would be some sins for which the believer did not bring a sacrifice. Did he or she lose their salvation? No,

⁶⁷ Other suggested possibilities: resurrection, & glorification; the eternal state; when all to be saved are saved; Hebrews 9:15; first advent; the whole ministry of Messiah—earth, heaven, the kingdom, the eternal state. One should also consider 11: 10; 12:2-24, 28.

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for salvation is a matter of faith, not works. Did the believers trapped in Babylon, Daniel and Ezekiel for example, not find salvation because they were hundreds of miles away from the only place sacrifice was allowed, the Jerusalem Temple? A Temple, by the way, that had been utterly destroyed, razed to the ground.

What about all the believers from Abel to Moses? For them there was no Mosaic Law demanding a sacrifice for every sin; in fact, there is no sacrifice reported from Abel to Noah (although Abel's sacrifice strongly argues that believers continued to make sacrifices as had been directed by God). They were not saved by sacrifices, but by faith: Enoch walked with God and had this testimony, that he pleased God. We see then that it is always and only faith that saves: faith in the God who saves, faith in the testimony he has given about the way of salvation, faith from righteous Abel and his sacrifice to faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. And although the Old Testament saints may not have experienced spiritual regeneration in the same manner as the New Testament saints (appendix 1), the issue is not being "born-again," the issue is salvation from sin's judicial guilt. Sin's judicial guilt was forgiven through the faith of the Old Testament believer, because forgiveness of their sins was based, in the mind and purposes of God, on what Christ would do at a particular moment in time. When sins are forgiven one is heaven-bound because there is no penalty remaining to prevent eternal life. Therefore, at death the soul of the Old Testament believer, from Abel forward, went to heaven to be with the Lord. There was nothing substandard about the salvation of believers prior to Christ's propitiating death on the cross, because their salvation was based upon and grounded in that propitiation, made in time, but effective throughout all time. The soul of every Old Testament believer from Abel forward went to heaven at death.

Some Christians believe Christ, between his death and resurrection, went to Abraham's bosom. This belief is based on a few misunderstood events and scriptures. When Mary of Magdala hugged the resurrected Christ, he told her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17; compare Matthew 28:9 where Christ did not say these things). Jesus was speaking of his bodily ascension, to be accomplished forty days later, and was also telling her that their relationship could no longer be as it was in the days of his flesh. More simply, he was the resurrected glorified Lord who would bodily ascend and she must learn to cling to him by faith, not by sight (a lesson for us all). As to his presentation of his propitiation to the Father, that had already occurred; if not, he would not have resurrected; but he did resurrect, proving that his sacrifice was received by the Father as a full and complete payment for the guilt and penalty of sin. In another misunderstood verse, Paul, at Ephesians 4:8, writes that Christ "ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." Some interpret this to mean Christ emptied the Old Testament *sheol* when he ascended to heaven. This verse is a quote from Psalm 68:18. The point of the Psalm is God's victory over his enemies and sharing the fruits of his triumph with his saved people. The point of quoting the Psalm in Ephesians is the spiritual gifts the Church received as a result of Christ's victory at the cross and subsequent ascension into heaven, and if we look to Psalm 68:19, John 16:7, and Acts 1:8 we can see what was on Paul's mind.

Nothing in Scripture substantiates the view that the Old Testament believers, or Christ, did not go to heaven immediately after death. Christ told the believing thief that he (the thief) would be with him (Christ) in paradise after both had died that day on their respective cross. Christ's soul went to heaven that day, after his death, to present his finished propitiation to the Father. Some Christians believe the finished propitiation was not presented until after Christ's ascension, but the Scripture support for this is John 20:17 and Acts 1:8; 2:4. However, we know Jesus presented his finished propitiation to the Father immediately after his death because on the day of his resurrection Jesus saved ten or more disciples, John 19:22, in the New Testament sense of born-again, seen in that he gave them the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell, based on John 3:5. Therefore, Christ's completed propitiation was presented to the Father immediately after his death, which means both Christ and the thief went to heaven after they died, and before Jesus resurrected. Every Old Testament believer, from Adam to the thief on the cross, went to heaven after their physical death.

HEBREWS TWELVE

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Let us, for a moment, set aside the subordinate clause concerning the "great cloud of witnesses," and consider the Writer's main thought: we also, in like manner with these (witnesses), must lay aside . . . etc. The chief characteristics that enabled the Old Testament persons of faith to persevere "by faith" was to lay aside every weight and sin, and to focus on living one's life by faith. The Writer uses an analogy from the sports played in his Greco-Roman culture. Runners prepared to run their race by taking off all unnecessary clothing, so that in running they could not be burdened by any weight, or entangled by any garment. In running his race a runner keeps the finish line in mind, but his immediate focus is on the race itself, and more specifically on the lane assigned to him. He knows his lane ends at the finish line. He knows that if he looks back he may misstep, he may stumble, or cross into another lane and be disqualified. If he focuses on others he may become discouraged, or miss a step and stumble, or veer into another runner, or cross the line into another lane. The runner does not forget the finish line, but in order to win his immediate focus must be on his path, his next step, his breathing and coordination. He must run the race step by step. Running the race is the thing that will bring him to the finish line fully qualified to receive the reward. Note that the race is not to salvation. Every believer is in the race, qualified to be a participant because of their salvation. The "race" is to live a life well-pleasing to God. There are three contestants: your old sin nature trying to trip you, the world trying to burden you, and you, the Christian, running by faith to reach the finish line qualified to receive the rewards due perseverance.

Therefore we also should do as the Old Testament saints did and lay aside the weights of this world. Even a brief glance at their lives reveals they did not isolate themselves from the world to separate themselves from the burdens of the world. The Writer's analogy is the clothes the runner removes in order to run the race free from non-essential burdens. In modern terminology one must lay aside worldly values for a Christian world-view. He must lay aside worldly entertainments that fill the eyes, ears and minds with words, scenes and values that do not reflect biblical standards of morality. He or she must make choices and take actions based upon what the Bible says. Whatever is of the world and not of Christ is a weight that slows one down, may divert him from the path—may even disqualify a believer for rewards at Christ's judgment seat. We become used to such weights, if we are not careful to quickly discard them when they become attached, and then we may not be able to finish the race.¹ The exhortation is plain, worldly values are a burden to Christianity and are to be cast off, Matthew 5:29, 30. A partial list of besetting weights may be found in Luke 21:34; Romans 13:12-13; Ephesians 4:22, 25, 28, 29, 31; Colossians 3:5.

Therefore, says the Writer, lay aside sin. He does not have any particular sin in view, but rather any sin arising out of one's sin nature to rebel against and disobey God. This exhortation does not mean a life of sinless perfection; the Old Testament examples of faith were not perfect, yet they are examples of perseverance "by faith." We see the example of Samson, how sin defeated his life. We see the example of Moses, how he laid aside his old life and pursued godliness. To lay aside sin is to not do it; to make a choice, to say "No!" To lay aside sin is to repent and confess our sins after we have agreed with our temptations to commit an act of sin. Sin, says the Writer, so easily and persistently harasses us (*euperistatos*). Literally the word means "to easily surround." The word "describes sin as having advantage in favor of its prevailing."² "The verbal adjective reminds one of the ring of wild beasts in the jungle that encircle the camp-fire at night each ready to pounce upon a careless victim."³ The sin nature is rebellion and disobedience against God. We have seen in Cain how sin waits at the door of our life for a careless moment when it may rule over us through wrong desire, such as Cain's pride and arrogance. The analogy to a loose garment is apt, as the

¹ For those who need an object lesson, buy some ankle and wrist weights, the kind used for exercise. Wear them all the time, everywhere. At first they will slow you down; after a while you will not notice them, because you have incorporated the additional weight into your life. So it is when we cling to worldly values.

² Vine, *Dictionary*, 120 ("beset").

³ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, V:433.

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runner discards any clothing that might hinder his movements or entangle his feet. Any work, any value, any morality, any desire, any entertainment, any social interaction, any hobby, any sport, any thing or any person that might be expected to entangle our soul, hinder the practice of our Christianity, and take us away from perseverance by faith, is to be laid aside. If I might sum this sin in the context of the epistle, it is "an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Departing as to abandoning the faith, departing as to not assembling together, departing as to forsaking the perseverance required to run and finish the race. Specific weights and sins abound, and Gouge⁴ gives this list to consider:

- Actual sins, especially if they be gross ones, Psalm 38:4
- Cares of this life, Luke 21:34
- The world, James 4:4
 - Riches, Mark 11:25; 2 Timothy 4:10
 - Honors, John 5:44; 3 John 9
 - Pleasures, 2 Timothy 3:4
 - All that is in the world, 1 John 2:16
 - Company, 1 Corinthians 15:33
 - Fashions, Isaiah 3:16ff
 - Vocations (employments) and avocations (hobbies)
- Self, Matthew 16:24

The believer is to watch against everything that might impede his progress in his Christian life, and guard against anything that would turn him aside from reaching the goal.

The subordinate clause presents the encouragement to the exhortation: "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses." The Writer does not mean literally surrounded, as competitors in the arena surrounded by spectators. This is a metaphor. The Old Testament saints are not literally cheering us on to victory from their residence in heaven. Their example is the encouraging shout propelling our confidence to lay aside the weight and sin and succeed in the race. Consider their example. One lost his life remaining true to his faith. One lost a whole world to begin a new life in a new world. One left his house and family for an unknown land. One left riches, fame, power and glory to lead a nation into the desert. One spent forty years as an executive assistant, wandering in the desert, then twenty-five years leading his nation through a series of wars. Still others subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, became valiant in battle, were tortured, not accepting deliverance, had trials of mocking and scourging, of chains and imprisonment; they were stoned, sawn in two, tempted, slain with the sword, and wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and tormented, wandering in deserts and mountains, and living in dens and caves of the earth. If they could persevere by faith in the circumstances of their lives, should we not also persevere? We are now the contestants in the race of faith. Be inspired by their example to give the uttermost to persevere by faith.

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith

If we note the context, then the interpretation will be apparent. The believer is to "run the race . . . looking to Jesus." "Looking unto" is *aphorontes eis*, meaning in context to "fix your eyes on Jesus, after a glance at the 'cloud of witnesses,' for he is the goal."⁵ The Christian "runner" looks straight ahead, not to the side, not to the rear, not to the spectators. He ignores distractions, "he deliberately looks away from other

⁴ Gouge, *Hebrews*, II:923.

⁵ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, V:433.

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things,”⁶ “not only in the first moments, but constantly during the whole struggle [because] Christ is always near and in sight.”⁷ The exhortation is twofold. The previous “witnesses to the patient endurance that faith produces”⁸ exemplified some one or more characteristics of faith, but Jesus is the author and finisher (2:10) of “the faith” in his own person.⁹ As the leader of faith (the word “our” is not in the Greek text), Jesus set the course of faith’s race. He set out the “track” on which the race would be run: love and obedience. He demonstrated how the successful race will be won: complete trust in God, dependence upon God’s power, perseverance by God’s grace. He declared the reward for winning: treasure laid up in heaven. As the finisher of faith, Jesus shows the race can be won. One should always remember that Jesus lived in our world as a Spirit-filled man of faith, meaning that the life he lived and the works he performed were done in God’s grace and by the Spirit’s power. That Jesus had a divine and human nature does not mean that his deity alone, nor his humanity alone, caused him to succeed in his mission. He succeeded as a person, not a nature, as a man to whom God gave grace and in whom the Spirit worked in power. A man who used all aspects of his person, his human and divine natures, to accomplish God’s will God’s way through God’s power. God worked his works through Jesus as he does with all believers, mediately through the believer’s faith, works, and perseverance. That Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism indicated God intended to accomplish his purposes and plans in Jesus through the ordinary processes of faith and grace he employs in all believers. Jesus, for his part, accomplished God’s will by faith, applied in his life through perseverance; which is consistency in obedience and good works to do God’s will. He exemplified the life of faith: complete dependence upon God; communion with God; obedience to God; confidence in a future not seen promised by God. The believer—every and any believer—has the same Holy Spirit, receives the same grace, guidance, and power suitable to his circumstances, and thus is also capable of living the same life of faith. Every believer who is dependent upon God, has communion with God, obedience towards God, and faith in the future promised by God, can accomplishing God’s will God’s way through God’s power. Yes, Jesus had the Spirit “beyond measure,” but the “measure” of the Spirit’s power in a believer’s life is consistent with that person’s part in God’s will. “My grace is sufficient,” God says to every believer, “for everything I have required you to do.” In the context of this verse, Jesus supplies the believer with all the grace needed to withstand and overcome trials and temptations, in order to successfully run and complete the race.

who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God

Here is why Jesus persevered. Although crucifixion was a form of execution considered so barbaric and inhuman that it was illegal to crucify a Roman citizen, for Jesus the “shame” was not the method of death, but the imputation of sin to himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). The God-man was holy, undefiled, separate from sinners from his birth (incarnation); so pure in his righteousness and morality that his contact with sinners—his life lived in a world of sin—had never defiled him. To become “sin for us” meant assuming the burden of sin’s guilt and defilement, causing his soul to become unclean, resulting in his separation from communion with a holy, righteous God. Can we grasp this? When Jesus “became sin for us” he temporarily allowed sin to be a part of who he was and cover the holiness and righteousness that was an intrinsic part of his being.¹⁰ He had proven his essential purity by his trial in the wilderness with Satan. He had demonstrated it a thousand times as he walked through Israel with his disciples, and made contact with the helplessly and hopelessly sin-filled men and women of this earth. But on the cross he allowed his essential holiness and righteousness to be covered by the sins of the world, 1 John 2:2, so that only the filth of sin could be seen clinging to his soul.

⁶ Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, 228.

⁷ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 394-395.

⁸ Pentecost, *Faith that Endures*, 200.

⁹ Pink, *Hebrews*, 904.

¹⁰ He did not give up or set aside his holiness and righteousness when he became sin for us, for these intrinsic parts of his being were absolutely essential to the propitiation of sin’s guilt and defilement.

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Yet, knowing that he would experience the utterly indescribable and unendurable contradiction of sin against himself, he voluntarily took the shame and guilt and defilement of sin to himself, despising the shame for the joy that was set before him. His essential holiness and righteousness erased the shame and guilt and defilement of sin not only from himself, but for all who believe on him as "my" Savior.

