

SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE NEW COVENANT

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF HEBREWS

PERSEVERE IN FAITH FOCUSED ON JESUS CHRIST, THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT, AS SUPREME, SUPERIOR AND SUFFICIENT

Paul Apple (September 2020)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

Heb. 3:1 -- "*Consider Jesus*"

Heb. 10:23 -- "*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;*"

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BACKGROUND NOTES

David Malick:

Message Statement: Because Christ Is Greater In His Person Than Those Of The Old Mosaic Covenant (Angels, Moses & Aaron) And Greater In His Ministry Than Those Of The Levitical Priesthood, The Writer Urges His Readers Not To Persist In Their Sinful Identification With Judaism But To Persevere In Faithfulness Toward Jesus Knowing That God Will Honor Them When He Returns To Fulfill His Promises.

Outline:

I. PROLOGUE--THE SUPERIOR REVELATION OF GOD'S SON: God's Son is qualified to be the superior One through whom God Spoke his final word being revelation *from* God, the wisdom of God who is creator and sustainer of all things, the revealer of God, and the one who after making purification for sin was exalted above the angels to sit in honor as ruler over all things **1:1-4**

II. A MOVEMENT TO THE HEART OF THE OLD COVENANT--CHRIST IS GREATER IN HIS PERSON AND HIS MINISTRY THAN THE OLD COVENANT: The writer exhorts his readers to not turn away from Christ because He is greater in His person than those of the old Mosaic covenant (angels, Moses, & Aaron) and greater in his priestly ministry than the Levitical priesthood (being the mediator of a better covenant, the source of eternal salvation and superseding the inadequate Mosaic provisions for sin) **1:5--10:18**

III. EXHORTATIONS IN VIEW OF THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST AND HIS MINISTRY TO THE OLD COVENANT: In view of the superiority of Christ and His ministry when compared to that of the Old Covenant, the writer urges his readers not to persist in sin but to persevere in faithfulness to God by loving one another, being personally pure, obeying their leaders and leaving Judaism, because the past shows that God honors such faithfulness and will honor them when He returns to fulfill His promises **10:19--13:21**

IV. CONCLUSION--AN APPENDED PERSONAL NOTE: The writer closes his letter by urging his readers to listen to this letter of exhortation, passing on information about Timothy's release and his plans to visit them, conveying greetings to all in the church and praying that God's grace would be with them **13:22-25**

J. Sidlow Baxter: CHRIST THE "NEW AND LIVING WAY

1. JESUS - THE NEW AND "BETTER "DELIVERER (Heb 1-7).

Jesus the God-Man - better than angels	(Heb 1:1-2:18).
Jesus the new Apostle - better than Moses	(Heb 3:1-19)
Jesus the new Leader - better than Joshua	(Heb 4:1-13).
Jesus the new priest - better than Aaron	(Heb 4:14-7).

2. CALVARY - THE NEW AND "BETTER" COVENANT (Heb 8:1-10:18)

New covenant has better promises	(Heb 8:6-13).
And it opens up a better sanctuary	(Heb 9:1-14).

And is sealed by a better sacrifice (Heb 9:15-28).
And it achieves far better results (Heb 10:1-18).

3. FAITH - THE TRUE AND "BETTER" PRINCIPLE (Heb 10:19-13).

Faith the true response to these "better" things (Heb 10:19-39)
It has always been vindicated as such: examples (Heb 11:1-40).
Is now to endure, patiently looking to Jesus (Heb 12:1-13).
Is to express itself in practical sanctity (Heb 12:14-13:21).
Parting words (Heb 13:22-25).

John Lawrence:

I. Christ Alone Qualifies In His Person to Attempt Salvation, (1:1–4:13)

The Son: (Eternal, 1:1-3) ... Christ ... Prophet

- A. Greater than the Prophets (1:1-3)
- B. Greater than the Angels (1:4–2:18)
- C. Greater than Moses (Ch. 3)
- D. Greater than Joshua (4:1-13)

II. Christ Alone Qualifies In His Work to Provide Salvation (4:14–10:18)

The Savior: (Perfect, 7:24-28) ... Jesus ... Priest

- A. The High Priest (4:14–7:28) THE SERVICE: “*After the order of Melchisedek*”
- B. The Tabernacle (8:1–9:11) THE SANCTUARY: “*Not made with hands*”
- C. The Sacrifice (9:12–10:18) THE SACRIFICE: “Once for all”

III. Christ Alone Qualifies In His Position to Effect Salvation (10:19–13:25)

The Shepherd (Great): (13:20) ... The Lord ... King

Here is the believer’s walk, “by a new and living way” in relation to Christ’s position:

- A. Faith (10:19–11:40)
- B. Hope (Ch. 12)
- C. Love (Ch. 13)

<https://bible.org/article/five-warnings-hebrews>

Everett F. Harrison: The Epistle to the Hebrews confronts the student with a writing quite unlike anything in the New Testament. Years ago **Franz Delitzsch** wrote, “It is like the great Melchizedek of sacred story, of which its central portion treats. Like him it marches forth in lonely, royal, and sacerdotal dignity, and like him . . . we know not whence it cometh or whither it goeth.” The quotation calls attention to two of the most pressing problems connected with the study of the epistle, that of **authorship** and **destination**. . . some students have advanced the suggestion that the work is really a sermon, or even a combination of sermons, now made available in permanent form.

Don Anderson: There are 3 THINGS that will help us greatly in our comprehension of the message to the Book of Hebrews:

1. The folks who are receiving this letter are of Jewish nationality. This explains much of the content and the many references to the Old Testament and the sacrificial system

throughout the book.

2. The book is written to genuine believers so the message is for Christians.

3. The group that is receiving the letter are contemplating the possibility of going back to Judaism, away from Christ, because of the persecution and suffering they have experienced.

Parunak: So we have an epistle by a highly cultured Greek, written to a local assembly of predominantly Jewish Christians, probably in Rome around AD 60. Recent pressures against believing Jews are tempting them to merge into the unbelieving Jewish community and hide their distinctive beliefs. The letter is written to urge them to take their stand with their Lord “outside the camp” of Israel, leaving the shadows embraced by conventional Judaism and cleaving to the reality of the crucified and risen Messiah.

George H. Guthrie: Of all the writings of the New Testament, none is more saturated with overt references to the Old Testament. The author so filled his discourse with Old Testament thoughts and passages that they permeate every chapter. Thirty-five quotations from a Greek translation of the Old Testament and thirty-four allusions work to support the development of Hebrews’ argument. In addition, the writer offers nineteen summaries of Old Testament material, and thirteen times he mentions an Old Testament name or topic, often without reference to a specific context.

E. Schuyler English: To read Hebrews is to breathe the atmosphere of heaven itself. To study it is to partake of spiritual meat. To abide in its teachings is to be from immaturity to maturity in the knowledge of truth and of Jesus Christ Himself.

Matthew Capps: The anonymous book of Hebrews is a unique contribution to the canon of Scripture. Like many other New Testament letters, Hebrews begins without an introduction, though it closes with blessings and greetings (**Heb. 13:23–24**). The author sheds light on the form of Hebrews by referring to his writing as a “*word of exhortation*” (**Heb. 13:22**). Hebrews is written in a pastoral voice with many practical exhortations, leading many to consider it a single sermon or sermon-like discourse, addressed to converts from Judaism under pressure to revert to Jewish faith.

Hebrews is also considered one of the most beautifully written and stylistically polished books of the New Testament, a literary masterpiece. The author is a master of rhetorical debate and persuasion. He also demonstrates his profound theological prowess with his use of imagery, metaphor, allusion, Old Testament analogy, and typology. Throughout his exposition and exhortation, the author weaves a beautiful tapestry of biblical theology with the aim of exalting the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Ray Stedman: “*the just shall live by faith*” -- When Hebrews talks about faith, therefore, it must help us to see the object of faith, because our faith will be strong if we believe and understand that the object of our faith is strong. That is why this is the most Christ-centered book in the New Testament. It focuses on Jesus Christ: therefore, it is one of the greatest books for hours of

discouragement, defeat, or depression, because it emphasizes the character and the qualities of Jesus Christ. If we see him as he is, we cannot help but be strong in faith.

MacArthur: The author of Hebrews is unknown. Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Luke, Philip, Priscilla, Aquila, and Clement of Rome have been suggested by different scholars, but the epistle's vocabulary, style, and various literary characteristics do not clearly support any particular claim. It is significant that the writer includes himself among those people who had received confirmation of Christ's message from others (**2:3**). That would seem to rule out someone like Paul who claimed that he had received such confirmation directly from God and not from men (**Gal. 1:12**). Whoever the author was, he preferred citing OT references from the Greek OT (LXX) rather than from the Hebrew text. Even the early church expressed various opinions on authorship, and current scholarship admits the puzzle still has no solution. Therefore, it seems best to accept the epistle's anonymity. Ultimately, of course, the author was the Holy Spirit (**2 Pet. 1:21**). . .