The grammar of the phrase "for the joy that was set before Him" allows several possible interpretations. It has been understood by some as "instead of [accepting] earthly joy which was within his grasp, Jesus endured the cross and thus obtained greater joy in heaven."¹¹ Yet, in this present evil world there was no earthly joy for Jesus to enjoy or forsake. Another view is of a "heavenly joy" ahead of Jesus, which he would enjoy after he completed his work on the cross. This view looks to the outcome, "has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Yet, this joy was never in doubt, it was always the end of the process (1:3; 8, 13; 2:7-8; 8:1; 10:12), and therefore cannot be the reason he endured the cross. Another view is that "the 'joy that was within his grasp' was that of being delivered from an impending and degrading death."¹² Yet, Jesus "despised the shame" of that degrading death. Gethsemane was not a struggle to deny the cross, but an expression of the horror of "becoming sin for us." Moreover, and of far more importance, Jesus came for the express purpose "to seek and to save that which was lost." He had, Luke 12:50, "a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!" The Greek grammar apart from context is subject to varying interpretations, but grammar must be interpreted by context. The "joy" set before him was the redemption of and fellowship with his "brethren,"

- Hebrews 2:9-13, "Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death . . . For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain [author and finisher] of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: 'I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.' And again: 'I will put My trust in Him.' And again: 'Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.'"

Jesus endured the shame of the cross in order to achieve the joy of the redemption and fellowship of his brethren. To interpret "the joy set before him" as other than the redemption of his brethren is to ignore the context set by the Writer and all other related Scripture. The joy set before him is why Jesus persevered against the shame of the cross.¹³ That same joy is available to believers: here am I and my Savior Jesus whom God has given me. If, as is the case, Jesus endured the cross to redeem his brethren from sin, so that he could enjoy eternal fellowship with them, then eternal fellowship with Jesus is the joy set before the believer as an encouragement to persevere by faith. The promise, 10:36, is ever so much more than the fact of his return.

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

The Greek word translated hostility, *antilogia*, has a base meaning of "to contradict," hence the KJV translation, "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." From this base meaning come the thoughts of controversy or reproach, the latter being more appropriate to the context. To reproach is to express disapproval or disappointment. The world's reproach against Jesus was of such intensity and constancy that it cannot be described as other than unrelenting hostility. The hostility the Writer has in view is not the cross, although the cross was the culmination, but the reproach and opposition Jesus constantly endured. Who has been scrutinized as he was? Who among us have had their every word and every action

¹¹ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 641.

¹² Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 413.

¹³ His obedience unto death was also part of the joy, because his obedience brought glory to the Father, a cause for joy in Jesus, and in his people when they are obedient to the glory of God.

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critically reviewed and criticized as he did? In the world's eyes, at least the eyes of religion, politics and society, Jesus could do no right. Some few sinners appreciated him for a moment, because of some benefit he brought to them; but most of these turned against him in the end. Even his family thought he was "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21), and even his friends opposed him at times (Matthew 16:23), or expressed disappointment (John 11:21, 32).

Jesus did not give up under these circumstances. Neither should we. I cannot stress enough that just as Jesus was given sufficient grace for his part in God's will, even so every believer is given grace sufficient for doing his or her part in doing God's will. The reality is that too often "under the depressing and discouraging influence of severe and long-continued trials the believer tends to abandon, either partially or totally, the duties which rise out of the Christian profession."¹⁴ The reality and strength of one's love for Christ, commitment to his cause, and faith in the future he has promised, is severely tried by "hostility from sinners." The Writer speaks from experience. He knows the weight of worldly things drags down our confession; he knows how sin trips us up in our walk with Christ; and he knows, 10:34, the hostility of sinners against himself. His response to all such impediments to faith (for they are obstacles, not barriers) is, 10:35, maintain your faith and perseverance. Jesus did, all the way to death, resurrection and victory. He did resist to bloodshed—death—against the motions of sin against his faith. The point is not dying in the struggle, but enduring in faith all the way to the end of life, even if that end is death caused by the hostility of sinners. The Old Testament saints ran the race and reached the goal though their "ever deepening attention to the glorious object of Christian faith, Jesus himself."¹⁵

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

This is a difficult transition. How does the Writer move from the weights of the world, the entanglements of (personal) sin, and the open hostility of sinners, to the Lord's discipline of his children? It may be the Writer is answering an unspoken (or unwritten to us) question: why is God punishing us with these persecutions? Or, the same question in another form: why does God allow persecution against us when we are just trying to worship him and be faithful Christians? The Writer, who always answers from his knowledge base, the Old Testament, quotes Proverbs 3:11-12.

The word translated chastening, *paideia*, originally meant the instruction of children. The meaning developed to include correction because effective instruction also includes correction of wrongdoing. Thus, the Lord's chastening is meant for training and includes correction as one of its means to that end. The word *paideia* is found in Hebrews 12:5, 7, 8, 11, and (italicized),

- Ephesians 6:4, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the *training* and admonition of the Lord."
- 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for *instruction* in righteousness."

Chastisement, *paideia*, focuses on training a son in the ways of son-ship, whether a natural son or a spiritual son. Correction is a part of the training, not the object or end of training. The object of God's training is to make one wise in the ways of son-ship.

The original of this exhortation, Proverbs 3:11-12, comes at the end of a long passage advising the believer "keep God's commandments . . . trust in the Lord with all your heart (lean not to your own understanding) . . . honor the Lord with your possessions and . . . the firstfruits of all your increase." In the original the exhortation also seems out of place. Who expects chastisement when trusting, keeping and honoring? Yet, there is a connection, two in fact, one stated, one implied. In the middle of this passage, Proverbs 3:1-12, comes the exhortation, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from

¹⁴ Brown, *Hebrews*, 615.

¹⁵ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 252. (Jesus they "saw" in the content of faith given for their age.)

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evil." In the midst of the prosperity (spiritual and material) that comes from trusting, keeping and honoring, one is liable to forget to "fear the Lord and depart from evil." To not fear the Lord is to participate with evil. It is for those "whom the Lord loves he chastens," that a return to spiritual health will follow chastening, as the son learns the value of departing from evil to fear the Lord. Therefore, in the first instance chastening is designed to lead a son to "trust in the Lord" and "acknowledge him," and "fear the Lord and depart from evil." Implied in Proverbs 3:1-12 is that when things are not going well in one's world, when trials and persecutions are increasing, this is part of God's training reminding the believer to keep the commandments, trust in the Lord, and let him (not our own wisdom) direct our paths in departing from evil in the fear of the Lord. Whatever the form of the rod—even if trials and persecutions and hostility from sinners—it is the messenger God is using to train, *paideia*, his people in the ways of son-ship.

A paraphrase may help bring out the full meaning of *paideia* as training accompanied by correction (my paraphrase):

- My son, do not despise the training of the Lord. Nor be discouraged when you are corrected by him. For whom the Lord loves he trains and corrects to be a son.

Barclay's translation captures the meaning:

- "My son, always remember the value of the discipline which comes to you from the Lord, and never be depressed and discouraged, when he corrects you. The Lord disciplines the man he loves, and punishes every son whom he accepts into his family. You must accept it as discipline. God is treating you as sons."

Our experiences as a child in a sinful world has caused us to view discipline to be the same as punishment, especially in its worst sense of parental vengeance for childish wrongdoing. God's discipline is training with a right moral end as the goal. Punishment, *mastigoo*, here translated "scourging" (NIV, HCSB: punishes), is the correction aspect of training. In the context of *paideia*, it (*mastigoo*) also has a right moral end as the goal. God *does not* revenge himself on his children for their sin. When a believer sins God corrects him (or her) that he might become trained not to do that sin again; the goal in view is righteousness in the practical outworking of faith in the believer's Christian life. Correction is not always in response to wrongdoing. Sometimes it is simply a "course correction" to redirect one's steps into a different path, because the path the believer was on would not take him where God wanted him to go.

Where Proverbs three intersects with Hebrews twelve is this aspect of "chastisement" as training. The Writer knew that his readers had become "weary and discouraged," v. 3, by the trials and persecutions they were experiencing. Perhaps some thought these tribulations meant God had abandoned them, or worse, was penalizing them. The connection between Hebrews and Proverbs is that they should not be discouraged by tribulations, but be encouraged because affliction in the world meant God was with them. Not merely because the world opposes faith, but because such tribulations may be used to apply a "course correction" to teach a believer to love not the world. I say again, the rod of *paideia* is the messenger of God training his people in the ways of son-ship, even if the rod may be trials and persecutions and hostility from sinners. The Christian's troubles in the world are inevitable: "In the world you will have tribulation," John 16:33. They are not punishment. They do not mean God has abandoned his child. The hostility of sinners against the saints is allowed, and the Father uses these persecutions to train and correct his children to be better sons of God. The Writer gives the full quotation from Proverbs, because he wishes to make his point that training includes correction, and correction includes uncomfortable experiences, such as sufferings, reproaches, and tribulations (10:32-33). If we jump to the end, 12:11, we see the goal of *paideia*: "afterward *paideia* yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Therefore, the opposition of sin and the world is allowed because God uses it for *paideia* to grow and maintain the believer's spiritual health. The gospel does not require suffering, but one's confession of faith encourages sinners to hostility. As Owen said, "This is a blessed effect of divine wisdom, that the sufferings which we undergo from men, for the profession of the gospel, shall be also chastisements of love from God, unto our spiritual advantage."¹⁶

¹⁶ Owen, *Hebrews*, VII:252.

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7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Simply put, when God ignores you, you are not a son of God. The sons of God are heirs of God, yea, joint-heirs with Christ. Though he was the son and heir, Christ learned obedience by the things which he suffered, Hebrews 5:8. The Christian suffers because he is a son, that he might be made fit to receive the inheritance.

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

The fathers of our flesh were our instructors, *paideutes* ("who corrected us"), in ways they thought would train us to become responsible and self-sufficient adults in the world. We respected them for their efforts. How much more apt is it that we should submit to the instruction of the Father of our spirit,¹⁷ who has the good of our eternal life in view. God's standards are rigorous and inflexible in that holiness and righteousness of life required to maintain fellowship with God. "Partakers of his holiness" does not refer to one's standing before God, which is the added holiness and imputed righteousness that is part of salvation. The end in view is the state of one's Christian life after salvation: the practical outworking of salvation in a life lived according to God's standards of holiness and righteousness. The believer is a child beset with a thousand distractions, temptations, and choices. Without instruction he would not know when he has veered away from the path.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

"As childhood is to the rest of our earthly life, so is the whole of our earthly life to the future heavenly one."¹⁸ The Writer is no doubt thinking of his personal experiences as a child being trained by his father for manhood; and so might we all. God's training and correction may be painful, but it is a necessary preparation for heaven. What we practice in this life prepares us for the next; else why are there rewards for how we have lived the Christian life? It can be painful to let go of the way we thought was right and learn a new way, the best way. The Psalmist expresses the thought of the passage:

- Psalms 119:66-67, 71, "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word . . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."

Paul captures the goal of *paideia*:

- 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5, "so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer."

The fruit of *paideia* in the Christian life is peaceable righteousness. "The person who accepts discipline at the hand of God as something designed by his heavenly Father as for his good will cease to feel resentful and rebellious; he has 'calmed and quieted' his soul, which thus provides fertile soil for the cultivation of a

¹⁷ There is no argument here to be made concerning the origin of man's soul. The parallel is between the work of a human father and the work of the believer's spiritual Father in training a child in son-ship.

¹⁸ Saphir, *Hebrews*, II:819.

righteous life, responsive to the will of God."¹⁹

*12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,
13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.*

Now follows two exhortations, leading into the final warning passage of the epistle. The first exhortation, vv. 12-13, is for the "weak and discouraged" in the congregation. The exhortation is, quit whining, accept God's instruction and correction, and start leading a life of righteousness. I have phrased this after the modern slang, but that is the Writer's meaning. "Therefore," because God is instructing and correcting you for your profit, that you might lead a righteous life and have holy fellowship with him, and be made fit to the position of his son and heir, "stand up, walk in the way God is directing you, and let him correct your wrong ideas and actions." The thought returns to 12:1. A race cannot run by the spiritually infirm (lame) or those wavering in faith (dislocated). Therefore let God's training and correction make us whole, and give us strength and skill to run the race without stumbling, in the straight and true path of holiness and righteousness.

14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

The second exhortation is in three parts, vv. 14-17. "Pursue," *dioko*, means to "go after with the desire of obtaining."²⁰ "Peace," *eirene*, has a broad variety of applications in the Scripture. At its simplest, *eirene* can mean a lack of hostility, or positively a state of tranquility. Peace could mean health, welfare, prosperity, or every kind of good. Used as a salutation in greeting or parting, peace is the desire for every good thing. God's peace is not dependent upon the conditions of life, but is that undisturbed tranquility and joy God himself experiences. He shares his peace in perfect measure with his saved people. God is the God of peace who dispenses his peace; this term also means the cessation of hostility between God and man because Jesus has made peace by reconciling man to God. In relation to this aspect, peace is the tranquil state of one's soul because salvation has made reconciliation with God and caused blessings to flow from that reconciliation. Eschatologically, peace was Israel's prospect in the Messianic kingdom, both with God and in the world. The most complicated meaning of *eirene* is wholeness, soundness, health, well-being, and prosperity, and the opposite of war. Here *eirene* corresponds to the Hebrew *shalom*. Several of these meanings are apparent in Hebrews 7:2; 11:31, and 13:20 (all other uses in Hebrews). In v. 14, *eirene* means peace as the opposite of war: negatively a lack of hostility, positively a state of tranquil relations with others. This is the same as Paul's exhortations for unity within and harmony without the church, Romans 14:19 "Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another," and Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." Compare Psalm 34:14, "Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it." Our flesh, the world, and the devil seek to disrupt peace, because chaos and conflict are fruits of sin. As another has noted, the Christian must "pursue" peace, "it will not come automatically because people are Christians."²¹

The pursuit of holiness is the pursuit of peace with God. That kind of holiness without which one cannot see God is the essential holiness that comes from salvation. However, the effect is here put for the cause, that we might all the more diligently pursue the effect, which is the practical outworking of God's holiness in our life (cf. 1 Peter 1:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:22). To "see God" in the context of the Christian life is to experience the grace and blessing that come from his fellowship with us. Fellowship (communion) between God and the believer depends on the believer's spiritual state. Has the believer confessed and repented of his sins, are God's rules for godly living being applied, is he worshiping, is he praying, is he submissive, obedient and serving? This is what it means to seek holiness with the desire of obtaining.

¹⁹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 346.

²⁰ Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 474.

²¹ Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, 237.

15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

looking carefully lest anyone fall short

"Looking carefully" (*episkopeo*, pay attention to, observe, examine) refers to self, not to others. The only other use is 1 Peter 5:2, where it refers to the oversight performed by the overseer (pastor), who, Hebrews 13:17, must give an account to God for the spiritual state of the souls placed in his care. The believer is to exercise oversight over the spiritual state of his own soul with the same serious effort. Here are three warnings as part of the exhortation to pursue holiness. As I have previously demonstrated, the Writer's many warnings are directed in the first instance to Christians. There is an application to be made to the unsaved, for example v. 14, that without salvation one cannot have holiness, and therefore one cannot see God. But the primary use of v. 14 is practical holiness in the outworking of one's salvation. The same type of application can be made to the unsaved in vv. 15-17. An unsaved person can fall short of saving faith and can despise God's covenant and be rejected without further remedy. However, the interpretation of these verses is to Christians.

The Greek word *me*, translated "lest," means "not." The meaning underlying any specific context in which *me* is used "is the negative of will, wish, doubt . . . *me* implies that one conceives or supposes a thing may not exist."²² The specific context of vv. 15-17 is that of caution, an exercise of foresight into what might happen. Therefore, in the present time, the believer is to continuously exercise oversight over his own spiritual condition, to ensure he or she does not fall short of grace, or have bitterness of soul, or become an immoral or profane person.

The first warning is to examine one's soul in relation to the grace of God, to ensure he or she does not fall short of that grace. Grace is unmerited favor and blessing, and the term is used in a broad variety of applications. "Grace," *karis*, occurs 155 times in the New Testament. It is used of favor with God, Luke 1:30; as a synonym for faith, Acts 6:8; results in preaching, Acts 11:23; the means of justification, Romans 3:24, and salvation, Ephesians 2:8; as transforming lives, 1 Corinthians 15:10, and spiritual power for living the Christian life, 2 Corinthians 8:7, and doing God's works, 12:9; it is necessary to spiritual worship, Colossians 3:16, and good speech, 4:6; help in time of need, Hebrews 4:16, and many other aspects of the Christian life, from its beginning to its end. As related to living the Christian life, grace may be given in a measure corresponding to one's need and God's purposes. Therefore, grace may also be withheld for the same reasons. The fullest expression of grace for Christian living may be withheld due to unconfessed sin. If a believer sins God is ever-ready to forgive him, 1 John 1:9-2:2, when the believer repents and confesses his sin. While in a state of unconfessed sin he or she has broken fellowship with God. Grace continues to provide mercy and providence, blessing and protection, in a hostile world. Grace does not stop working while chastisement is working to bring the erring believer to a state of repentance and confession. The full measure of grace, however, may be withheld when one "falls short" of meeting God's will due to unconfessed sin.

looking carefully . . . lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble

The believer is to also exercise oversight over himself to ensure a root of bitterness does not spring up. The idea of root "springing up" is of a sprout growing up out of the root. The sprout is just the visual indication of the root, its action in the world. The ongoing action of the sprout from a root of bitterness is to keep on causing trouble.²³ The real issue is the root. However, the root cannot be eliminated short of the believer leaving this mortal life, because the source of the root of bitterness, the sin nature, remains in the

²² Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 976. The other word for "not," *ou*, expresses a thing actually does not exist.

²³ "Springing up" is a present active participle expressing continuous or repeated action. The action is contemporaneous with the leading verb, "causing trouble," which is in the present subjunctive active, indicating continuous or repeated action subject to the root springing up. When the root of bitterness is springing up, then it is repeatedly causing trouble.

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flesh. Therefore, care must be exercised to keep it from springing up; and if a shoot from the root does spring up, then swift action must be taken to bring it under control. Bitterness is the harm sin can cause. The "trouble" associated with a root of bitterness is seen in Ephesians 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." Its opposite is in the following verse, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Defilement to others occurs because the believer makes wrong choices as tempted by his sin nature to react against "wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, and malice" with the same root of bitterness. The cure for a root of bitterness is doing God's word, Deuteronomy 29:9,18 "Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them . . . that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness." More directly (compiled from Colossians 3:2-17):

- "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. . . put to death . . . fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry . . . put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another . . . put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him . . . put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another . . . put on love, which is the bond of perfection . . . let the peace of God rule in your hearts . . . be thankful . . . Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Sin²⁴ is the root that springs up through wrong attitudes, words, and actions, and causes trouble. If the shoot of bitterness is not rooted out it will bring trouble to the household of God.

16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

lest there be any fornicator

Looking carefully, lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau. Although the overall warning is to the church, sin begins with the individual. Believers know when they have sinned—they cannot hide it from themselves—and the Spirit brings knowledge and conviction that "I have sinned." A "fornicator" means a sexually immoral person. The term is not strictly confined to unmarried sexual intercourse. Any sexually-related activity that is not within the well-defined boundaries of God's rules for living is fornication. Marriage is the only appropriate place for sexual activity. Appropriate sexual activity is always defined as between a husband and wife, meaning that even looking at another person in a sexually-related way is fornication (cf. Proverbs 6:25; Matthew 5:28); beware all you who indulge your desires with magazines, videos, the internet, and the other ways in which modern society tries to fornicate with you. Appropriate sexual activity is always defined as between a husband and wife, meaning a male and female, so homosexuality is fornication. Unfaithfulness to God is spiritual fornication, and therefore the purity of the church in doctrine and practice must be maintained. Whether or not the prohibition against fornication is being exemplified by Esau cannot be specifically determined by the text²⁵ or the Old Testament. One notes that Esau, Genesis 26:34-35, "took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite." The example Abraham set with Isaac, Genesis 24:3, "you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanite," indicates Esau was unfaithful to the covenant in marrying idolaters. Not being true to the covenant is spiritual unfaithfulness, that is, it is fornication against the Lord. The rule for Christians is to marry "in the Lord," (1 Corinthians 7:39) and "do not be unequally yoked" (2 Corinthians 6:14). The former Jews

²⁴Some commentators interpret the root of bitterness in the context of the Christian community, which makes this "root" a person. This would seem to be the intent of Deuteronomy 29:18. A root of sin is sin working through a person, and personal oversight is required because that person could be you.

²⁵ "Given the structure of the [text] it is much more natural to understand both adjectives as referring to Esau" (Hughes, *Hebrews*, 540).

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in the Christian community the Writer was addressing would have viewed Hebrew women practicing Judaism as appropriate mates. However, Judaism had become, to the Christian community, like the idolatry of the pagans: by rejecting Christ they had abandoned worshiping the one true God. The same principle applied to Gentiles seeking marriage: they should not marry non-Christians. Therefore, in both the physical and spiritual senses, the individual and the church was to exercise oversight lest anyone become a fornicator.

lest there be any . . . profane person like Esau

The profane character of Esau is illustrated by his action, "who for one morsel of food sold his birthright," which is the example from which we are to draw the appropriate principle. The word translated "profane," *bebelos*, is a compound word developed from *baino*, "to go, and *belos*, "a threshold"²⁶ The word "denotes the place which may be entered by anyone."²⁷ If anyone may "go over the threshold," then the place is common (not special, not sanctified) ground. When used in relation to the Old Testament temple only certain persons could enter, therefore "profane" came to mean unsanctified. In an Old Testament context entering the temple did not mean the temple proper (by law restricted to the priests), but the entire temple complex (campus) including the courtyard. A good example is Acts 21:23-30. Paul was accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple (the courtyard reserved for the Jews) and was mobbed by the devout Jews because he had "defiled this holy place." In the New Testament people, not places, are sanctified. Sanctification is used in two senses in Scripture. The primary sense is of the believer's unalterable standing before God. The secondary sense is the believer's day-to-day state of personal sanctification: how one lives the Christian life (experiential sanctification). In this passage, where the life of Esau is the point of comparison, personal sanctification is in view. Therefore, in a New Testament context, a profane person such as Esau is one who is unreceptive to God; the one who fails to see the value in spiritual things.²⁸ Esau treated his birthright as common. His birthright was not merely the material goods he would inherit from Isaac, but also the spiritual inheritance in the covenant God had made with Abraham and his descendants. Esau was keenly interested in obtaining his material inheritance as the eldest son, but the larger meaning of the covenant as the channel of God's grace to the world was meaningless to him. In Genesis 25:29-34, one sees from the conversation that Esau's birthright in the Abrahamic covenant was meaningless to him. He was the eldest. Therefore Jacob's ploy to get the birthright (in Esau's view the material inheritance) was to Esau beyond silly because the birthright always went to the eldest; so he would play the game and get some food. One also must wonder how seriously Jacob took the transaction, as it was Rebekah, not Jacob, who initiated the deception whereby Jacob received the material and spiritual birthright from Isaac, Genesis 27. However, God took Esau's actions seriously. Moses' inspired comment was, "Thus Esau despised his birthright." He thought so little of it that he could play a game with it. He was unreceptive to the birthright as something of spiritual value, and gave it away in exchange for something of earthly value. This is exactly how a Christian can be a profane person. We exchange our fellowship with God for things we can handle in the here and now. When a believer sins, he is saying that the fleeting pleasure of a "morsel of sin" is better in value than communion with God. The believer's inheritance is, just as Esau's, in the future as well as the present. Treating it as equal in value with earthly things, so that it can be casually set aside to gain earthly things, is depreciating God; it is being profane.

17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Esau did prosper in the earthly things he had chosen. Twenty years later, when he met Jacob, Genesis 33:1, he had 400 men with him, men under his command, part of his household. He said to Jacob, "I have

²⁶ Zodhiates, *Dictionary*, 331.

²⁷ Kittle and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, VI:604-605.

²⁸ The application is the unsaved person who is unreceptive to God's offer of salvation.

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enough my brother." Genesis 36 tells us that Esau gained so many earthly possessions that he "took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob." Whether he knew it or not, whether he intended it or not, Esau lived by his choice to abandon his birthright, by moving away from the land promised to the descendants of Abraham. Earthly success is not an indicator of spiritual prosperity, for Esau's posterity, the nation Edom, became an enemy of Jacob's posterity, Israel, throughout their mutual history. Just to make this clear, the Jewish historian Josephus (b. AD 37) tells us that the Herod of Matthew 2, who murdered all the infants and toddlers in Bethlehem, was an Idumean. Idumea is the New Testament name for Edom.

Hebrews 12:17 tells us that Esau sought repentance with tears, desperately wanting the blessing, but "he found no place for repentance." Humanly speaking, what he wanted was the eldest son's share of the earthly inheritance. But both the Genesis account and the Writer of Hebrews focuses on the spiritual blessing. Listen as Isaac blesses his sons.

- To Jacob: Genesis 27:28-29, "Therefore may God give you Of the dew of heaven, Of the fatness of the earth, And plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, And let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, And blessed be those who bless you!"
- To Esau: Genesis 27:37-40, "Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, 'Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?' And Esau said to his father, 'Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: 'Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, And of the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, And you shall serve your brother; And it shall come to pass, when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck.'"

Isaac could not reverse his passing of the patriarchal blessing to Jacob, "I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed." One sees in Jacob's blessing the correspondences to the promise made to Abraham, Genesis 12: 2-3, which was, Genesis 17:7, "Between Me [God] and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant." Esau could not have this blessing because he had despised it. He sought it with tears, but he "found no place for repentance." There is probably a dual perspective here. One, that he was not repentant for having sold his birthright, but for having been cheated out of the family inheritance. His remark on selling his birthright reveals all, Genesis 27:36, "For Jacob has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" He blamed Jacob for the loss of the birthright, as though trickery had forced him to give it up. He did not have repentance for despising his birthright; his thoughts and tears were for the extent of his loss and how he might regain the inheritance. Second, he sought diligently and with tears to regain the blessing, but the decision could not be changed. In the divine counsels of the Lord Jacob was the heir. In the divine counsels of the Lord Esau had despised the birthright and was rejected as the heir. No amount of repenting could change the divine decision. There is a line that once crossed cannot be re-crossed. There is a finality to some actions that cannot be changed. I am not speaking of loss of salvation; Esau did not cease to be Isaac's son and heir. He lost the "blessing" a word chosen with great deliberation by the Writer. Some potential blessings are lost forever because of sin: Esau *could not* become the heir. There are choices in sin that take the believer down a path he should never have taken, that deliver him to a place he should never have come to, and that prevent him from returning to his starting point and beginning anew. Let me quickly note that this does not mean the believer is left without blessing (even Esau received a blessing), but future blessings will be of a different order than what they might have been. The believer's life is fixed in God's perspective, because God is omniscient; but for the individual his life is always in potential, dependent upon his or her choices. Before they were born it was prophesied that Esau would serve Jacob, Genesis 25:23. This was not fate, Romans 9:11, but the sovereignty of God. Both men had the same potential for blessing. Both made choices in their life that molded and shaped them for the future. Both made an irreversible choice that determined their future. For Jacob it was Genesis 28:21, that YHWH would be his God. For Esau it was when

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he despised his birthright and sold it for a morsel of food. The action of God toward each man involved the out-working of God's sovereignty through man's responsibility. This is the interaction between God and man that allows man to freely choose, but infallibly brings about God's decrees respecting his purposes in the world. Succinctly put, man's choice is to fear God and serve him only, or not. God did not hinder Esau's choices and did hold him accountable for the choices he made. There are consequences to some sins that cannot be changed. The warning in Hebrews is clear: exercise oversight over yourself, lest you make a choice that causes the permanent loss of what could have been.

I do not now want to minimize the seriousness of sin and its consequences. The direction of one's life can be permanently changed because the consequence of some sins cannot be changed. Believers are creatures of time, and a single act in a moment in time can change the path of one's life. Not of salvation, but of potential service and blessings. Many things can be recovered. But some cannot: Jacob's hip was permanently injured (Genesis 32:25) by God, so that he walked with a limp forever afterward; a reminder to stay close to God, but also a reminder of how his sin had changed his life. But, he did not lose his relationship with God, and God blessed him. Samson lost everything because of his sin, but recovered enough of his relationship with God to receive a final blessing. Through humility, and prayer, and consecration, and yes through repentance and confession of the sin, God can and will recover the believer to an intimate personal fellowship, and give him or her a place of service in the church; a place of usefulness and blessing to one's self and others; a place where one can make a blessed difference in the lives of others. What I am saying is that some doors of service that might have been opened can be permanently closed, because the consequences of some sins disqualify that person for some particular spiritual gift and place of service. Therefore, beware, and fear the Lord, and fear sin, and always be exercising careful oversight, lest you sin, and the consequences of your sin cannot be changed, though you seek for it carefully with tears.