Emphases on the Levitical priesthood and on sacrifices, as well as the absence of any reference to the Gentiles, support the conclusion that a community of Hebrews was the recipient of the epistle. Although these Hebrews were primarily converts to Christ, there were probably a number of unbelievers in their midst, who were attracted by the message of salvation, but who had not yet made a full commitment of faith in Christ. One thing is clear from the contents of the epistle: the community of Hebrews was facing the possibility of intensified persecution (**10:32–39; 12:4**). As they confronted this possibility, the Hebrews were tempted to cast aside any identification with Christ. They may have considered demoting Christ from God's Son to a mere angel. Such a precedent had already been set in the Qumran community of messianic Jews living near the Dead Sea. They had dropped out of society, established a religious commune, and included the worship of angels in their brand of reformed Judaism. The Qumran community had even gone so far as to claim that the angel Michael was higher in status than the coming Messiah. These kinds of doctrinal aberrations could explain the emphasis in Hebrews chapter one on the superiority of Christ over the angels.

Chuck Swindoll: The strongly Jewish character of the letter to the Hebrews helps to narrow down its date of composition, most likely AD 64–69. Significantly, the book makes no reference to the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem in AD 70, and the author wrote as if the sacrificial system were still in existence (**Hebrews 10:1–2, 11**). With its myriad references to Hebrew customs and the Old Testament, the book was likely sent to a Jewish Christian community.

Daniel Wallace: it is our tentative conclusion that Barnabas (as senior author), together with Apollos, wrote to a house-church somewhere in the Lycus Valley. This house-church had been heavily influenced by Judaizers and had consequently split off from the main body of believers (cf. **10:25; 13:17**). . .

Throughout the epistle, however, the writer(s) punctuate(s) the argument with warnings to the readers. After all, this letter is not a mere piece of academia: it is written to a Jewish house-church which is in danger of defection from the gospel of grace. In many respects, then, these warnings are what the author(s) wish(es) to get to; they are his climax, application. Because of the wording of these warnings, coupled with the author's use of Galatians and our historical

reconstruction, it seems evident that the warnings are not dealing with loss of reward (contra Zane Hodges in BKC), but are addressing the possibility of not obtaining a professed salvation.

Lenski: In this body of Jewish Christians a movement is under way to give up Christianity and to go back to their former Judaism. This movement has as yet not gained much momentum, no members have actually apostatized, the leaders still stand firm. This body of Jewish Christians has suffered some persecution for sympathizing with brethren who are of their own body but were imprisoned (10:32-34), yet none of the readers were themselves imprisoned at that time, and none of them had lost their lives by martyrdom (12:4). This entire body of Jewish Christians had remained true during the trying times of the past; but something had now occurred which led a number of them to think that it would be a great advantage to them to go back to their old Judaism. It is this incipient defection which calls forth this letter. Its one object is to counteract this dangerous movement. This letter is convincing in the attainment of this object. Every paragraph strikes home.

Stedman: From **Hebrews 1:1 to 10:18**, Jesus Christ is compared to a number of other leaders and systems and religious values in which recipients of this letter once trusted. The contrast between Christ and these other people and systems is presented much like an athletic contest or an elimination match where contestants vie for a championship. Again and again, a challenger rises to confront the hero, Jesus Christ, and one after another, the challenger is vanquished. Again and again, the hero emerges triumphant, superior to all comers. Throughout this letter, Christ, the object of our faith, is compared with all the lesser things in which people place their faith – and every challenger is found wanting. Christ alone is supreme.

Irving Jensen: Hebrews has been referred to as the fifth gospel because it tells of Jesus' finished work on earth and His continuing work in heaven. There is no other book in the New Testament that helps us to understand the present ministry of Christ as does the book of Hebrews. Many Christians know little about Christ's present work for His people. Hebrews shows us that just as God led the Israelites from Egypt through the barren wilderness, protecting them from danger, supplying all their needs, teaching them, training them, and eventually bringing them into the rich land of Canaan, so Christ is at this present time helping His children, by intercession, inspiration, instruction, and indwelling, to enter into the spiritual rest land of abundant living, a taste of the heavenly glories to come.

Hebrews is often compared with Romans. Hebrews presents the Person of salvation; Romans presents the way of salvation. Hebrews focuses on the ceremonial law of the Old Testament; Romans, on the moral law of all time. "Romans moves from law to grace, and Hebrews, from shadow to substance." (John Phillips)

Robert W. Ross: No other New Testament epistle so clearly answers the "why" of the sacrifice of Christ, and of the redemption offered through this sacrifice. No other New Testament epistle so clearly links the twofold ministry of Christ as the eternal Son on God and the suffering Son of Man. Sin, guilt, atonement, and forgiveness are more fully comprehended through the Hebrews epistle. This writing also helps the readers gain a better understanding of Old Testament truths or incidents. Also, the difference between Judaism and Christianity becomes clear in the

teaching of the Hebrews epistle. . .

The thesis of the writer of Hebrews seems to be captured in two main ideas, which are explained and illustrated in the logic of the argument. The first idea is expressed in the word “*consider*,” used in **3:1** and **12:3**. In each instance the admonition is to *consider Christ*. . . the readers are led to “*consider him*” in his priesthood and sacrifice. . . The second idea is found in the word “*exhortation*,” with its companion verb, “*I exhort*” (**13:22**). . . The supporting argument to this two-fold or two-part theme is then built up by the Christianity-superior-over-Judaism argument to which the exhortation is directed.

A. M. Stibbs: The writer’s purpose, therefore, is to make his readers fully aware, first, of the amazing revelation and salvation given by God to men in Christ; secondly, of the true heavenly and eternal character of the blessings thus freely offered to the appropriation of faith; thirdly, of the place of suffering and patient endurance by faith in the present earthly pathway to the goal of God’s purpose, as shown in the experience and work of the Captain of our salvation, and in God’s discipline of all His children; fourthly, of the awful judgment which must befall any who, knowing all this, reject it. Having striven to make them aware of these things, his complementary purpose is to stir them to act accordingly. These purposes are pursued throughout the Epistle by the use in turn of reasoned exposition, challenging exhortation and solemn warning.

Hampton Keathley: Evidently there was some confusion about who Christ was with the danger being that angels were being assigned an equal or higher status than Christ. Along with this was the inclination to abandon Christ and return to the Mosaic law and the Levitical priesthood. The purpose of the author of Hebrews is to establish Christ’s preeminence and His replacement of the Mosaic law and turn his audience back to faith in Him and Him alone. On the basis of the doctrine imparted, the author of Hebrews expects to inspire his readers to a response of faith in Christ as their savior and to a life of purity.

William R. Newell: The great object of Hebrews, then, is to set before these believers’ eyes, Christ, the Son of God; the Son of Man; the Great High Priest in Heaven; and to cause them constantly to occupy their thought and worship with God, into Whose presence Christ by His blood has brought them.

John Calvin: There is, indeed, no book in Holy Scripture which speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, which so highly exalts the virtue and dignity of that only true sacrifice which He offered by His death, which so abundantly deals with the use of ceremonies as well as their abrogation, and, in a word, so fully explains that Christ is the end of the Law. Let us therefore not allow the Church of God or ourselves to be deprived of so great a benefit, but firmly defend the possession of it.

William Barclay: This is the most sonorous piece of Greek in the whole New Testament. It is a passage that any classical Greek orator would have been proud to write. The writer of Hebrews has brought to it every artifice of word and rhythm that the beautiful and flexible Greek language could provide. . . The writer to the Hebrews felt that, since he was going to speak of the supreme

revelation of God to men, he must clothe his thought in the noblest language that it was possible to find.

There is something of interest even here. The man who wrote this letter must have been trained in Greek oratory. When he became a Christian he did not throw his training away. He used the talent he had in the service of Jesus Christ. . .

Albert Barnes: The general purpose of this Epistle is, to preserve those to whom it was sent from the danger of apostasy. Their danger on this subject did not arise so much from persecution, as from the circumstances that were fitted to attract them again to the Jewish religion. The temple, it is supposed, and indeed it is evident, was still standing. The morning and evening sacrifice was still offered. The splendid rites of that imposing religion were still observed. The authority of the law was undisputed. Moses was a lawgiver, sent from God, and no one doubted that the Jewish form of religion had been instituted by their fathers in conformity with the direction of God. Their religion had been founded amidst remarkable manifestations of the Deity - in flames, and smoke, and thunder; it had been communicated by the ministration of angels; it had on its side and in its favor all the venerableness and sanction of a remote antiquity; and it commended itself by the pomp of its ritual, and by the splendor of its ceremonies. On the other hand, the new form of religion had little or nothing of this to commend it. It was of recent origin. It was founded by the Man of Nazareth, who had been trained up in their own land, and who had been a carpenter, and who had had no extraordinary advantages of education. Its rites were few and simple. It had no splendid temple service; none of the pomp and pageantry, the music and the magnificence of the ancient religion. It had no splendid array of priests in magnificent vestments, and it had not been imparted by the ministry of angels. Fishermen were its ministers; and by the body of the nation it was regarded as a schism, or heresy, that enlisted in its favor only the most humble and lowly of the people.