18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest,

19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.

20 (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.")

21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")

Verses 18-21 are in the form of a figure of speech known as an polysyndeton. This is a "many-and's" list in which the reader is to consider each point that supports the leading statement. The verses are more appropriately translated:

- "For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched, and burned with fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore (for they could not endure what was commanded), and if so much as a beast touches the mountain it shall be stoned or with an arrow shot through, and so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.'"

The point of the polysyndeton is the voice of God in judgment. The Writer states "you have not come to the mountain that may be touched." The word for "mountain" is not in some manuscripts, but the comparison with Mount Zion in v. 22, and the description of the phenomena in vv. 18-21, indicate Mount Sinai is in the Writer's view. The phrasing, "the mountain that may be touched," seems out of place to some interpreters. Accordingly they have either assumed the negative was dropped by copyists, "may *not* be touched," or have ignored the implied comparison between Zion and Sinai and translated (some variation of) "touched with fire." However, "the apostle's meaning is, that they were not come to the material, tangible mountain, Sinai, but to the immaterial, spiritual mount, Zion."²⁹ In the earlier chapters of Hebrews the Writer compared the

²⁹ Brown, *Hebrews*, 644-645.

Law with Christ. The main point was the insufficiency of the Law to effectively and permanently deal with sin. I wrote also of the Law as the guardian (*paidagogos*) to keep the Old Testament believer safe in his faith until Christ came. However, there was a darker side to the Law. The Law was a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). Verses 18ff are a metaphorical description of the believer's relation to the Law of Moses, expressed in the literal events occurring when the Law was given.³⁰ There is no life in the Law—the letter kills, 2 Corinthians 3:6—and the result of the law is expressed in v. 21, “I am exceedingly afraid and tremble. To the Hebrews, the Writer, “instead of saying in simple words, ‘You are not under the law, that severe and wrathful economy,’ he says, ‘You are not of the congregation of Israel who came to Mount Sinai, and from its cloud-capt summit received, amid clouds, and darkness, and thunder, and lightening, a fiery law.’”³¹ As a whole, Israel at Sinai represented convicted sinners judged under the sentence of the Law.³² The readers of the epistle to the Hebrews were forgiven sinners under the blessings of grace.

New Testament believers are not under the old covenant but the new, not under law but grace; the believer's potential for service, future inheritance, and present blessings, are commensurate with his or her position in Christ. Believers are the ones who are chosen to salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13) and who have an inheritance reserved in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). Nothing can change that. This information should not lead to sin, but rather it must lead to perseverance in holiness and faith just because believers are God's children. The true heir does not squander his position but lives up to the responsibility. The relation of this section to the themes of the epistle is expressed by Owen. “The design of the apostle in the whole epistle, is to persuade and prevail with the Hebrews unto constancy and perseverance in the profession of the gospel . . . he makes in the discourse before us a recapitulation of the whole: for he makes a brief scheme of the two states that he had compared, balancing them one against the other, and thereby demonstrates the force of his argument and exhortation from thence unto constancy and perseverance in the faith of the gospel . . . so here we have a recapitulation of what he had proved concerning the two states of the law and the gospel.”³³

That the Writer is addressing believers is seen in two phrases: you have not come (to the Law); we are receiving a kingdom. As we have done in previous warning sections, we will find the key to a proper interpretation hanging on the door at the last verse: “let us [the Writer and his readers] have grace, [the kind of grace] by which we many serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” The relationship to vv. 12-17 is not in this one section, but must be viewed in relation to the whole, vv. 18-29. The believer is under grace. He cannot lose his inheritance like Esau (v. 28, we are receiving a kingdom), but he can lose his fellowship with God (vv. 15-17) and come under the disapproval of the Law. The Law can be a sharp stick to poke the believer in the spiritual butt and urge him or her to obedience. The Law can also be a dark cloud, fire on the mountain, and lightening in the sky, convicting us that we have stepped away from God's blessings in grace, and have turned away from fellowship with our Savior, for a morsel of pleasure from sin. The just anger of God at sin—at you when you sin—is in your soul like when God came down at Sinai to give the Law, and you exceedingly fear and tremble until repentance and confession restore you to fellowship.

*22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,
23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,
24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*

³⁰ The Writer, “draws on Old Testament language, without alluding unmistakably to any single text. Possible sources include Exodus 19:16-22; 20:18-21; Deuteronomy 4:11ff; 5:22-27; 9:19” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 671).

³¹ Brown, *Hebrews*, 644.

³² Owen, *Hebrews*, VII:307.

³³ Owen, *Hebrews*, VII:305, 306.

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"Before we come to Christ we have to do with God, as Judge, sitting upon his throne, terrible."³⁴ After we come to Christ we are reconciled to God, and he is on a throne of grace, symbolized by Mount Zion. This is the only use of the term "Mount Zion" in Hebrews, and the Writer is making use of a very complicated Old Testament symbology. Originally "Zion" was the fortress of the Jebusite city of Salem (Jerusalem). David conquered the fortress, 2 Samuel 5:7, and it became known as the City of David. Over time Zion came to indicate the entire city, both literally and symbolically. Sometimes the term indicates the tribes of Israel; sometimes it refers to the future dwelling of Israel; sometimes it refers to the dwelling place of God on earth, or in heaven. The term has both soteriological and eschatological uses. The Writer was probably thinking of several of the Psalms (38 uses). For example, in Psalm 48, Mount Zion is the city of the great king. In Psalm 50 "out of Zion . . . God will shine forth." Psalms 69:35-36, "For God will save Zion . . . those who love His name shall dwell in it." In the light of Old Testament usage, the two terms, Mount Zion and Jerusalem, are probably synonymous in Hebrews 12:22, and the better translation is, "to Mount Zion *even* to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Many times in its 160 uses Zion has ultimate reference to the messianic kingdom, and this is appropriate in light of the promise (10:36; 11:39), and the end of the argument (12:28). However, the believer's ultimate residence is, Hebrews 11:16, a "heavenly country" a "city" God has prepared for them, which is, in the words of Hebrews 12:22, "Mount Zion even the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." The place where God dwells and believers dwell with him is a place of grace, not law, because in heaven there is no sin, and the law was made for the place where sin dwells. Therefore, we are not come to the place of the law, symbolized by Mount Sinai, but the place of grace, symbolized by Mount Zion. The view in this verse is past tense but forward looking, a figure of speech³⁵ where the past is put for the future, "you have come [i.e., shall come] to Mount Zion" etc. In the New Testament believer's personal experience, he has come (past tense reflecting salvation) to grace and received the inheritance by faith. The believer shall, future tense, receive the inheritance and enter the heavenly Jerusalem. Scripture sometimes views the believer spiritually in terms of where he or she will be physically as heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ. The connection to the immediate context of vv. 22-24 is the exhortation to persevere, to endure chastening, to make straight paths, to beware sin, vv. 15-17, because we are come to Mount Zion, symbolic of the of the true worship of God and the heavenly Jerusalem, and symbolic of the true community of the saints.³⁶

The whole of vv. 18-29 forms a literary unit (independent and complete in itself) composed of several parts. In vv. 23-24 the Writer again uses a "many ands"³⁷ list. Verses 22-24 would be more appropriately translated:

- But you have come to Mount Zion, even to the city of the living God [the heavenly Jerusalem], and an innumerable company of angels, and the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, and God the Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."³⁸

Note how the polysyndeton in vv. 22-24 balances with the one in vv. 18-21. Under the law those who heard God speak "begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore." Under grace the believer is to hear God's voice: "see that you do not refuse him who speaks." Under the law one was terrified to hear God's voice. Under grace one is commanded to hear God's voice. The "many ands" list supports the opening statement, the believer is under grace. At v. 25 a "therefore" or "because" is implied: therefore because all the above things are true, "see that you do not refuse him who speaks." If we put vv. 18-24 together we have,

- "Because you have not come to Mount Sinai, the place of the Law, but you have come to Mount Zion, even to the city of God, and because you have come to angels assembled, and the church (*ecclesia*),

³⁴ Dickson, *Hebrews*, 75.

³⁵ Heterosis of tenses, an exchange of one tense for another, Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 510, 520.

³⁶ Guthrie, D., *Hebrews*, 261.

³⁷ A polysyndeton.

³⁸ The NIV obscures the interpretation by breaking the polysyndeton in to several sentences. The NKJV and HCSB obscure the polysyndeton by translating the several *kai* (and) as "to."

and God the judge, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and the new covenant in Jesus, and a better blood of sprinkling than Abel, therefore see that you do not refuse him who speaks."

Both polysyndetons support the ultimate conclusion: v. 28: we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Since we are receiving an eternal kingdom, let us have grace and serve God with reverence and godly fear.

In a polysyndeton the multiple use of "and" is meant to cause the reader to slow down and look at the parts. The first is, "an innumerable company (*myriads*) of angels (*angelos*)". There are thirteen references to angels in Hebrews.³⁹ The purpose of mentioning angels in this place is probably to give the readers an interest in the community of faith. Note that Hebrews 11:13 does not say these all died *alone* in faith. The individual believer is not an "alone" believer, he or she is part of a larger community of faith. Even the angels are part of this community, for they too had a choice between unbelief and faith. They too suffer for their faith, in their continuous war with the fallen angels and protection of saints from sinful men. The inhabitants of the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, includes the angels (*angelos*). The word *myriads* literally means ten thousands, because the number ten thousand was the highest number of the ancient world. The plural indicates a larger amount, therefore it could not be counted; hence, not infinite but "innumerable." The text, however, reads, *myriads angelos paneguris*, but the KJV and NKJV versions associate the word *paneguris* (assembly) with the following *ecclesia* ("church"). The word *paneguris*, used only here in the New Testament, poses some difficulties. Grammatically it might connect with *angelos* or *ecclesia*. However, because each element of the polysyndeton is clearly separated by "and" (*kai*), and a *kai* separates *paneguris* and *ecclesia*, (*myriads angelos paneguris kai ecclesia*), it seems better to connect *paneguris* with *angelos* not *ecclesia*.⁴⁰ Therefore, the NKJV translation, v. 23, "[You have come] to an innumerable company of angels, to [*kai*] the general assembly [*paneguris*] and church [*ecclesia*]" where *paneguris* is modifying *ecclesia*, is not the best translation, nor does it conform to the grammatical ordering of the text. The NIV renders the verses appropriately, "You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly [*paneguris*], to [*kai*] the church [*ecclesia*] of the firstborn."⁴¹

The word *paneguris* is a compound word meaning a gathering of the whole.⁴² In this sense it could mean a gathering of all the angels. The argument, vv. 22-23, would then be that all the angels and all the Old and New Testament believers are all together the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem. However, *paneguris* is used in secular Greek, pagan religions, and (its Hebrew equivalent) in certain Old Testament passages for community assembly on appointed festival days. In Ezekiel 46:11 it is a festival assembly God has appointed in the millennial kingdom. In Hosea 2:13 it is used negatively in reference to pagan feasts; in 9:5 for an Old Testament feast day. In Amos 5:21 God despises the insincere worship of Israel on the appointed feast days. The verb form is used in Isaiah 66:10 to mean rejoicing in the millennial kingdom. In relation to the angels the only festival-type gathering we know of is Revelation 5, a celebration of Jesus as Savior (cf. Job 38:7). The phrase could be translated "and to innumerable angels in festal assembly." This says something about the angels specifically and heaven in general: heaven is a place where the angels are always celebrating God.

Because *paneguris* is connected with *angelos*, not *ecclesia*, the better translation of the next "and" clause is "and the assembly, *ecclesia*, of the firstborn, *prototokos*, registered in heaven." The word *ecclesia* is usually translated "church" in its 114 uses, almost always in reference to a local New Testament body of believers. The word is used in Hebrews only here and 2:12. In 2:12 *ecclesia* refers to all those saved by Christ, Old and New Testament. What did *ecclesia* and *prototokos* mean to the Writer and his original readers in 12:23? Before we discuss *ecclesia*, we should first discuss *prototokos*, "firstborn." This word is used three times in

³⁹ Hebrews 1:4-7, 13; 2:2, 5, 7, 9, 16; 12:22; 13:2.

⁴⁰ See Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 678-679, where he supports the reading I have given as preferred, and references the following applicable meanings given by Spicq: plenary assembly, festival, religious significance, panegyric in the sense of a speech in praise of someone. Compare Bruce, *Hebrews*, 353, "myriads of angels in festal array," and Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, 467, "innumerable multitudes [of angels] gather in plenary assembly for an exultant celebration of worship."

⁴¹ Compare the HCSB: "[You have come] to myriads of angels in festive gathering [*paneguris*], to [*kai*] the assembly [*ecclesia*] of the firstborn.

⁴² Kittell and Friedrich, *Dictionary*, V:722.

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Hebrews:⁴³ of Christ, 1:6, as the preeminent Son and heir of the Father; used literally, 11:28, of the first born children of the Egyptians and Israelites; and at 12:23. Perhaps the uses closest to 12:23 are:

- Romans 8:29, "For who God did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." In this regard, one might also consider
- Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

The idea of *prototokos* is always pre-eminence for Christ and inheritance for believers. The believers' status as God's "firstborn" is due to their association with Christ, making them the heirs of God because they are united with Christ by their redemption. The phrase "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" is applied by Paul specifically to New Testament believers as those adopted by God as his children and heirs, making every believer a *prototokos*, the firstborn who receives the inheritance. Believers are like Ephraim who received the inheritance of the firstborn (Genesis 48:14-19), because God has appointed us to a greater position. However, the position of firstborn does not apply only to the New Testament church. The New Testament church is adopted into God's family as his children and heirs, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5, but the adoption first belonged to believers in Israel, Romans 9:4. In the Hebrews 12:23 context the *ecclesia* is the called-out assembly⁴⁴ of the firstborn registered in heaven: the *ecclesia* of believers from Adam forward, that includes the local church (or churches) the Writer of Hebrews is addressing. The word *ecclesia* is not being used in its specific New Testament meaning of a local body of believers between the resurrection and rapture—a "church." The word is being used in a general sense to mean the assembly of all those who have been saved, of which the Hebrews' local New Testament church was a vital part. We, each living believer, have come by faith into the "assembly of firstborn registered in heaven." The view is still that of 12:1, the community of faith. The living believer has become part of that community; his vital duty is to persevere in the promises, even as those who came before him also persevered. Under the law the Old Testament believers pressed toward the city of God, 11:10; under grace the believer has greater privileges, but the goal remains the same; indeed, the greater privileges found in the grace given to the New Testament believer should encourage him to persevere all the more. The word translated "registered," *apographo*, means "to write." The only other use is Luke 2:1, 3, 5, where a census was taken by which all the Roman world was registered for taxation. The translation "registered" is appropriate to Hebrews in light of 11:10, 12:22: believers are citizens of the city of God, therefore written or registered on the roll of citizens of the city. The New Testament church of the Hebrews was part of the larger assembly of the city of God, and numbered among God's heirs.

Believers are also come to "God the Judge of all." The word "men" is supplied by the NKJV, NIV translators, but must be understood as intended by the Writer; God judges angels and man, but men are the subject of the passage. The meaning of this phrase is seen in its opposite. Israel had access to the Judge as condemned by the Law, but the New Testament believer has access to the Judge as forgiven and approved by grace in Christ. The Old Testament believer did not dare approach the God of Sinai, but believers under grace have access to the Judge on his throne, with the boldness that comes through Jesus Christ, 10:19. He will judge the believer's just cause in the world; he will reward the believer for his perseverance in this life.⁴⁵

Believers are come to "the spirits of just men made perfect." Who are these and in what way can it be said the living believer comes to them? As to the second, this cannot mean real-time communion between living believers and the souls of physically dead believers now in heaven. The context still speaks to perseverance because one has received these things by faith and looks forward to a literal future receipt. The encouragement of belonging to the heavenly Jerusalem, the company of angels, and the assembly of the

⁴³ All New Testament uses other than Hebrews: Luke 2:7; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18.

⁴⁴ The Greek *ecclesia* was pressed into use by the Spirit as a designation for the church. The secular meaning was to designate a group called out from the larger population for a specific purpose, such as a political party, or Acts 19:32, 39, 41.

⁴⁵ Owen, *Hebrews*, VII:343.

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firstborn, is that of being in the company of the community of faith. The guiding thought, if not the implicit intent, is that community of faith formed by "so great a cloud of witnesses" who by their example encourage the living believer to persevere throughout life. If, as is most certainly the case, one has come to the Judge of all men, then one has, by faith now and soon in heaven, come to those who have been judged and have been "made perfect," that is, they have been found fully qualified, *telieoo*, by reason of their faith and testimony, to be accepted by the Judge. These "just men" are those believers who have all died in faith, looking toward the promises, and are now in heaven having received them. The community of faith includes all who have fought the good fight, finished the course, kept the faith and received the promises. God's promises are more than potential, they are assured, and the believer is even now in the company of those who have received the promises.

"You have come to . . . Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." This has been one of the main subjects of Hebrews, a new covenant in Jesus. The believer is not come to the covenant of law that condemns and kills. The believer is come to Jesus the Mediator who has the covenant of grace made in Mount Zion and kept secure in the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. The new covenant is not words written in a book and sprinkled with animal's blood. The new covenant is a person, Jesus Christ, a covenant made in his propitiating death on the cross. Here, in a phrase, is an epitome of the great difference between the old and new covenants. Moses did not make the covenant in his own flesh nor seal it with his own blood. Moses was a great man, but he was just a man. The same is true for Abraham. The covenant with Abraham is the basis for all future blessings of Israel and the church, but Abraham received the covenant, he did not participate in its making. Nor does the believer have an interest in Abraham's covenant through Abraham, but through Christ, the greater heir of Abraham, the one through whom all the blessings and promises God made to Abraham flow to the Christian. "Whatever, therefore, there is of mercy, grace, or glory, prepared in the new covenant, and the promises of it, we are made partakers of it all by our access unto Christ, the mediator of it. And whereas before he [the Writer] had evidenced from the Scripture how much more excellent this covenant is than the old one, or that made with the people at Sinai, there is force in it to persuade them unto steadfastness in the profession of the gospel; which is aimed at in all these arguings."⁴⁶

"And," the believer is come to, "the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." The sprinkling of blood is here put for the completed sacrifice, for in every Old Testament sacrifice part of the blood was sprinkled. What is in view is atonement. The death of the animal sacrifice substituted for the death of the sinner, the sprinkling of blood indicated that a substitutionary death had occurred. Forgiveness of sin is seen in the sprinkling of the blood. Thus, the whole of salvation is in view in this figure: redemption, justification, sanctification. The whole covenant is in view, compare 9:11-15, the sprinkling of the blood of Christ saves and cleanses. "For this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Christ's blood speaks "better" things than the blood of Abel. The word translated "better" is *kresson*, and is used as a comparative to indicate what is more advantageous or useful. The word occurs twelve times in Hebrews⁴⁷ and three times in the rest of the New Testament.⁴⁸ Abel's blood does not mean the blood of the animal sacrifice Abel offered. Rather, it is his own blood that is in view. Abel's blood, 11:4, speaks of his own faith and perseverance in the promises. Christ's blood speaks of the promises themselves, and of the grace that enables faith and perseverance. Abel shed his own blood as a testimony of his faith. Christ shed his own blood to bring saving faith to sinners.

25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven,

The main argument of the epistle ends at 12:29, and chapter thirteen is the usual "parting counsels" seen

⁴⁶ Owen, *Hebrews*, VII:347.

⁴⁷ Hebrews 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24.

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:9; 1 Peter 3:17; 2 Peter 2:21.

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in so many other epistles, e.g., James 5:19-20; Romans 15:14-16:27; 1 John 5:18-21. The immediate context of v. 25 is the argument that began in v. 18, but this connects all the way back to the warning section beginning at 10:26. The overarching topic of 10:26-12:29 (living "by faith" is perseverance through God's grace and one's personal effort in applying that grace) is revealed in exhortation, warning, encouragement, and illustration. In the more immediate context, the Old Testament saints persevered in the promises under the old covenant of the law. Should not the New Testament saints who are under grace also hear and persevere? The immediate section under consideration, which begins in v. 18, is in some ways a rehearsing of the argument of the epistle. The overall theme of Hebrews is always press on to full maturity in Christ. The various sub-themes, such as the superiority of Christ over angels, Moses, Abraham, Aaron, etc., support the main theme. The warning passages press home the theme: one cannot stop part way in the process of living out one's salvation. Full maturity requires understanding the superiority of the gospel over the law; it requires entering into God's rest by living out God's rules for living; it requires communion with God and community with fellow-saints; it requires persevering by faith in grace. Verses 18-24 extend that "persevering by faith" theme, illustrating the believer is under grace, and therefore has the greater privilege, but also the greater obligation. "The degree or extent of the privileges enjoyed, is the measure of our responsibility: the richer the blessing God grants us, the deeper is our debt of obligation to him."⁴⁹ The greater obligation is the subject of v. 25ff.

The question to be answered (the key opening the door of interpretation) is, "Whose voice is that which we must hear and not refuse?" Christ is the subject of v. 24, but overall the divine Person is God in Christ, because it was YHWH, the Trinity, who spoke at Sinai; it is God, the Trinity, who is a consuming fire, v. 29; it is God in Christ who spoke in these last days in his Son; it is God in Christ who speaks in the new covenant. The contrast is between the voice the people did not want to hear at Sinai and the voice of the new covenant made in Christ's propitiation. The voice of God in the new covenant calls out to the believer to assume his privileges and obligations under grace. This is an echo of 3:7-4:13, where the people refused to hear God speaking and did not enter into God's rest, but the believer under grace has that privilege and assumes the obligations of living in God's land. The exhortation to "do not refuse him who speaks" has its parallel in "let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest," 4:11. The covenant of grace is the voice of the Spirit calling the believer to enter God's rest and so to live in God's land. Those who refused to hear God's voice at Sinai did not escape their sins; neither did generations of Jews who also refused to hear, and therefore could not enter into God's rest. God's voice in Christ speaks of better things, therefore do not, like the ancient Hebrews, refuse God who speaks in the new covenant. The generations who refused to hear God's speaking at Sinai could not work out the promises and live out the blessings of God's rest in their own lives. So, too, will the New Testament believer fail to work out the promises and live out the blessings if he or she refuses to hear and obey the voice of God speaking in Christ. The issue is not salvation, but is the same as that word from Paul to the Philippians, 2:12-13, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." To work out is to see to the matter to its conclusion—in Hebrews' terms, to enter God's rest and live in God's land under God's rules for living. That is to say, see that you do not refuse him who speaks.⁵⁰ The words translated "that you refuse not" are *me paraiteomai*. The word *me* means "a desire that the thing expressed may not occur." The word *paraiteomai* is properly translated "refuse" as in "to decline a request." The meaning here is not so much as to reject, but to refuse to listen and obey. One hears God speaking in Christ but chooses to disobey. The positive exhortation is "hear and do."

26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."

27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

⁴⁹ Pink, *Hebrews*, 1056.

⁵⁰ The application to the unbeliever is not to refuse the gospel message of salvation.

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28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

I noted at 10:39 that the promise which includes both Old and New Testament believers is the millennial kingdom. A notice of that kingdom is an appropriate end to the exhortation. The shaking of Sinai at the voice of God is used as an analogy to lead the reader to Haggai 2:6, 7, "For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the Lord of hosts." Haggai's context is the rebuilding of the Temple after the Babylonian captivity. The rebuilt temple was insignificant in size and appearance to the former temple built by Solomon (which some hearing Haggai had seen in their youth). Haggai encourages Israel with the prophetic remark that YHWH has not abandoned them, he will come, shake the nations, and fill their temple with his glory. Haggai looked to the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom promises. The shaking of heaven and earth meant the removal of the old order for a new order in which God overthrows the powers that be, Haggai 2:22, establishes the kingdom, and fills his temple with glory. The Writer of Hebrews uses this prophecy in the same way. The reference is not to the end of the world, 2 Peter 3:12; Revelation 20:11; 21:1. The reference is to the Tribulation period and subsequent millennial kingdom. In this upheaval of powers the material and spirit worlds will be shaken, but the believer cannot be shaken. The kingdoms of the world, man's and Satan's, will be removed (Revelation 19:20-20:3), but the kingdom of Christ, which must include those who are members of the kingdom, cannot be removed (Revelation 20:4-6). An immediately practical application is the Writer's purpose in using Haggai. Because the believer will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken or removed, what manner of life should he or she be living until that day has come? The answer is a life lived by God's rules for living. A life of perseverance by faith. A life that gives acceptable service to God in the attitude of reverence and awe. That is the "by faith" that will take the believer safely to receipt of the promises, which are as certain as the kingdom that cannot be shaken and removed.

29 For our God is a consuming fire.

This verse must be interpreted by the Writer's use of the Haggai passage. Our God will consume the enemy. The Writer is probably alluding to Deuteronomy 9:3. As that verse indicates, God as consuming fire is a warning of judgment to those who turn away from God, and is a comfort to his people.

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1 Let brotherly love continue.

2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

The Writer has completed his exhortation (although he will briefly refer to it in v. 22). What follows is general advice applicable to any church, a postscript to his discussion consisting of practical and social advice and doctrinal instruction. This type of conclusion was common to ancient letters and is appropriate to Hebrews, an exhortation written to friends and fellow-believers. The first exhortation is to let brotherly love continue. There is no need to suppose a problem requiring this exhortation: he does not say let love begin or resume, but let love continue. The faith that makes individuals believers in Christ makes them brothers in Christ. The apostle Paul, the apostle Peter, and the Writer of Hebrews use this word, *philadelphia*,¹ in similar contexts for similar purposes. Love for one's fellow believers is a mark of genuine Christianity, John 13:34-35. I remind the reader that biblical love is not emotion-based but is a decision of the will to pay attention to and care for one another. The word "continue" is *meno*, translated as abide, remain, continue, endure in the New Testament. Here the thought is that love among and between brothers and sisters in Christ is to be a steady state or condition that defines their Christianity in general, and their relationship with fellow believers in particular.

Hospitality is another Christian virtue. The word translated "entertain strangers" is *philoxenia*, a compound word literally meaning to be a friend to a stranger. The only other use of this word is Romans 12:13, where it is translated "hospitality." The word *philoxenia* is derived from *philoxenos*, which is used in 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; and 1 Peter 4:9. The meaning is the same, to be a friend to a stranger. A stranger, *xenos*, is one who is from another place. In the scriptures where hospitality and brotherly love are commended the *xenos* is one who is a fellow believer coming from outside one's local church family. He or she is a friend because a believer, although a stranger because unknown. The Bible never asks believers to be a friend to an unbeliever. The exhortation concerning unbelievers is to exercise love in acts of kindness and mercy, to present the gospel message, to do good to all, and as much as it depends on you, to live at peace with all. When a sinner becomes a Christian, then he becomes a friend. The word concerning entertaining angels probably alludes to Abraham's encounter with God and the two angels, Genesis 18, although from their conversation it seems apparent that Abraham knew these were not mere men. Perhaps the better allusion is Genesis 19, where Lot invited the two angels into his house, intending to protect them from the immoral men of Sodom. He obviously did not know they were angels until they announced their intention to destroy the city. However, the point of the Writer's exhortation in Hebrews is not that one is to be hospitable because the stranger might be one of the spirit beings known as angels. The better interpretation is to understand *angelos* in its primary sense of "messenger." Although some strangers may not be worthy and abuse the kindness, some will be messengers of God bringing a blessing to the household. Regardless, brotherly love extended toward Christian brethren who are strangers because personally unknown to us, is part of vital Christianity.

3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them — those who are mistreated — since you yourselves are in the body also.