In these circumstances, how natural was it for the enemies of the gospel in Judea to contrast the two forms of religion, and how keenly would Christians there feel it! All that was said of the antiquity and the divine origin of the Jewish religion they knew and admitted; all that was said of its splendor and magnificence they saw; and all that was said of the humble origin of their own religion they were constrained to admit also. their danger was not that arising from persecution. It was that of being affected by considerations like these, and of relapsing again into the religion of their fathers, and of apostatizing from the gospel; and it was a danger which beset no other part of the Christian world.

To meet and counteract this danger was the design of this Epistle. Accordingly, the writer contrasts the two religions in all the great points on which the minds of Christians in Judea would be likely to be affected, and shows the superiority of the Christian religion over the Jewish in every respect, and especially in the points that had so much attracted their attention, and affected their hearts.

A. C. Gaebelien: Hebrews gives a wonderful vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is revealed as the Son of God, and Son of Man; as the heir of all things; higher than the angels. We can trace His path of humiliation to death and what has been accomplished by the death on the cross. All the blessings put on the side of the believer are made known in Hebrews. But above all the great

message is the Priesthood of Christ. This is the great center of this sublime Epistle. It is an Epistle of contrasts. There is the contrast between the Lord Jesus Christ and the angels; between Him and Moses, between Him and Aaron, between the Priesthood of Melchizedek and that of Aaron; between the offerings of the old covenant and the one great offering of Christ. This was the supreme need of these Jewish-Christians, to know Christ in all His fullness and glory. This knowledge would make them perfect, steadfast and fill them with comfort. And this is still our need.

Homer Kent: Among the problems with which Jewish Christians must have grappled, the following were surely included:

- 1) How Christ was to be understood in relation to the teaching of many Old Testament passages.
- 2) The religious, cultural and ancestral attractions of the Old Testament system, particularly the visible features of that worship in contrast to the largely spiritual nature of Christian worship.
- 3) The relationship of the Christian movement to the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah.
- 4) The persecution from their own Jewish brethren, and the temptation to avoid it by abandoning the Christian faith.
- 5) The efficacy of Old Testament sacrifices.
- 6) The relation of Gentile converts to Jewish religious practices.
- 7) The relation of Jewish Christians to Gentiles socially.

R. Kent Hughes: many contemporary scholars tentatively propose that the letter was written to a small house church of beleaguered Jewish Christians living in Rome in the mid-sixties before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. The respected New Testament authority **William Lane**, employing this thesis, has proposed a brilliant historical reconstruction that I think accords with the internal pastoral concern of the letter and makes it come alive. Hebrews, he notes, was written to a group of Jewish Christians whose world was falling apart. Their Italian locus is most probable . . .

Their Christianity had not been a worldly advantage. Rather, it set them up for persecution and the loss of property and privilege, and now could possibly even cost them their lives. . .

Lane proposes here that the circumstances accord well with the Neronian persecution that would come with the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64. The historian Tacitus records that Nero made the Christians scapegoats to remove suspicion from himself (*Annals of Rome* 15:44). Lane concludes, "In the year A.D. 64 martyrdom became an aspect of the Christian experience in Rome. There were several house-churches in the city, and the group addressed in Hebrews had not yet been affected by the emperor's actions,. But the threat of death and arrest was real."

The writer of Hebrews was writing to admonish and encourage his friends, a small group of Jewish Christians who were scared stiff! Some had begun to avoid contact with outsiders. Some had even withdrawn from the worshiping community altogether (**10:25**). The author feared there might be those who, if arrested, would succumb to the conditions of release – a public denial of Christ (**6:6; 10:29**). The tiny home-church was asking some hard questions: Did God know what was going on? If so, how could this be happening to them? Did he care? Only God could protect them, but where was he? Why did he not answer? Why the silence of God?

Richard D. Phillips: Few studies can be more profitable to Christians today than that of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In this letter, God exhorts us to persevere in the faith, even in the face of trials. Hebrews tells us *why* we must press on – because of the surpassing supremacy of Jesus Christ – and *how* we must press on – through faith in Christ, like the faith of those who went before us. Hebrews warns us of the pitfalls common to every age and through which many make a shipwreck of their souls, reminding us as well of the many resources available to us in our pilgrimage through this life.

MacArthur: Many Jewish Christians were beginning to say to themselves, “This is rough. We received the gospel and believed it. But it’s hard to break with our old religion and with our own people and the traditions we have always held and to face persecution. It is hard for us not to doubt that Jesus is the Messiah.” Such doubts were a great problem for them, because they were spiritually infantile.

Throughout Hebrews these immature, but beloved, Christians are told to keep their confidence in Christ, the mediator of a better covenant and their new Great High Priest. They are reminded that they were losing nothing for which they were not getting something infinitely better. They had been deprived of an earthly temple but they were going to get a heavenly one. They had been deprived of an earthly priesthood but they now had a heavenly Priest. They had been deprived of the old pattern of sacrifices but now they had one final sacrifice.

In this epistle, contrast reigns. Everything presented is presented as better: a better hope, a better testament, a better promise, a better sacrifice, a better substance, a better country, a better resurrection, a better everything. Jesus Christ is presented here as the supreme Best. And we are presented as being in Him and as dwelling in a completely new dimension – the heavenlies. We read of the heavenly Christ, the heavenly calling, the heavenly gift, the heavenly country, the heavenly Jerusalem, and of our names being written in the heavenlies. Everything is new. Everything is better. We don’t need the old.

Leon Morris: The author sees Scripture as pointing to Jesus. What the ancient writings say is fulfilled in him. This means more than that specific prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. Rather the thrust of the whole OT is such that it leads inescapably to him. The author writes of Christianity as the final religion, not because he regards the faith of the OT as mistaken, but because he sees it as God’s way of pointing men to Jesus. Judaism is not so much abrogated by Christianity as brought to its climax. The fuller meaning of the OT is to be seen in the person and work of Jesus. The OT and the new way are rightly seen only when they are recognized as parts of one whole. And it is Jesus who enables us to discern that whole and its meaning.

Wiersbe: 5 Characteristics of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

1) It Is a Book of **Evaluation**

When you combine these three important words (*better, perfect, eternal*), you discover that Jesus Christ and the Christian life He gives us are better because these blessings are eternal and they give us a perfect standing before God. The religious system under the Mosaic law was imperfect because it could not accomplish a once-for-all redemption that was eternal.

2) It Is a Book of **Exhortation**

Each of the five “problem passages” encourages us to heed God’s Word by pointing out the sad spiritual consequences that result if we do not:

<i>Drifting</i> from the Word –	2:1-4	(neglect)
<i>Doubting</i> the Word –	3:7 – 4:13	(hard heart)
<i>Dullness</i> toward the Word –	5:11 – 6:20	(sluggishness)
<i>Despising</i> the Word –	10:26-30	(willfulness)
<i>Defying</i> the Word –	12:14-29	(refusing to hear)

[I disagree with Wiersbe who does not see these warnings as having any reference to apostasy.]

3) It Is a Book of **Examination**

I fear there are many people who have a false faith, who have not really heard and heeded God’s Word. Sometimes they are so busy telling everybody else what to do that they fail to examine their own situations. The epistle to the Hebrews is a book of examination: it helps you discover where your faith really is.

4) It Is a Book of **Expectation**

The focus in this book is on the future. The writer informs us that he is speaking about “*the world to come*” (**Heb. 2:5**), a time when believers will reign with Christ. Jesus Christ is “*heir of all things*” (**Heb. 1:2**) and we share the “*promise of eternal inheritance*” (**Heb. 9:15**). Like the patriarchs lauded in **Hebrews 11**, we are looking for that future city of God (**Heb. 11:10-16, 26**).

5) It Is a Book of **Exaltation**

Creator, Prophet, Priest, and King – Jesus Christ is superior to all of the prophets and servants of God who have ever appeared on the sacred pages of the Scriptures. . . . If our purpose is to know Christ better and exalt Him more, then whatever differences we may have in our understanding of the book will be forgotten in our worship of Him.