The reference to prisoners is also to Christian brethren, as the definite article "the" indicates persons specifically known to this body of believers. In the Writer's historical context some Christians were being arrested and imprisoned. The Romans used imprisonment to compel obedience to the order of a magistrate, to confine the accused until trial, or to detain the accused until execution. A trial that did not exonerate the accused resulted in punishment (slavery, torture, hard labor, exile) or execution. Prisoners were harshly mistreated, assumed guilty until proven otherwise, and devoid of all human rights. To "remember" means more than prayer, it means active involvement to render aid. There was no such thing as a "speedy trial" and to survive the months, or even years, while imprisoned, family and friends were needed to bring clothing,

¹ Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 2 Peter 1:7.

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blankets, food, medicines, and any other necessities. Without this aid a prisoner might easily starve to death or die of exposure or illness. The reference to "you yourselves are in the body also" does not mean the local church body, but that the ones not imprisoned know the sufferings of those who are imprisoned, because both are "in the body," i.e., physically living and suffering. The statement about being "mistreated" is handled differently by the translations. The Greek literally reads "Be mindful of the prisoners, as though bound with them; those being evil treated, as also yourselves being in [the] body." Whether this is two groups, the prisoners and the mistreated, or one group, prisoners being mistreated, cannot be positively determined. The exhortation, however, is plain: take care of fellow believers undergoing persecution for the faith.

4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

This statement concerning marriage is more imperative than the NKJV translation indicates. The HCSB gives a better translation: "Marriage must be respected by all, and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge immoral people and adulterers." Sexual misconduct was as prevalent in ancient times as it is today; perhaps more so because some ancient religions promoted sexual immorality as a means of worship. Respect for marriage does not mean asceticism, chastity and celibacy are less honorable or holy than marriage.

5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

6 So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Covetousness is an inordinate love for possessions, but the Greek word the NKJV translates "covetousness" is *aphilarguros*. The leading "a" was used in Greek as a negative, "phil" is from *philos*, meaning a friend or loving, and *arguros*, means silver as used for money. The word *aphilarguros* means "not a lover of money." We may translate more literally as "without love of money let your manner of life be, being satisfied with the things present," that is, being satisfied with your present circumstances. The exhortation does not disallow a lawful ambition, for what is prohibited is a love of money. What one loves—and here the intent is a strong desire—is what one seeks to gain. What is in view is the attitude, the motivation: a focus on more for the sake of having more. The love of money is often disguised as the desire for more possessions, so the NKJV "covetous" is not so far from the truth of the matter. Sometimes the love for money is disguised as anxiety about not having enough to be secure from the trials of the world. Regardless of how a love for money is manifested, the cure is to trust in the God who has promised his providence will provide for our worldly needs. The Writer summarizes God's providence: "He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" The allusion is probably to Joshua 1:5, but the substance of that promise is repeated throughout the Bible. For example, 1 Chronicles 28:20; Psalm 54:4, Matthew 6:32; compare 1 Timothy 6:6-10. God is not with his saved people only for their spiritual good but also for their material needs. He will supply these things in accordance with his plans and purposes, in a measure sufficient to our needs, and never in an amount that would cause us to become covetousness or turn away from him. One must take care to accept the measure he deems sufficient, Proverbs 30:7-10.

Verse 6 reasonably follows from the promise of an ever-present, ever-providing God: So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" Man can only do that which God allows. This is not a promise against hard times or trials or persecutions. This is a promise that God is always working through one's worldly circumstances to help and guide; he will give grace and providence in the full measure needed for the circumstances. The promise that "my grace is sufficient for you" was given when Paul was in a very difficult circumstance, a messenger of Satan was causing him some sore trial. The promise was that God would sustain him during the trial. What we should fear is allowing sin to be our guide. The believer is often the cause of his or her own problems in the world. The promise, "the Lord is my helper," does not mean we passively receive his help, it means we actively seek him in all areas of our life, beginning with understanding and following his rules for living. The Spirit will help us while we are on the path, and when

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we leave the path he will help us return to the path.

7 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

“Remember” is to pay attention. The Writer speaks of present leaders in v. 17. Here he speaks of past leaders, perhaps the founders of the church, who are New Testament examples of living by faith. They died in faith, and the reader is to consider and follow their faith. “Follow” is *mimeomai*, to imitate or follow as an example. The “outcome of their conduct” means “the sum total or achievement of their day-to-day behavior, manifested in a whole life”² which includes the triumph of their faith in death, whether peaceful or painful. These, unlike the examples of chapter eleven, were personally known to the readers, therefore, the sum of their life is the example to follow. Each generation provides examples of living by faith.

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

This statement about Jesus is not so much a doctrinal statement as a practical exhortation. Since Jesus is always the same, should we allow our faith, our perseverance, our doctrine, and our day-to-day practice, to vary? Jesus’ character is the basis for the life of faith for every believer. God’s rules for living may change to meet specific historical circumstances,³ but the principles underlying those rules are based in the character of the Godhead. In Jesus is all the fullness of the Godhead, therefore the continuing “sameness” of Jesus means the principles that define daily living are found in the Person of Christ. Those principles never change.

In the immediate context, vv. 7 and 17 are connected by v. 8-16. The Jesus who was the substance of the faith of past leaders is the same Jesus who is the present substance of faith, and is the same Jesus who will be the substance of faith in the future. The consistency of leaders who died in faith, and the consistency of living leaders, is the historical faith of Jesus Christ. Such consistency in faith and practice is required of all. The Person who did not leave or forsake Joshua (v. 5) is the same Person who will never leave or forsake the Hebrews, and will never forsake or leave you or me.

9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.

Since the basis of one’s faith, Jesus the Savior, never changes, the doctrines of the faith do not change. At first this statement may seem to pose a contradiction, for isn’t the Writer’s argument that doctrines did change between the Old and New covenants? God spoke through the prophets but has now spoken in Son. The high priest yearly offered animal blood in the sanctuary but Jesus offered his own blood once for all. The message spoken in Jesus did not contradict or eliminate the message delivered through the prophets. The message God spoke through the prophets was the message he developed to its conclusion in Jesus Christ.

² Hughes, *Hebrews*, 569.

³ Precepts—God’s rules for living—are the embodiment of his principles. Precepts may be historically fixed or permanently abiding. If doing the precept enacts the principle in modern circumstances, then the precept should be followed. For example, the Law prohibited mixing different kinds of cloth in a garment. Today we have clothing made of natural and man-made materials. Should we wear only clothes made of cotton? Through the precept regarding clothing, and similar precepts, God was teaching believers the principle that biblical faith and practices do not mix with the world’s beliefs and behavior. The precept regarding clothing does not fit today’s circumstances, but the principle of being separate from the world still applies. For example, Christians are not to marry unbelievers, a precept embodying the principle; or as Paul stated it, “do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” A precept is the clothing a principle wears to fit the circumstances. If the biblical precept enacts the principle, then do the precept; if not, embody the principle in a new precept that works in your culture.

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The sacrifice of the high priest was intended to point the way to the once for all sacrifice of Christ. Scripture says "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes," Romans 10:4. The word "end" is an unfortunate translation of *telos* in this context. More properly, "Christ is the completion, the fulfillment, of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." God's administration in his dealings with man under the economy of the Law of Moses has come to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the old having been completed, a new economy has been instituted in the Completer, which economy is the dispensation of the New Covenant, Hebrews 8:10-13; 10:14-18. The doctrines, however, have not changed. The outward form of atonement was the animal sacrifices, which were intended to symbolize the true form of the atonement, the death, burial; and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The doctrine, which has never changed from Adam forward, is redemption of the sinner through his or her faith in the death of a qualified substitute, which, prior to the crucifixion, represented the propitiating death of Jesus.

Moreover, the progressive revelation of doctrine is not a change in doctrine. What is revealed about God in Genesis 1:1 is less than the completed revelation of God's Person and works made known from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. What has been made known at any one point in the history of man since Adam walked in the Garden with God does not contradict the full revelation from Genesis to Revelation. The full revelation unfolds the germs of truth, revealing all that was latent in the first revelation. The progressive revealing of God in history is "new" in the sense it could not be known by man until revealed by God, but not new in the sense that all which would be revealed in time was latent in the original, primitive revelation. There is also a progressive unfolding of man's understanding of revelation. This is not a change in doctrine. For example, there has been a progressive unfolding of the church's understanding of the Person Jesus. One of the first known statements, outside of Scripture, is that of Ignatius, about AD 107:

- "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was descended from the family of David, born of Mary, who was truly born of God and of the Virgin, truly took a body, for the word became flesh and dwelt among us without sin.

About AD 340 this and other statements had been developed into what is known as the Apostle's Creed:

- "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary."

Competing beliefs that did not reflect Scripture brought about further understanding, and in AD 381 this creed was restated:

- "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father."

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647, brings together in one statement all the understanding the church had developed concerning the Person of Christ from the second century to the Reformation:

- "The Son is eternally begotten of the Father . . . The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father . . . being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance." So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

As believers studied the Scripture and opposed false doctrine, the understanding of all that Scripture taught about Jesus came to be formally stated. The doctrine, however, never changed, it was in Scripture, waiting for man's full comprehension. The same can be said for all doctrines. Therefore, do not be lead astray by doctrines that are opposed to Scripture.

9 (Continued) For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

Religions other than Christianity are summed in the reference to foods. In Judaism, which is the Writer's

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primary frame of reference, there were various rules, conditions, and prohibitions concerning foods, not only for the priests but also for the congregation of Israel. The same was and is true of other religions. In general, such rules reflect a “do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” approach that is intended to encourage faith and regulate practice where the soul has not experienced soul-saving faith and spiritual regeneration. An externally imposed regulation cannot effect a change in the soul. The regulation exists because the sinner’s soul naturally seeks that which is wrong, and therefore must have some externally imposed discipline to guide him to do that which is right. The heart (a metonymy for soul) that is changed by grace through faith, naturally and voluntarily seeks and does the things of God. Fifteen hundred years of Mosaic legislation, comprised of “do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” abundantly proves the point: these things did not profit those who were occupied with them; which is one of the themes of the epistle, that these things could not cleanse the conscience. Those who are still occupied with those things are not believers in Christ. That is the main point of v. 10. The believer “eats” at the altar of Jesus, enjoying Christ’s spiritual food, which is intimate spiritual communion with him. Those who do not believe in Christ as Savior have no part in the Christian’s altar, for they serve another altar. It needs to be said that Christians have no right to eat at, that is, to have worship and communion with, another form of religion; for our altar is Christ. Christianity, which is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, has made all other expressions of faith, even that of Judaism, null and void, along with their rules, regulations, and ordinances.

11 For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp.

12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

The distinctiveness of Christianity is seen in its faith, its beliefs, its practices, its Savior, and in relation to vv. 11ff, the means God used to effect salvation. The Writer’s concern is the competition Judaism has with his readers’ faith, but his words have a universal application. The reference is the day of atonement. The blood of the sacrifices was offered in the temple, but the carcasses of the animals were taken outside the camp and burned. Jesus has offered his blood, i.e., his propitiating death, in heaven, Hebrews 8-9. His offering was physically made in his body, and that offering was outside the rules and regulations and sacrifices of Judaism. Literally, symbolically, and spiritually, Jesus suffered and died for sin outside the gates of Judaism. The “gate” is an Old Testament symbol for the government of a city, like “city hall” is the modern symbol. Jesus took his body and blood outside the established religion of Judaism to make his offering for sin. In part this was because his offering was for all peoples. But in part it was because the salvation he made was and is separate from all other religions. Remember, the cross was not a religious symbol, it was a means of capital punishment. As a symbol the cross represented the world’s rejection of the Savior and salvation God offered to the world. Jesus died for sin outside everyone’s gate,⁴ because their ways and means to salvation were and are not God’s. Therefore, that he might separate and set apart his people from all other ways and means to God—falsely so-called—Jesus made his point by dying for man’s sin outside, away from, separate from, man’s religions. In the immediate context, the original readers of Hebrews *could not and dare not* go back inside the gate of Judaism.

13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

In the larger context of time and history since the crucifixion-resurrection-ascension, no believer dare mix any other religion, faith, or belief with the faith, doctrines, and practices of genuine Bible-based Christianity. Jesus suffered outside the camp and remains outside the camp. The Writer’s context is Judaism, but our larger context must be the world. Jesus is reproached by the world just because his way to heaven is not the world’s way. He is outside their camp; that is where his saved people must be, even though the way is filled

⁴ He also was literally crucified outside the walls of the Jerusalem of his day, north of the city.

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with trials and persecutions, and even death. We look to the reward; fellowship with Jesus in the here and now outside the camp of the world; eternal life in his presence after physical death, in the city which is to come, 11:10.

15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

The word "sacrifice" is not being used in the specific sense of death in exchange for forgiveness of sin. The whole burnt offering was a sacrifice of dedication or consecration to God. The sacrifices for thanksgiving were bloodless. The word "sacrifice" had a broader meaning of an offering for the purpose of worship. Both Jew and pagan experienced a culturally-impressed need to offer material sacrifices for the purpose of worship. Christianity has no such sacrifices. Some readers may be thinking of the Lord's Supper, or Communion, or as it is also known, the Eucharist. However, only in Roman Catholicism is this a continuing sacrifice, in their "Sacrifice of the Mass." In Bible-based Christianity the Lord's Supper or Communion is a remembrance of Jesus crucifixion and a reminder of his resurrection and soon return. Christianity has no physical sacrifices. In Christianity God must be worshiped in spirit and in truth. The sacrifice-worship we give is praise to God, the fruit of our lips (the allusion is Hosea 14:1-2), that is, words of praise and thanksgiving. "To his name" means praise and thanksgiving to God, given out of worship for who he is and thanksgiving for what he has done. Worship extends to good works performed toward those who are his people. It is a principle in Scripture that what is done to or for God's people is as though it was done to or for God. Indeed, when the believer exercises mercy and kindness toward both those within and those outside the camp, he is being just like his heavenly Father, who makes his rain to fall and his sun to shine on all beings, just because it is in his nature to be and do good. When the believer is like Christ, then he or she is honoring God; that is worship.

17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Submission to authority that has been set in place by God is commanded throughout Scripture. Paul and Peter make clear that even earthly authority is to be obeyed, for they are set in place by God for our good, not ill. Yet, one must also recognize that sin rules in the world, and earthly authority cannot be blindly nor absolutely obeyed. Obedience to earthly authority extends to the boundary of Scripture, and no further. The same principle applies to authority in the church. Obedience and submission are required, for the pastor and other church leaders obey Christ, knowing they must give him an account of their actions toward the souls placed in their care. Yet, obedience and submission extend only so far as these leaders are truly watching over the souls of Christ's people for their spiritual good. The Writer assumes the positive, and admonishes his readers in general to cooperate with their spiritual leaders, so their leaders may minister with joy. To act otherwise is unprofitable in that it would be to ignore the watch-care Jesus and the Spirit are exercising through their appointed leaders. There is probably a contextual tie with the argument in vv. 8-16. There were traveling teachers in the Writer's day, the ancient equivalent of today's Christianized books, videos, radio and TV programs, and various conferences and meetings. The Christian's primary obligation is to listen first to his or her pastor, and evaluate outside ministries in the light of his advice. He is the one who has been charged with the care of your soul.

18 Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.
19 But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

The Writer's request for prayer is natural in the community of the saints. However, it is the reasons by which he encourages their prayers for him that I find intriguing. In v. 18 he is saying that he is worthy of

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their prayers. In reference to his epistle, his sometimes harsh words have been those of one who keenly feels a responsibility for the welfare of their souls. In reference to his love for them he has fulfilled his duty and privilege. As concerns his personal Christianity he has lived by faith, as they themselves know, 10:34. He has not commended to their practice anything that he has not been diligent in requiring of himself. In all these things his conscience is clear of any accusation, guilt, hypocrisy, or guile. His request for prayer is not just that he might be able to visit them personally, although that is his primary concern. Rather, just as he has heretofore lived in "good conscience" he desires to continue to live "honorably," which must mean to continue to live according to the principles and precepts of a godly faith. The Writer has exhorted his readers to enter into God's rest and live in God's land according to God's rules. Can we doubt he asks prayer that he might continue to persevere in the same faith? Obvious also is that he does not expect his epistle to cause hard feelings between himself and his readers, but that they will accept his admonitions as good for their souls, and eagerly anticipate his arrival. That he asks prayer that he might be restored to them may indicate the letter was written while he was in prison waiting trial, 10:34. Since this was the condition of many Christian leaders, this does not necessarily mean the Writer was Paul. For example, Timothy, v. 23, had been imprisoned.

*20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,
21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

The closing prayer for blessing. God is our God of peace because Jesus has made peace between the sinner and God. He raised Jesus from the dead because the propitiation made by Jesus was all-sufficient to satisfy God's for man's crime of sin. That point is made with reference to the "blood of the everlasting covenant," by which the Writer means the new covenant made in Jesus propitiating death, which is all-sufficient to effect the sinner's redemption. Jesus is the great shepherd of the sheep. He is the One who watches over the souls in his care, to make them complete, thoroughly furnished to every good work. To place this in the context of the epistle would be to repeat what has been said in the commentary at 10:19-25. Jesus, through the Spirit, will work in the believer to accomplish his good works. The dedication and doxology are the Writer's personal worship of Jesus, and an invitation to his readers to join him in worship of their great Savior. Amen, so be it, an affirmation of the preceding.

22 And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.

The "exhortation" is the entire preceding epistle. To "bear with the word of exhortation" is an appeal to them to read, heed, and do. He has taught them doctrine and practice; what will they do with his words? The "few words" is appropriate humility from the Writer—he has not said all that might be said. To borrow from Job 12:2, he does not consider himself the great teacher, and his words the sum of all wisdom. Secondly, he has not written so much they cannot bear with it, or find it tedious, or too difficult to comprehend or put into action. The church's public reader might finish it within an hour, so it is not a long exhortation.

*23 Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.
24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.
25 Grace be with you all. Amen.*

The Timothy mentioned here is almost certainly the Timothy who was Paul's companion and helper. Thus he was well-known to them and his freedom would be welcome news. This is the only mention of Timothy as having been imprisoned, no doubt for his Christian profession. He and the Writer are in different places at the time the epistle was written. As we already know, the Writer was well-known to his readers, and sends greetings to the leadership and the congregation at large. The separate greetings do not mean the epistle

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was sent to one group over another, but is merely that simple protocol of courtesy that gives appropriate respect to leadership. He himself may have been one of the congregation's former leaders or founders. The Writer is either in Italy, or in the company of fellow saints who are from Italy. Perhaps both are in view, as the literal reading is "those who are from or of Italy." Perhaps the meaning is that the readers are in Italy, and the Writer is writing in another place, surrounded by friends of the readers who are themselves from Italy. Any of these meanings is possible. Hughes quotes the New English Bible as an appropriate translation, "Greetings to you from our Italian friends."⁵ The closing words are the simple prayer found also at the close of Titus (3:15), but also found in one form or another at the end of most of the New Testament books, e.g., Revelation 22:21. The prayer is not a meaningless "God be with you,"⁶ but a sincere recognition of the source of grace, God in Christ, and the desire that God supply grace to meet all needs. Amen.

⁵ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 594.

⁶ Corrupted into today's "good bye."

Appendix One: Salvation in the Old Testament

How were the Old Testament believers saved? Did the Old Testament believers lose their salvation with every fresh act of sin? Admittedly this is a difficult subject. My view is that when faith and repentance brought the necessary sacrifice, it was accepted by God by grace. Their salvation was, then, a salvation by God's grace, through personal faith on the part of the believer, expressed through the revealed means of salvation, the animal sacrifices. Every subsequent sacrifice after the initial act of saving faith was an expression of that prior saving faith.

A casual reading of the New Testament Scripture seems to give the sense that salvation was effective only after Jesus died and was resurrected. This particular view is so strong that many Christians believe the Old Testament believers could not go to heaven until after Christ's propitiation (and resurrection) paid for sins the Old Testament sacrifices only covered (which makes the Old Testament salvation of a lesser kind or quality than New Testament salvation). Christ's death on the cross did fully pay the spiritual penalty for sin, which is separation from God, by satisfying God's holiness and justice regarding the crime of man's sin. His physical death and subsequent resurrection indicated the penalty for the (judicial) guilt of sin had been fully paid. Since his resurrection, sinners who have faith that Christ died on their behalf, i.e., for their sins, have had their sins forgiven, their soul made spiritually alive to God (regenerated, born-again), and given eternal life.

What, then, was the spiritual state of believing sinners before Christ's death? Were Abel and Seth saved? What about Abraham or Moses; and what of those who had faith in the sacrifices they made under the Mosaic Law? Scripture gives every indication the sins of Old Testament believers in God as Savior were fully forgiven, and that their home since their personal physical death has been heaven. Hebrews 12:1 speaks of a "great cloud of witnesses," which, considering the historical relationship of the letter to the history of redemption, must refer primarily to the Old Testament believers. Hebrews 11 speaks of those Old Testament saints who "obtained a good testimony through faith." Hebrews 9:15 states that believers under the Mosaic covenant were redeemed by the propitiation made by Jesus. Jesus, Matthew 8:11, indicated Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were saved. Paul, Galatians 3, states that those who have faith are blessed with believing Abraham, a statement that includes those of faith who historically lived before Jesus. How, then, were they saved, what was the spiritual condition resulting from their salvation, and what was their state or location after physical death?

In the immediate context of their historical circumstances, the believers in the Old Testament were saved by having faith in the means God had given them as the way to salvation. Under Moses' Law, for example, this "content of faith" was to bring the proper sacrifice for sin, having faith in God's Word that the animal sacrifice, accompanied by repentance and confession, would cause God to forgive their sin. They had faith in what God said concerning the way of salvation. The believer's sin was imputed to the animal, and the animal received the penalty due sin, death, as the believer's substitute. This sacrifice was effective for the sins imputed to the substitute, and a new sacrifice—a fresh atonement—must be made for each new act of sin. Hebrews expresses this truth, noting that the sacrifices must be repeated every time one sinned. Why, then, were these sacrifices effective in bringing salvation? First, because they expressed the offeror's faith in the revealed way of salvation. Whether it was the sacrifice of Abel, or the sacrifice of the common Israelite under the Law of Moses, the sacrifice these believers offered expressed their faith in the way of salvation as revealed for their time in the history of redemption. Second, the sacrifices were effective to cover sin because by grace God accepted the animal as a suitable substitute for the sinner, a substitute to which the guilt of sin was imputed and the death due sin applied. Third, they represented, and therefore faith in them looked forward to, the death and resurrection of Christ. In all essential respects, by having faith in the animal sacrifice, the Old Testament believers were expressing faith in the complete remission of the guilt of sin that Jesus Christ would accomplish at his work on the cross. They did not know this—they did not see Christ in their animal sacrifices, but God accepted their faith in the historical means he had provided, as looking forward to his Son. Fourth, God had decreed in eternity past (Ephesians 1:4-7) that Christ's propitiation would be the basis for salvation in every age from Adam forward.

Jesus' death is the only foundation or basis for salvation both before and after his resurrection. The

certainty of God's purpose and plans makes the salvific benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection applicable to all in every age (era, dispensation, covenant) from Adam forward, who have faith in God as "my" Savior. Charles Ryrie has stated it thus, "the *basis* of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations" (C. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995, p. 123). Salvation, as viewed by God, is always by grace through faith. God chose to teach that truth through a progressive revelation of himself and his moral laws, culminating in the death of the Son on the cross. The Old Testament believers were saved by the merits of Christ through their faith in the content of faith God had delivered to them. Believers today are saved in the same way, by Christ's merits through faith in the content of faith God has delivered "in Son" (Hebrews 1:1).

That this is a Scriptural view of salvation in the Old Testament proceeds from the nature of salvation. There must be one way of salvation: the application of the merits of Christ by God's grace through the means of personal faith. Making an animal sacrifice didn't save a person, any more than acknowledging Christ died for sinners saves a person today. The *means* of salvation, whether under the Law or under the Gospel, is faith in God's revealed way of salvation. Theologically this is known as the content of faith. Under the Law the content of faith was to bring the proper animal sacrifice, by faith, with repentance and confession, for each act of sin. Under the gospel the content of faith is Jesus as the only propitiation, received by faith, with repentance and confession for one's sins. But, this is not what saves. Faith is the means by which salvation is applied to the soul. What saves is the propitiating death of Christ. Under the Law, personal faith expressed through the content of faith (the animal sacrifices) was accepted as faith in the (as yet unseen and unknown) sacrifice of Christ: his propitiation is what gave saving efficiency to the believer's faith as expressed through the sacrifices. The death of Christ is the basis of salvation under the Law and under the Gospel. The efficacy of the historical act of the crucifixion encompasses eternity past to eternity future, because God decreed the propitiation as the only basis for salvation. From God's point of view, because it was decreed its accomplishment was certain. Therefore, every believer in any age is saved because the decree of God in eternity past made the historical act of Christ (his propitiation) the only basis for salvation.

What was the spiritual condition resulting from the saving faith of the Old Testament saints? They were wholly and completely saved from the guilt and penalty of sin. They were sealed into their saved state by the work of the Holy Spirit. If the basis for salvation is the death of Christ for every person saved from Adam forward, then the salvation experienced by the Old Testament believer is the same salvation experienced by the believer under the Gospel. By this I mean that those Old Testament believers who appropriately responded to the revealed content of faith, were fully and completely saved by grace through faith. If the basis for salvation is the death of Christ for every person saved from Adam forward, then every saved person is sealed and secured in their salvation by the Holy Spirit. (Sealing is not the same as indwelling. Sealing is a work of the Spirit in the saved soul to secure his or her salvation and identify that soul as belonging to God. Indwelling is the Spirit himself resident in the believer's soul.)

However, certain spiritual benefits accruing from salvation in New Testament times were not applied to the Old Testament believers. In his conversation with Nicodemus, John 3, Jesus presented a spiritual truth that seemed unknown to Nicodemus. That truth was spiritual regeneration, stated as "You must be born again." In Acts, Luke also presents a new spiritual truth, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Luke, Paul, and Jesus indicate that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was a consequence of Jesus' historical death and resurrection (John 14:16, 17; 20:22; Acts 2:4; 10:44-47; Romans 8:11; I Corinthians 6:19). The conclusion I have drawn from these scriptures is that the Old Testament saints did not experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (The indwelling of the Spirit seems intended to incorporate New Testament believers into a spiritual body of people that are organically united in Christ, are joint-heirs with Christ, and are always present with him.) The absence of the indwelling Spirit may have affected their deliverance from the power of sin. More bluntly, did they experience spiritual regeneration if the Spirit was not indwelling? The new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10-12; 10:15-17, to be made in Christ's propitiation, is a covenant promising spiritual regeneration. It would seem that under the old Covenant, contained in the Mosaic Law, the believer did not experience the regeneration promised in the new covenant. For, if it had been received under the old, it would not have been promised in the new. I believe the Spirit positively assisted and supported their faith, for no one comes to faith unless God draws him or her, and no one remains faithful

unless kept by God. But spiritual regeneration and the Spirit's indwelling waited for those believers who would be saved under the new covenant made in the death and resurrection of Christ. (This was another way in which Christ was to have the preeminence in salvation history.) The sins of the Old Testament believers were forgiven on the basis of their faith, although certain spiritual benefits were not given to them.

What was the state or location of the Old Testament saints after physical death? Jesus told the believing thief on the cross that when he died that day, he would go to paradise. This was a term familiar to all Jews as the place where faithful Abraham, and all who had like faith, went after death. The saved thief was told that he would be "with Jesus" in paradise. During his ministry, Jesus described two places where souls go after physical death: hell, or heaven (Matthew 5:12; 7:21; cf. Acts 7:55; Philippians 3:20). When he died on the cross, Jesus went to heaven, and the saved thief went with him. This agrees with Paul's assertion that to be absent from the body, physical death, was to be present with the Lord. Hebrews 11:10 says that Abraham looked forward to being in God's presence. I believe the teaching of Scripture is that when an Old Testament believer died, he went to heaven. The salvation of the Old Testament saints was as genuine as the salvation of the New Testament saints. There was no requirement for the Old Testament saints to wait for Jesus to die before they could go to heaven. (Ephesians 4:8-10 does not mean that Christ went to some sort of "believer's compartment" in hell to gather the Old Testament believers and take them to heaven, but that Christ ascended in triumph to heaven. He descended to earth at his incarnation and ascended to heaven at his exaltation.)