The Book of Hebrews

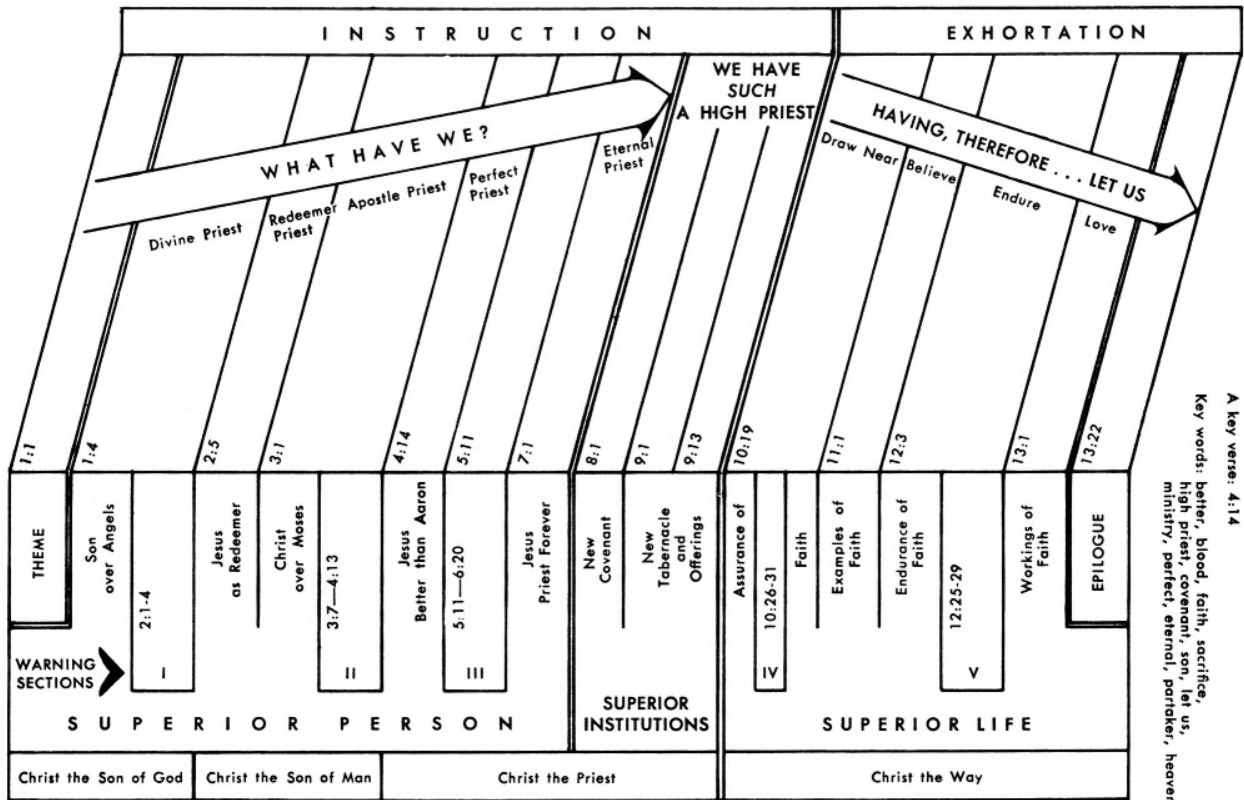
Focus	"Jesus, the Author & Finisher of our Faith" (Hebrews 12:2)									
Divisions	Christ Superior to The Angels		Christ Superior to Moses & Joshua		Christ Superior to Aaron's Priesthood		Christ Superior to the Mosaic Law		Christ the Secret to a Superior Lifestyle	
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	10	11	13
Topics	Revelation		Leader		Priest		Sacrifice		Example	
	A Better Way								A Living Way	
Place	Written to the Scattered Jewish Christians									
Time	About A.D. 64-68									
Author	Unknown - Believed to be the Apostle Paul by Most Scholars									

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HEBREWS

	Jesus Christ Superior in His Person Superior to: Prophets Angels Moses The Sabbath Other priests CHAPTERS 1:1-4:13	Jesus Christ: Superior as Our Priest Better than: Earthly priesthood Old covenant (Mosaic system) Animal sacrifices Daily offerings CHAPTERS 4:14-10:18	Jesus Christ: Superior for Life Let us have: Faith to believe God Hope to endure trials Love to encourage others CHAPTERS 10:19-13:25
Emphasis	Instruction		Exhortation
Key Words	"Much better than" 1:4	"Better" 7:19	"Let us" 12:1
Warnings	2:1-4	3:7-4:13	5:11-8:20 10:19-39 12:25-29
Theme	The absolute superiority of Jesus Christ		
Key Verses	4:14		
Christ in Hebrews	Jesus is the absolutely superior revelation of God and our eternal High Priest (1:1-14; 3:1).		

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OUTLINE OF HEBREWS

SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE NEW COVENANT

PERSEVERE IN FAITH FOCUSED ON JESUS CHRIST, THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT, AS SUPREME, SUPERIOR AND SUFFICIENT

I. (1:1 – 7:28) PROVING THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

A. (1:1-4) CULMINATION OF GOD'S REVELATION

NT REVELATION IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST TO ALL MANKIND IS FAR SUPERIOR TO OT REVELATION THROUGH THE PROPHETS TO THE JEWISH PATRIARCHS

1. (:1-2) The Superiority of God's Revelation in These Last Days in His Son
 - a. (:1) Diversity of Revelation Long Ago through the OT Prophets
 - b. (:2) Culmination of Revelation Now in His Son
2. (:3a) Superior Revelation Because of the Supremacy of the Person of Christ
 - a. Radiance of His Glory – Makes Visible God's Glory
 - b. Representation of His Nature – Makes Visible God's Essence
3. (:3b) Superior Revelation Because of the Supremacy of the Power of Christ
4. (:3c-4) Superior Revelation Because of the Supremacy of the Work of Christ
 - a. (:3c) Ultimate Reward for His Work
 - 1) Work of Redemption and Atonement
 - 2) Privilege of Enthronement – Place of Honor and Authority
 - b. (:4) Ultimate Recognition of His Work
 - 1) More Excellent Ministry
 - 2) More Excellent Reputation

B. (1:5 – 2:18) SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

1. (1:5-14) Series of 7 OT Messianic Quotations Prove the Superiority of Jesus Christ over Angels
 - a. (:5a) Psalm 2:7 – Superior by Virtue of God's Public Declaration of His Unique Sonship – Linked to the Resurrection
 - b. (:5b) 2 Sam. 7:14 – Superior by Virtue of God's Public Declaration of His Unique Sonship – Linked to Dynastic Reign
 - c. (:6) Psalm 97:7 – Superior Because He is Worthy of Worship by Angels
 - d. (:7) Psalm 104:4 – Superior Because He Commands the Ministry of Angels
 - e. (:8-9) Psalm 45:7-8 – Superior Because He is the Eternal Righteous Ruler
 - f. (:10-12) Psalm 102:25-27 – Superior Because He is the Eternally

Existent, Changeless Creator of Heaven and Earth
g. (:13-14) Psalm 110:1 – Superior Because He is the Exalted
Conquering King

(2:1-4) WARNING #1 – AGAINST DRIFTING AWAY

IN LIGHT OF THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST, PAY ATTENTION TO THE
AUTHENTICATED GOSPEL MESSAGE LEST YOU DRIFT AWAY AND SUFFER THE
CONSEQUENCES

1. (:1) The Substance of the Warning – Pay Attention
 - a. Anchor Down
 - b. Avoid Drifting Away
2. (:2-4) The Seriousness of the Warning – No Escaping Judgment if You Drift Away –
More Severe Accountability Under the New Covenant than the Old
 - a. (:2) Judgment for Disobedience to the Old Covenant
 - 1) Fixed Requirements – No Wriggle Room
 - 2) Fair Recompense for Sin
 - b. (:3-4) Judgment for Neglecting the New Covenant
 - 1) (:3a) No Exemptions When it Comes to Accountability
 - 2) (:3b-4) No Confusion When it Comes to the Message and
Required Response

2. (2:5-18) The Value of Christ's Humanity –
Christ's Superiority over Angels Not Compromised by His Humanity
 - a. (:5-9) Superiority of Jesus Christ over Angels Temporarily
Obscured by His Human Mission of Redemption
 - 1) (:5) Dominion Never Given to Angels
 - 2) (:6-9) Dominion Given to Christ – Although Not Realized Yet
 - a) (:6-7a) Present State = Humanity = Lower than Angels
(Psalm 8)
 - b) (:7b-8a) Future State = Dominion Over All
 - c) (:8b) Present Focus – What Do We See Right Now?
 - b. (:10-18) Superiority of Jesus Christ over Angels Enhanced by His
Identification with Humanity
 - 1) (:10-13) Necessity of Humanity to Truly Suffer
 - a) (:10) Suffering Deemed Appropriate
 - b) (:11) Identification with Humanity
 - c) (:12-13) OT Prophetic Confirmation of This Identification
with Humanity
 - 2) (:14-16) Necessity of Humanity to Experience Death as the
Pathway to Victory and Deliverance
 - a) (:14a) Identification with Humanity
 - b) (:14b-15) Two Purposes Accomplished by His Death:

- (:14b) Defeat the Devil
- (:15) Deliver Enslaved from Fear of Death
- c) (:16) Dispense Help to God's Elect
- 3) (:17-18) Necessity of Humanity to Qualify as a Merciful / Faithful High Priest
 - a) (:17a) Identification with Humanity
 - b) (:17b) Role of High Priest
 - c) (:17c-18) Two Purposes Accomplished by His High Priestly Ministry
 - (:17b) Purpose of Making Propitiation
 - (:18) Purpose of Strengthening Those Who are Tempted

C. (3:1 – 4:13) SUPERIOR TO MOSES

1. (3:1-6) Persevere in the Faith by Considering Jesus as Superior to Moses
 - (:1) Prologue – Consider Jesus – in His Relationship to Us as Believers
 - 1) Our Privileged Position as Believers
 - a) Family Identity
 - b) Heavenly Calling
 - Our Focus = Consider Jesus
 - Our Link to God = Supreme Apostle / High Priest
 - a. (:2) Both Christ and Moses Commended as Faithful
 - 1) Faithfulness of Christ
 - 2) Faithfulness of Moses
 - b. (:3-4) Christ Surpasses Moses in Glory by Virtue of His Creative Work as God
 - 1) (:3) Distinction Between Christ and Moses
 - a) Christ is Superior to Moses
 - b) The Builder is Superior to the House
 - 2) (:4) Distinction Between the House and its Builder
 - a) Every House has a Builder
 - b) The Builder is God = Christ
 - c. (:5-6a) The Faithfulness of a Son Surpasses that of a Servant
 - 1) (:5) Moses was Faithful as a Servant
 - 2) (:6a) Christ was Faithful as a Son
- (:6b) Application – Persevere in Faith and Hope

(3:7 – 4:13) **WARNING #2 – AGAINST HARDNESS OF HEART AND UNBELIEF**

1. (3:7-19) Part 1 – Avoid Hardness of Heart and Unbelief by Responding in Faith and Encouraging One Another to Persevere
 - a. (3:7-11) Don't Provoke God with Hard-Hearted Unbelief – Reminder of Israel's Former Failure in the Wilderness
 - 1) (:7-9) Learn the Lesson from History
 - a) (:7-8) Present Opportunity – Hear and Obey

- b) (:9) Past Failure -- Stubborn Rebellion and Persistent Unbelief
 - 2) (:10-11) Fear God's Wrath and Judgment
 - a) (:10) Serious Nature of Sin
 - b) (:11) Severe Consequences for Apostasy
 - b. (3:12-19) Encourage One Another Lest You Fall Away in Unbelief
 - 1) (:12-13) Urgency of Avoiding Apostasy Due to the Imminent Danger
 - a) (:12) Guard Yourself Against Apostasy
 - b) (:13) Encourage One Another to Persevere
 - 2) (:14) Necessity of Perseverance for Genuine Believers
 - 3) (:15-19) Reminder Again of the Historical Example of Failure in the Wilderness
 - a) (:15) Root Problem = Hardening Your Heart by Rebellion
 - b) (:16-18) Scope of the Problem
 - c) (:19) Root Problem = Unbelief
2. (4:1-13) Part 2 – Avoid Hardness of Heart and Unbelief So You Don't Miss Out on Persevering in Faith and Realizing God's Rest
- a. (:1-7) Opportunity to Enter God's Rest
 - 1) (:1-2) Fear of Missing Out
 - a) (:1) Availability of God's Promise Must Not Be Neglected
 - b) (:2a) Access to Truth Not Enough
 - c) (:2b) Application of Faith Needed to Not Miss Out
 - 2) (:3-5) Faith Still Efficacious Today
 - a) (:3) Proposition: Participation Not Nullified by Prohibition
 - b) (:4-5) Proof Texts
 - 3) (:6-7) Focus on Responding Today
 - a) (:6a) Door is Still Open
 - b) (:6b) Disobedience is Still the Disqualifier
 - c) (:7) David Warns Against Hardening Your Heart
 - b. (:8-11) Perseverance Needed to Enter God's Rest
 - 1) (:8) Future Orientation of God's Rest
 - 2) (:9-10) Perseverance is the Realization of God's Rest
 - a) (:9) Sabbath Rest Available
 - b) (:10) Sabbath Rest Patterned After God's Cessation from His Works
 - 3) (:11) Exhortation to Pursue God's Rest
 - c. (:12-13) Accountability Will Expose the False Professors of Faith
 - 1) (:12) Accountability Applied by God's Word
 - 2) (:13) Accountability Applied by God's Omniscience

D. (4:14 – 7:28) SUPERIOR TO AARON

1. (4:14-16) Leverage Our Superior High Priest --

Three Pastoral Implications of the Superiority of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ

- a. (:14) Our Superior High Priest Encourages Us to Persevere
 - 1) Christ Persevered to Reach His Heavenly Throne in the Presence of God
 - 2) Christ is our Savior and the Eternal Son of God
 - 3) Christ is the Focus of Our Confession as We Persevere
- b. (:15) Our Superior High Priest Empathizes with Our Weaknesses
 - 1) Christ Has Compassion for Us
 - 2) Christ Has Overcome Every Temptation We Might Face
 - 3) One Caveat in Christ's Identification with Mankind:
Christ Was Not Tempted by Any Sin From Within
- c. (:16) Our Superior High Priest Emboldens Our Petitions for Help
 - 1) Approach Christ with Boldness
 - a) We Should Have Intimate Access to Christ
 - b) We Should Have Confident Access to Christ
 - c) We Should Have Powerful Access to Christ
 - 2) Approach Christ to Obtain Mercy and Grace
 - 3) Approach Christ for Help in Time of Need

2. (5:1-10) Superior Priesthood According to the Order of Melchizedek –

The Qualifications and Divine Appointment of Jesus Christ to the High Priestly Role Are Linked to the Order of Melchizedek

- a. (:1-3) Qualifications for Priesthood
 - 1) (:1a) Solidarity with Humanity
 - a) Taken from Among Men
 - b) Represents Man to God
 - 2) (1b) Sacrifice for Sin = Mission
 - 3) (:2) Sensitive / Compassionate Mediator Who Can Identify with Weakness
 - a) Gentle – Not Harsh
 - b) Understanding – Not Insensitive
 - 4) (:3) Sacrifice for Sin = Mission
 - a) Necessity of Sacrifices for Sins
 - b) Scope of Sacrifices for Sins
- b. (:4-6) Divine Appointment Based on Divine Decrees – Superior Priesthood According to the Order of Melchizedek
 - 1) (:4) Sovereignly Called by God
 - a) Negatively: Not by Human Initiative
 - b) Positively: Sovereignly Called by God
 - c) Example of Aaron

Two OT Proofs:

- 2) (:5) Submission to the Will of the Father
 - 3) (:6) Status According to the Order of Melchizedek
- c. (:7-10) Preparation for the Priesthood
 - 1) (:7) Supplications for Deliverance

- 2) (:8) School of Suffering
- 3) (:9-10) Superior Priesthood According to the Order of Melchizedek
 - a) (:9a) Summary of Completed Preparation
 - b) (:9b) Source of Eternal Salvation
 - c) (:10) Status According to the Order of Melchizedek

(5:11 – 6:20) WARNING #3 – AGAINST SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

- 1. (5:11-14) Rebuke for Spiritual Immaturity – Part 1
 - Four Marks of Spiritual Delinquents – It’s Time to Grow Up
 - a. (:11) Can’t Focus on Spiritual Truth
 - 1) Impacts Quantity of Intake of Doctrinal Truth
 - 2) Impacts Understanding of Intake of Doctrinal Truth
 - 3) Impacts Concentration Regarding Intake of Doctrinal Truth
 - b. (:12a) Can’t Teach Doctrine – Even at the Elementary Level
 - 1) Compromising the Mission of Making Disciples
 - 2) Regressing in the Understanding of Doctrinal Basics
 - c. (:12b-13) Can’t Handle Solid Food that Nourishes Righteous Living
 - 1) (:12b) Regression in Diet
 - 2) (:13) Regression in Spiritual Development
 - a) Lacking Wisdom for Righteous Living
 - b) Functioning at the Level of Infancy
 - d. (:14) Can’t Exercise Discernment Between Good and Evil
 - 1) Missing Out on the Healthy Diet
 - 2) Missing Out on Healthy Development
- 2. (6:1-8) Rebuke for Spiritual Immaturity – Part 2
 - Failure to Progress to Genuine Christianity Dooms One to the Fruitless Life of Irreversible Apostasy
 - a. (:1-3) Advancing Beyond the Elementary Foundation
 - 1) (:1a) Exhortation to Spiritual Maturity
 - a) Build on the Foundation
 - b) Press on to Maturity
 - 2) (:1b-2) Moving Beyond the Foundation of Basic Catechism
 - a) Soteriology = Initial Response
 - b) Pneumatology = Instruction in Initial Ceremonial Rites
 - c) Eschatology = Instruction in Basic Christian End Times
 - 3) (:3) Enablement by the Sovereignty of God
 - b. (:4-8) Avoiding the Danger of Irreversible Apostasy
 - 1) (:4-6) No Second Chance for Apostates
 - a) (:4-5) Counterfeits Look Like the Real Deal
 - b) (:6a) Counterfeits are Exposed When They Fall Away
 - c) (:6b) Condition of Apostasy is Irreversible
 - 2) (:7-8) Illustr. from Nature – Fruitfulness = Proof of Genuineness
 - a) (:7) Fruitfulness Connected to God’s Blessing
 - b) (:8) Thorns and Thistles Connected to God’s Cursing
- 3. (6:9-20) Guarantee of God’s Promises

Keep Pressing Towards the Goal Because the Certain Hope of Obtaining God's Promises is Anchored in God's Own Guarantee

- a. (:9-12) Assurance of Hope of Inheriting the Promises
 - 1) (:9-10) Two Encouragements of Your Assurance of Hope:
 - a) (:9) Encouragement that God is Working Our Your Salvation in Your Inner Life
 - b) (:10) Encouragement that God Will Remember Your Fruitful Ministry Demonstrated in Your Outer Life
 - 2) (:11-12) Two Exhortations to Persevere to the End to Inherit the Promises
 - a) (:11) Be Diligent
 - b) (:12) Imitate Good Models
- b. (:13-20) Anchor of the Soul by Virtue of God's Guarantee
 - 1) (:13-18) The Guarantee of Our Hope by the Promise of God
 - a) (:13-14) God Guaranteed His Promise to Abraham
 - b) (:15) God Obtained the Promise for Us
 - c) (:16-18) God's Guarantee is Far Greater Than Any Human Guarantee
 - 2) (:19-20) The Security of Our Hope by the Advocacy of Jesus
 - a) (:19) Why Is It So Secure? – The Nature of Our Hope
 - b) (:20) Who Makes It So Secure? – The Focus of Our Hope

3. (7:1-10) Identification and Greatness of Melchizedek –

The Greatness of Melchizedek Typifies the Superior Priesthood of Christ

- a. (:1-3) Who is Melchizedek? This Mysterious King-Priest!
 - 1) (:1a) Identification of Melchizedek – Mutual Roles of King and Priest
 - a) His Name
 - b) His Kingly Role
 - c) His Priestly Role
 - 2) (:1b-2a) Interaction with Abraham – Mutual Respect Shown
 - a) (:1b) Melchizedek Blessed Abraham
 - b) (:2a) Melchizedek Received Tithes from Abraham
 - 3) (:2b) Idealization of His Role as King
 - a) King of Righteousness
 - b) King of Peace
 - 4) (:3) Idealization of His Role as Priest
 - a) No Recorded Ancestors to Qualify Him
 - b) No Recorded Time Boundaries to Limit Him
 - c) Type of Christ
 - d) The Ultimate Perpetual Priest
- b. (:4-10) How Great is Melchizedek? Greater Than Abraham!
 - 1) (:4a) Focus = the Greatness of Melchizedek
 - 2) (4b-6) Favored over Abraham

- a) (:4b) Superior to Abraham Because He Received Tithes
- b) (:5) Superior to the Levitical System Which Traces Its Roots to Abraham
- c) (:6) Superior to Abraham Because He Both Received Tithes and Blessed Him
- 3) (:7) Fundamental Principle = the Lesser is Blessed by the Greater
- 4) (:8-10) Far-Reaching Superiority
 - a) (:8) Superior Because He Endures
 - b) (:9-10) Superior Because Levi Paid Him Tithes
- 4. (7:11-28) Drawing Near to God Via the Superior Priesthood of Christ – The Superiority of Christ’s Priesthood Brings New Covenant Access to God – 3 Arguments for the Superiority of Christ’s Priesthood over the Levitical Priesthood
 - a. (:11-19) Because Christ’s Priesthood Offers a Better Hope – Based on the Power of an Indestructible Life
 - 1) (:11-14) Christ’s Priesthood Moves Us Beyond the Law of Moses
 - a) (:11) Change in Priesthood Comes with the Order of Melchizedek
 - b) (:12) Change in Priesthood Means a Change in God’s Dealings with Man
 - c) (:13-14) Christ Descended from Judah – not Levi as Moses Prescribed
 - 2) (:15-17) Christ’s Priesthood Based on the Power of an Indestructible Life
 - a) (:15) According to the Order of Melchizedek – In its Character
 - b) (:16) Authority for Christ’s Priesthood
 - c) (:17) According to the Order of Melchizedek – In its Divine Testimony
 - 3) (:18-19) Christ’s Priesthood Offers a Better Hope
 - a) (:18-19a) Setting Aside of the Law of Moses
 - b) (:19b) Bringing in a Better Hope
 - b. (:20-25) Because Christ’s Priesthood is Permanent – Guaranteeing a Better Covenant
 - 1) (:20-21) Priesthood of Promise
 - 2) (:22) Priesthood of Preeminence = a Better Covenant
 - 3) (:23-25) Priesthood of Permanence
 - a) (:23) Levitical Priesthood Limited by Death
 - b) (:24) Christ Not Limited by Death
 - c) (:25) Application: Priesthood of Christ is More Effective
 - c. (:26-28) Because Christ’s Priesthood is More Effective – Based on His Perfection
 - 1) (:26) More Effective Because of His Perfect, Sinless Character
 - a) Appropriate -- Necessary to Have Such a High Priest
 - b) Approved -- No Defilement by Sin
 - 2) (:27) More Effective Because of His Perfect, Once-for-all Sacrifice

- a) Limitation of the Sacrifices Offered Under the Levitical System
- b) Perfection of the Once-for-all Sacrifice of the Sinless Priest Himself
- 3) (:28) More Effective Because of His Perfect Intercession as Son of God
 - a) Limited Intercession of the Levitical Priests
 - Limited by the Weakness of the Mosaic Law
 - Limited by Multiple Succession of Mere Men
 - Limited by Personal Weakness of the Priests
 - b) Unlimited Intercession of Christ as Priest

II. (8:1 – 10:18) PROVING THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT

A. (8:1-13) SUPERIORITY OF THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST AND THE NEW COVENANT

1. (8:1-6) Superiority of the Ministry of Christ – Christ’s Ministry is Superior Because He Ministers in a Better Sanctuary and Mediates a Better Covenant
 - a. (:1-5) Christ’s Ministry is Superior Because He Ministers in a Better Sanctuary
 - 1) (:1-2) Three Superlatives Regarding the Ministry of Christ
 - a) (:1a) Superior Priest
 - b) (:1b) Enthroned Priest
 - c) (:2) Heavenly Priest
 - 2) (:3-5) Three Contrasts Between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant
 - a) (:3) Contrast in Sacrifices
 - b) (:4) Contrast in Service
 - c) (:5) Contrast in Sanctuary
 - b. (:6) Christ’s Ministry is Superior Because He Mediates a Better Covenant
 - 1) Better Ministry
 - 2) Better Covenant
 - 3) Better Promises
2. (8:6-13) Superiority of the New Covenant – Out with the Old and In with the New – The New Covenant with its Better Promises Necessitates the Abandonment of the Inadequate Old Covenant
 - (:6) Transition: The New Covenant is Superior
 - a. (:7-9) The Old Covenant Had Limitations Which Required a New Covenant
 - 1) (:7-8a) Negation of the Limited Old Covenant
 - a) (:7) Introduction of New Covenant Proof of Limitations of Old Covenant
 - b) (:8a) Limitations of the Old Covenant Rooted in the Inability of Obedience
 - 2) (:8-9) Need for a Superior New Covenant
 - a) (:8) Announcement of Coming New Covenant with United Nation of Israel