Did every Old Testament person who performed an act of sacrifice experience salvation? No. Just as it is today, in the Old Testament times a person could go through the routine of religious exercises without being saved. A person under the Law could bring a sacrifice as a correct response required by religious ritual, but without saving faith. Sinners under the Gospel do the same: they get baptized, join a church, witness for Christ, teach a Sunday School, or engage in any number of religious activities, and they may believe they are sinners and believe Jesus is the Savior, without having ever placed saving faith in Jesus Christ as "my" Savior. But the person under the Gospel who places his or her faith in Jesus Christ as "my" Savior, that person has exercised saving faith. Therefore, under the Law, according to the election made by God (Ephesians 1:4), there would come a time when a sinner would offer a sacrifice in full and complete faith in God's testimony that an animal sacrifice was the way his sin would be forgiven and a relationship established with God. By grace he came to view God by faith as "my" Savior, expressed that faith through the revealed content of faith, the animal sacrifices, and by grace through faith was saved.

So, why was there a continuing sacrifice for sins? It was not because the Old Testament believer lost his or her salvation with each new act of sin. The basis for salvation in every age is the death of Christ. It follows, then, that the kind or quality of salvation in every age must be the same (although certain spiritual benefits may be specific to a particular age). Every believer, from Adam forward, is secured in his or her salvation by the merits of Christ and the sealing work of the Holy Spirit. There are two main reasons why the sacrifices continued. First, the Old Testament sacrifices, from Adam to Christ, were limited in their efficacy so that Christ, in his historical act of propitiation, would have the preeminence as the one Redeemer and one Mediator between God and man, who permanently eliminated the guilt and penalty of all the believer's past, present, and future sins. The Old Testament sacrifices, then, were designedly limited in efficacy to that act of sin for which they were offered, so that Christ would have the preeminence as the only Savior. What practical purpose, then, was served by having the saved Old Testament believer continue to make sacrifices after his or her salvation? Many answers could be given, such as a conscious act of worship, or an act of praise and remembrance for salvation. One obvious purpose was to force recognition that a better sacrifice was required that would fully eliminate the need for further sacrifice; and this is part of the Hebrews Writer's argument. There was, however, another reason.

Stepping away from Hebrews for a moment, one must consider that no believer is fully aware of all his sins, although he is morally accountable for each sin. If, in the New Testament, a believer fails to be aware of some particular sin, and thus fails to confess and repent of that sin (1 John 1:9) is he penalized for that lack of confession and repentance? Must Christ make another sacrifice? No. Christ's propitiation paid the penalty for all the believer's sins, past, present, and future, so another sacrifice is not needed. What is at issue is fellowship with God, which is injured by an act of sin, and for which, in the New Testament, one must apply the merits of Christ's propitiation through the action of confession and repentance for that sin. I am

speaking of that remedy for provided for the believer in 1 John 1:9. This raises the question, is the New Testament believer expected to be aware of all his or her sins? One might as well chant 1 John 1:9 throughout day and night to cover all possible instances of sinning. It is true the Spirit gives conviction of sin, so that one may repent and confess. However, there must be some happy mean between uninterrupted confession for every sin and confession for those sins one becomes aware of through his (or her) own conscience or by conviction from the Spirit. The biblical answer is that while a believer is morally accountable for every sin, God in grace forgives even those sins the believer does not remember to confess (or is too spiritually immature to recognize), because salvation has secured an eternal relationship between the believer and God. So, too, with the Old Testament saints. A believer was required to bring a sacrifice for each act of sin after his or her salvation, because sin injures the believer's fellowship with God. But perfect memory and perfect response to conviction are not possible in mortal men. Just as in these New Testament times, in the Old Testament God in grace forgave a believer for sins when he failed to bring a sacrifice. Salvation is secured by the merits of Christ; fellowship is maintained by conviction and confession of sins; both are dependent on the grace of God that brings salvation and forgives sin.

The continual offering of sacrifices (subsequent to salvation) by the individual believer operated in the same manner 1 John 1:9 operates for Christians: maintenance of fellowship. The Old Testament soul was saved by grace through faith in the revealed way of salvation. Subsequent fellowship with God was maintained by a fresh application of the atonement, through an appropriate sacrifice for acts of sin, accompanied by faith, confession, and repentance. How much of this theology was understood by the average Old Testament believer (the same may be asked of the New Testament believer's grasp of Christ's propitiation), is difficult to say. However, it is remarkable that the Old Testament Scripture seldom shows a believer making a sacrifice, but constantly upbraids the false professor for his formal and hypocritical sacrifices. The only acceptable sacrifice is the one offered in faith, and faith is the hand of the soul reaching out to receive God's gift of salvation. Since Old Testament believers are seldom shown making a sacrifice, perhaps it is meant to teach us that they were saved by grace through faith. The Christian is saved by grace through faith, and fellowship is maintained by a fresh application of the merits of Christ's propitiation to each act of sin, made by faith, confession, and repentance. The limitation of the Old Testament animal sacrifices was that (for the believer) they must continue to be offered for acts of sin subsequent to salvation, whereas the sacrifice of Christ was once for all and is remembered, not offered, for acts of sin subsequent to salvation. In all things Christ has the preeminence. Christ's preeminence is the heart of the argument in Hebrews: the Old Testament sacrifice has been fulfilled and replaced by the full propitiation made by Christ. His once for all sacrifice is all that is needed to save a soul and maintain the soul in fellowship with God.

The conclusion as to the salvation of the Old Testament saints is that the kind or quality of the their salvation was the same as the New Testament saints's salvation. Some spiritual benefits, such as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, were not part of Old Testament salvation, but they were as secured in their salvation by the Holy Spirit's sealing as is the New Testament believer. The sacrifices were designedly limited in efficacy so that Christ's propitiation when accomplished in history would have the preeminence in the salvation of every sinner from Adam forward. The sacrifices that believers continued to offer were intended as a kind of "fellowship maintenance," similar to the New Testament believer's use of 1 John 1:9. The Old Testament believer went to heaven at his personal physical death, where he waits for the second advent and kingdom of Messiah.

Appendix 2: The Meaning of the term "heart" as used metaphorically in Scripture

Short definition: the person, who you are. Used for volition, conscience, moral/spiritual state, behavior.

Full definition: The heart is a term in Scripture that refers to the personality: the seat of moral reflection, choice of the will, and pattern of behavior. The term includes all the mental processes, feelings, affections, and emotions, along with the internal motivations, leading to one's decisions and responses to life situations.

Examples: (KJV: 830 occurrences of the English word "heart"; NJKV: 832; NIV: 570; HCSB: 527; ASV: 863).

Genesis 6:5-6, Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his *heart* was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His *heart*. (Genesis 6:5 is the first use of this word in Scripture.)

Exodus 7:13, And Pharaoh's *heart* grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

Nehemiah 2:12, I told no one what my God had put in my *heart* to do at Jerusalem.

Psalms 9:1, I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole *heart*; I will tell of all Your marvelous works.

Psalms 10:11, [The wicked person] has said in his *heart*, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see."

Psalms 51:10, 17, Create in me a clean *heart*, O God ... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite *heart*—these, O God, You will not despise.

Proverbs 3:1, My son, do not forget my law, but let your *heart* keep my commands;

S. of Songs 4:9, You have ravished my *heart*, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my *heart* with one look of your eyes.

Jeremiah 17:9-10, "The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the *heart*, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.

Romans 10:10, For with the *heart* one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:11, O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our *heart* is wide open.

Galatians 6:9, And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose *heart*.

Hebrews 4:12, For the word of God is ... a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the *heart*.

Hebrews 10:22, let us draw near with a true *heart*.

1 John 3:20-21, For if our *heart* condemns us, God is greater than our *heart*, and knows all things. Beloved, if our *heart* does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

Appendix 3: Letter of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan

Pliny to Trajan: "I have never been present at an examination of Christians. So, I do not know the nature or the extent of the punishments usually dealt out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how far it should be carried . . . For the moment this is the line I have taken with all persons brought before me on the charge of being Christians. I have asked them in person if they are Christians; if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and a third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for punishment; for whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought to be punished. There have been others similarly fanatical who are Roman citizens; I have entered them on the list of persons to be sent to Rome for punishment. . . . I considered that I should dismiss any who denied that they were or ever had been Christians, once they had repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense to your statue (which I had ordered to be brought into court for this purpose along with images of the gods), and furthermore had cursed the name of Christ. Real Christians (I understand) can never be induced to do these things. . . . They declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to refuse to return a deposit upon demand. After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and later to take food of an ordinary harmless kind. But they had in fact given this up since my edict, issued on your instructions which banned all political societies. This made me decide it was all the more necessary to extract the truth from two slave women (whom they call 'deaconesses') by torture. I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths . . . I have therefore postponed any further examination and hastened to consult you."

Trajan's response: "You have followed the right course of procedure, my dear Pliny, in your examination of the cases of persons charged with being Christians. For it is impossible to lay down a general rule to a fixed formula. These people must not be hunted out. But if they are brought before you and the charge against them is proved true, they must be punished. But in the case of anyone who denies that he is a Christian, and makes it clear that he is not, by offering prayers to our gods, he is to be pardoned as a result of his repentance—however suspect his conduct may have been in the past. But pamphlets circulated anonymously must play no part in any accusation. They create the worst precedent, and are quite out of keeping with the spirit of our age."

Appendix 4

Meaning of the Term "the Day" in the New Testament

The term "the day" in a general use refers to a visitation from God, an event always associated with some form of judgment. The specific use intended by term, "the day" must be judged in each use by its specific context. "The day" in prophetic use in the New Testament can refer to four different events.

- Judgment Seat of Christ:
 - Verses where the term is used
 - John 6:39
 - 1 Corinthians 1:8
 - 1 Corinthians 3:13
 - 1 Corinthians 5:5
 - Philippians 1:6
 - Philippians 2:16
 - 1 Thessalonians 3:13
 - 1 Timothy 6:14
 - Titus 2:13
 - 1 Peter 1:13
 - Associated verses
 - 1 Corinthians 15:51
 - 2 Corinthians 5:10
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
 - Revelation 20:4
- Tribulation
 - Verses where the term is used
 - Acts 2:20
 - Luke 17:30 (specifically the second advent)
 - Romans 2:5 (see below also)
 - Romans 2:16 (see below also)
 - 1 Thessalonians 5
 - Revelation 6:17
 - Associated verses
 - Revelation 6-19
- Millennial Kingdom
 - Verses where the term is used
 - Matthew 7:22
 - Associated verses
 - Revelation 20:4-6
- Great White Throne Judgment of the Unsaved
 - Verses where the term is used
 - Romans 2:5
 - Romans 2:16
 - 2 Peter 2:9
 - 2 Peter 3:12
 - Jude 6
 - Associated verses
 - Revelation 20:10-15

Although there may be some disagreement with my identification of the particular event the primary references refer to, these interpretations are consistent with a literal hermeneutic. I want to deal specifically with three verses.

Matthew 7:22. This use of "that day" comes amidst the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon served two causes. One, it is the King stating the requirements for entering the Davidic-Messianic Kingdom. The key

verse in this respect is 5:20, the righteousness of the person who enters the Kingdom must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. In the material, legalistic sense this was impossible. Spiritually, however, was another matter. The requirement to enter the Kingdom was saved by grace through personal faith in the Messianic King. The second cause served in the Sermon is to proclaim the ethical requirements for kingdom living. These ethical requirements define life in the kingdom, and are applicable to the current mystery form of the kingdom, the church age. In relation to our discussion, 7:21 is a warning that faith, not works, gets one into the kingdom. In that context v. 22 probably refers to the inauguration of the kingdom at the second advent, and may coordinate with 25:31-46. Certainly the GWT judgment cannot be excluded.

In 1 Corinthians 1:8, the meaning is established by the context, 1:7, "the Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is a reference to the revealing of the Lord, which could be the second advent, or could be the rapture, but not the GWT judgment. The point in context is a sanctified life while one is waiting for the return of the Lord—there is no judgment in the passage, other than Paul's desire for the Corinthians to be found blameless when Christ returns, which return is his "revelation" or revealing.

In Philippians 1:6 the "day of Christ" is the day he returns, and nothing else is proved by this verse. A likely parallel is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. A judgment is implied, but the nature of that judgment is not explained. The Philippians 1:6 passage raises a few questions. Since Paul is writing to the "saints" he is writing to living individuals. He states Jesus will complete his good work in those living saints, "until the day of Jesus Christ." The point of the passage is that the God's work in the soul is part the believer's responsibility and part God's, and that God's grace will see the work of salvation to its completion in the believer. Paul has confidence in the Philippian church because he has confidence in God. The point is not judgment but consummation. Their salvation will be consummated in that day when Christ is exalted and glorified in his people, which is the day of his return. Since Paul is addressing individual living believers, his point must have reference to the resurrection and reward of these believers. The good work of God, their salvation, will not be complete until they are resurrected (because then the body will be transformed and glorified.) The "day of our Lord Jesus Christ" looks forward to his return and the believer's resurrection.

Appendix 5: Capital Punishment Under Moses' Law

Capital crimes can be grouped under three headings.

Physically or spiritually taking a life:

1. Murder Exodus 21:12,14 (20?); Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:16-28; Deuteronomy 19:11, 12
2. Kidnaping Exodus 21:16
(for slavery)
3. Negligent death Exodus 21:28-29 (but see v. 30)
4. False Prophecy, Witchcraft Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 13

Denial of God or rebellion:

5. Smiting/
Cursing a Parent Exodus 21:15; Leviticus 20:9
6. Idolatry Exodus 22:20; Leviticus 20:2
7. Blasphemy Leviticus 24:16; Deuteronomy 17:1-7
8. Sabbath Profaning Exodus 35:2
9. Rebel against priestly authority Deuteronomy 17:8-13
10. Stubborn, rebellious son Deuteronomy 21:18-21

Mockery of marriage relationship:

11. Adultery Leviticus 20:10
(sex between man & woman both married to others)
12. Rape of a betrothed woman Deuteronomy 22:23-27
13. Ante-connubial sex (man with father's wife; man with daughter-in-law; man marries mother & daughter; unmarried man with married woman) Leviticus 20:11-12, 14; Deuteronomy 22:22
14. Homosexual intercourse Leviticus 20:13 (cf. Romans 1:26-27)
15. Sex with an animal Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 20:15-16
16. Incest Leviticus 20:11, 12, 14
17. Woman not a virgin at marriage Deuteronomy 22:13

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