- b) (:9) Admission of the Failure of the Old Covenant Based on Historical Testimony
- b. (:10-12) The New Covenant Provides Better Promises That are Inwardly and Spiritually Focused –
 - 4 Better Promises:
 - 1) (:10a) Superior Power -- Promise of Regeneration and Inward Transformation
 - 2) (:10b) Superior Relationship -- Promise of Secure Relationship with God with No More Apostasy
 - 3) (:11) Superior Knowledge -- Promise of Universal Revelation and Knowledge of God based on Personal Experience
 - 4) (:12) Superior Forgiveness -- Promise of Permanent Forgiveness of Sins Based on Finality of Sacrifice of Christ
- c. (:13) The Old Covenant Has Become Obsolete
 - 1) Obsolete by Pronouncement of Replacement
 - 2) Obsolete by Historical Transition

B. (:9:1-14) COMPARISON OF OLD COVENANT AND NEW COVENANT WORSHIP SYSTEMS

1. (9:1-10) Worship Under the Old Covenant System –
The Old Covenant Worship System with its External Focus on the Earthly Sanctuary and Priestly Service Must be Viewed as Inadequate and Temporary

- a. (:1-5) Overview of the Sanctuary and its Contents –
Pointing Towards Fulfilment in Christ
 - 1) (:1) Old Covenant Worship System
 - a) Regulations for Priestly Service
 - b) Sanctuary
 - 2) (:2) Outer Chamber = the Holy Place
 - a) Location of the Outer Tabernacle
 - b) Contents of the Outer Tabernacle
 - c) Name of the Outer Tabernacle
 - 3) (:3-5) Inner Chamber = Holy of Holies
 - a) (:3a) Location of the Inner Tabernacle
 - b) (:3b) Name of the Inner Tabernacle
 - c) (:4-5a) Contents of the Inner Tabernacle
 - (:5b) Summary
- b. (:6-10) Overview of the Service by the Priests –
Pointing Towards Fulfilment in Christ
 - 1) (:6) Priestly Service in the Outer Tabernacle
 - a) Preparation for Worship
 - b) Participation in Worship
 - c) Performance of Worship
 - 2) (:7) Priestly Service in the Inner Tabernacle
 - a) Access Restricted to the High Priest
 - b) Access Restricted to Once Per Year
 - c) Atonement for Sin by Blood Sacrifice Required

- 3) (:8-10) Symbolic and Temporary Nature of This Worship
 - a) (:8-9a) Symbolic Nature of This Worship
 - b) (:9b-10) Temporary Nature of This Worship
2. (9:11-14) Advantages of Worship Under the New Covenant System –
Only the Blood of Jesus Christ under the New Covenant can Cleanse the Conscience and Obtain Eternal Redemption
 - a. (:11a) Better High Priest Ushering in Better Times
 - b. (:11b) Better Tabernacle
 - 1) Superior
 - 2) Heavenly – Not Earthly
 - c. (:12-14) Better Sacrifice
 - 1) (:12a) Perfect Human Sacrifice vs. Animal Sacrifice
 - 2) (:12b) Once-for-all Sacrifice Gaining Acceptance in the Presence of God vs. Annual Sacrifice
 - 3) (:12c) Completed Sacrifice Obtaining Eternal Redemption vs. Temporary Covering
 - 4) (:13-14) Effective Sacrifice to Cleanse the Conscience vs. External Cleansing
 - a) (:13) External Cleansing Accomplished by Old Covenant Animal Sacrifices
 - b) (:14) Internal Cleansing Accomplished by the Blood of Christ

C. (9:15 – 10:18) SUPERIORITY OF THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

1. (9:15-28) Superiority of Christ's Sacrifice in Ratifying the New Covenant –
As the Mediator of the New Covenant, Christ's Sacrifice is Clearly Superior
 - a. (:15-22) Covenant Must be Ratified by Sacrificial Death –
Comparison of New Covenant and Old Covenant
 - 1) (:15-17) New Covenant Inaugurated with Death of Christ
 - a) (:15) Value of Christ's Death
 - b) (:16-17) Validity of the New Covenant (Testament)
 - 2) (:18-22) Old Covenant Inaugurated with Death of Animals
 - a) (:18) Integral Role of Sacrificial Blood under the Old Covenant
 - b) (:19-21) Illustrations of the Application of the Sacrificial Blood under the Old Covenant
 - c) (:22) Integral Connection between Sacrificial Blood and Cleansing and Forgiveness
 - b. (:23-28) Superiority of the New Covenant with its Better Sacrifice –
Confirmed in 4 Key Areas:
 - 1) (:23) Superiority of New Covenant Sacrifice and Cleansing
 - 2) (:24) Superiority of New Covenant Sanctuaries
 - 3) (:25-26) Superiority of New Covenant Atonement
 - 4) (:27-28) Superiority of New Covenant Efficacy
 - a) Universal Connection between Death and Eternal Judgment
 - b) Particular Connection between Death of Christ and Future Salvation of the Elect

2. (10:1-18) Superiority of the Once-for-all Sacrifice of Christ –
The Once-for-all Sacrifice of Christ Provides the Ultimate Cleansing and Forgiveness that was Impossible under the Old Covenant
- a. (:1-4) Inadequacy of Repetitive Old Covenant Animal Sacrifices
 - 1) (:1) Catalog of Limitations
 - a) Represents the Shadow – not the Reality
 - b) Repeatedly Offered
 - c) Reduced (Restricted) Results
 - 2) (:2-3) Constant Reminder of Sins and Need for Cleansing
 - 3) (:4) Conclusion of Futility
 - b. (:5-10) Christ's Sacrifice Supersedes the OT Sacrifices
 - 1) (:5-7) Christ Voluntarily Took on Humanity
 - a) (:5) Purpose of the Incarnation = to be the Perfect Lamb of God
 - b) (:6) Pleasing the Father by Way of Propitiation for Sins
 - c) (:7) Perseverance in Accomplishing the Revealed Will of the Father
 - 2) (:8-10) Christ Transitioned the Sacrificial System to the Efficacious, Once-for-all Offering of Himself
 - a) (:8) Rejection of Old Covenant Sacrificial System
 - b) (:9) Transition to New Covenant Sacrifice of Christ
 - c) (:10) Accomplishment of Ultimate Sanctification by His Once-for-all Sacrifice
 - c. (:11-14) Christ as the Priest Who Sits Supersedes the Levitical Priests Who Continually Stand and Minister
 - 1) (:11) Inadequacy of Levitical Priests with Their Repetitive Animal Sacrifices
 - 2) (:12-13) Efficacy of Christ's Once-for-all Sacrifice
 - a) (:12) Efficacy Authenticated by His Enthronement
 - b) (:13) Efficacy Consummated by His Eschatological Triumph
 - 3) (:14) Accomplishment of Ultimate Sanctification by Christ's Once-for-all Sacrifice
 - d. (:15-18) Adequacy of Christ's Once-for-all Sacrifice for Sins – Supported by OT Prophecy
 - 1) (:15-16a) Regarding the Superiority of the New Covenant
 - a) (:15a) Testimony of the Holy Spirit
 - b) (:15b-16a) Internal Knowledge and Empowerment
 - 2) (:16b-18) Regarding the Final Resolution of the Sin Problem
 - a) (:16b-17) Complete and Final Forgiveness of Sins
 - b) (:18) Complete and Final Sacrifice for Sins

III. (10:19 – 13:25) PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS

A. (10:19-25) PRACTICAL OUTWORKING OF THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

THE REALITY OF THE SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST IMPACTS BOTH OUR STANDING BEFORE GOD AND OUR STEADFASTNESS IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

1. (:19-21) Our Standing Before God –
Two Encouragements from the Superiority of Christ
 - a. (:19-20) We Enjoy Great Access to the Presence of God by Christ’s Sacrifice
 - 1) (:19) Entrance into the Heavenly Sanctuary
 - 2) (:20) Embracing the New Pathway of Life
 - b. (:21) We Enjoy Great Representation by Christ’s Priestly Ministry
2. (:22-25) Our Steadfastness in Faith, Hope, and Love --
Three Exhortations from the Superiority of Christ
 - a. (:22) Draw Near to God in Confident FAITH
 - 1) Authenticity / Sincerity
 - 2) Confidence
 - 3) Good Conscience
 - 4) Cleansed / Purified
 - b. (:23) Hold Fast the Confession of Our HOPE
 - 1) Our Responsibility = Perseverance
 - 2) God’s Enablement
 - c. (:24-25) Encourage One Another in LOVE
 - 1) (:24) Stated Positively
 - 2) (:25a) Stated Negatively
 - 3) (:25b) Stated Intensively in Light of Coming Salvation and Accountability

(10:26-31) WARNING #4 – DON’T PERSIST IN DELIBERATE SIN
 PERSISTENT DELIBERATE SIN SHOWS CONTEMPT FOR CHRIST AND HIS SACRIFICE AND WILL BE JUDGED WITHOUT MERCY AS APOSTASY

1. (:26-27) No Remedy for Apostasy under the New Covenant –
Only Terrifying Judgment
 - a. (:26a) Condition of Apostasy
 - b. (:26b-27) Certainty of Eternal Judgment
 - 1) (:26a) No Escape
 - 2) (:27) No Relief
2. (:28-29) No Lessening of Judgment under the New Covenant –
Rejecting Christ Worse than Rejecting the Law of Moses
 - a. (:28) Severe Judgment Under the Old Covenant
 - 1) Offense: Rejecting the Law of Moses
 - 2) Judgment: Dies without Mercy
 - b. (:29) More Severe Judgment Under the New Covenant
 - 1) Clear Comparison
 - 2) Three Charges of Apostasy
3. (:30-31) No Surprises Since the Judge Remains the Same
 - a. (:30) Familiarity with the Judge --
Two OT Quotes with the same message:
 - 1) You Can Count on God Judging -- Deut. 32:35
 - 2) You Can Count on God Judging – Deut. 32:36

- b. (:31) Fear of the Judge

**B. (10:32-39) EXHORTATION TO PERSEVERE IN LOVE, HOPE AND FAITH
CONSISTENT WITH YOUR EARLY CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

1. (:32-34) Persevere in Love as You Endure Suffering and Persecution –
Focus on the Past Experiences
 - a. (:32-33) Reminder of Endurance During Past Persecutions
 - 1) (:32) Impressive Endurance
 - 2) (:33) Intense Persecution
 - b. (:34) Commendation for Past Demonstration of Christian Virtues
 - 1) Risky Love and Compassion
 - 2) Radical Joy and Eternal Perspective
2. (:35-37) Persevere in Hope as You Anticipate Christ's Return –
Focus on the Future Reward
 - a. (:35) Motivation Tied to Future Reward
 - 1) Motivation to Maintain Christian Confidence
 - 2) Future Reward Makes Present Suffering Worthwhile
 - b. (:36) Mission Tied to Future Reward
 - 1) Perseverance is the Key
 - 2) Mission = Perform the Will of God
 - 3) Future Reward = Receiving What Was Promised
 - c. (:37) Soon Return of Christ Tied to Future Reward
3. (:38-39) Persevere in Faith as You Remain on Track until the Final Goal –
Focus on the Present Challenge
 - a. (:38a) Principle to Live By in the Christian Life
 - b. (:38b) Parenthetical Warning
 - c. (:39) Pastoral Expectation and Encouragement
 - 1) Apostasy Not Expected
 - 2) Perseverance in the Faith Expected

**C. (11:1-40) EXHORTATION TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLES OF THE
CHAMPIONS OF FAITH**

1. (11:1-3) The Fundamentals of Faith –
Faith is the Means:
 - To Focus on the Future,
 - To Realize Unseen Realities
 - To Gain God's Grace and
 - To Comprehend Creation
 - a. (:1) The Value of Faith –
The Assurance of God's Promises and Apprehension of Unseen Realities
Derive from Faith
 - 1) (:1a) Assurance of God's Promises – Focus on the Future
 - a) Essence of Faith = Assurance or Confidence
 - b) Perspective of Faith = Oriented towards the Future /
towards God's Promises

- 2) (:1b) Apprehension of Unseen Realities – Realize Unseen Realities
 - a) Essence of Faith = Apprehension or Conviction or Evidence
 - b) Perspective of Faith = Oriented towards Unseen Realities
 - b. (:2) The Victory of Faith –
The Way to God’s Approval Derives from Faith
 - c. (:3) The Viewpoint of Faith –
The Worldview of Christians (Beginning with Our Perspective on Creation)
Derives from Faith
 - 1) (:3a) Faith is Rooted in the Objective Word of God
 - 2) (:3b) Faith is Manifested in the Perception of God’s Workings in the
Invisible Realm
- 2. (11:4-7) Earliest OT Examples of Living by Faith –
Only a Life of Faith Pleases God – Historical Examples of Abel, Enoch and Noah
 - a. (:4) Faith of Abel – Testimony of Righteous Character
 - 1) Primary Highlight – Faith Approaching God the Right Way
 - 2) Testimony of Righteousness
 - 3) Legacy of Faith
 - b. (:5-6) Faith of Enoch – Testimony of Pleasing God
 - 1) (:5a) Primary Highlight – Faith Walking with God
 - 2) (:5b) Testimony of Pleasing God
 - 3) (:6) Essential Connection between Faith and Pleasing God
 - a) Connection of Faith to Pleasing God
 - b) Commitment of Faith
 - c. (:7) Faith of Noah – Testimony of Salvation vs. Condemnation
 - 1) Primary Highlight – Faith Working
 - 2) Testimony of Salvation vs.
 - a) Condemned the World
 - b) Obtained Righteousness
- 3. (11:8-22) Forward-Looking Faith of the Patriarchs –
Only a Life of Faith Pleases God – Historical Examples of the Faith of the Patriarchs that
Looked Forward to God’s Promises for the Future
 - a. (:8-12) Faith of Abraham – Promise of Future Inheritance
 - 1) (:8) Faith Obeys God’s Call
 - a) Obedience is Key
 - b) Overcoming the Obstacle of the Unknown
 - 2) (:9-10) Faith Focuses on Eternity
 - a) (:9) Living on Earth as an Alien / Pilgrim
 - b) (:10) Looking Forward to Our Heavenly Home
 - 3) (:11) Faith Believes the Impossible
 - 4) (:12) Faith Receives Countless Blessings
 - b. (:13-16) Faith Oriented Towards Future Promises
 - 1) (:13) Faith Does Not Look for Immediate Gratification
 - a) Promises of God not Realized in This Life
 - b) Promises of God Still Joyfully Anticipated
 - c) Perspective is One of Strangers and Exiles
 - 2) (:14-16a) Faith Looks for Heavenly Blessing

- a) (:14) Forward Looking to Eternity
 - b) (:15) Not Looking Backwards to Earthly Security and Comforts
 - c) (:16a) Desiring the Future Eternity - Better than the Past
 - 3) (:16b) Faith Enjoys a Relationship with God Where Future Blessings Are Guaranteed
 - c. (:17-22) Faith of the Patriarchs – Passing the Baton of God’s Promises to the Next Generation – Looking Forward to Future Blessing
 - 1) (:17-19) Faith of Abraham – Tested but Still Anticipating the Seed of Isaac
 - a) (:17) Extreme Test Matched by Extreme Obedience
 - b) (:18) Firm Promise
 - c) (:19) Radical Conviction Regarding Resurrection
 - 2) (:20) Faith of Isaac – Anticipating Future for Jacob and Esau
 - 3) (:21) Faith of Jacob – Blessing Two Sons of Joseph
 - 4) (:22) Faith of Joseph – Anticipating Return to Promised Land
4. (11:23-31) From Egypt to Jericho – From Bondage to Victory – Faith Focuses on the Unseen God to Gain Eternal Reward by:
 - Choosing God
 - Delivering from Death and Bondage
 - Capturing Enemy Strongholds to Achieve Victory
 - a. (:23-26) Faith of Moses and His Parents – Choosing God
 - 1) (:23) Choosing Obeying God Rather Than the King
 - a) Action – Protected the Infant Moses
 - b) Motivation – Purpose of God Visualized
 - 2) (:24-26) Choosing Suffering for God Rather Than Pleasures of Sin
 - a) (:24-25) Action – Identifying with God’s Suffering People
 - b) (:26) Motivation –Eternal Inheritance Worth More than Temporary Riches
 - b. (:27-29) Faith of Moses – Delivering from Death and Bondage
 - 1) (:27) Trusting God for a New Life – Leaving the Palace for the Desert
 - a) Leaving Privilege for Leadership Development
 - b) Leveraging Courage
 - c) Looking to God for Endurance
 - 2) (:28) Trusting God for Redemption – Worshiping via Blood Sacrifice to Avoid the Sentence of Death
 - a) Observing Passover
 - b) Experiencing Passover
 - 3) (:29) Trusting God for Escape – Following God’s Leading Where Enemies Cannot Go
 - a) Safe Passage
 - b) Unsafe Passage
 - c. (:30-31) Faith of Israel and Rahab – Capturing Enemy Strongholds to Achieve Victory = Jericho
 - 1) (:30) Following the Divine Battle Plan

- a) Mission Accomplished
 - b) Mission Performed
 - 2) (:31) Facilitating the Mission of the Spies
 - a) Avoiding Destruction
 - b) Accepting Danger
- 5. (11:32-40) Heroism and Reward of the Champions of Faith –
 These Final Heroes of Faith Highlight Grand Achievements, Endurance Through Severe Suffering and the Hope of Eternal Rewards
 - a. (:32) Their Famous Identity – Larger than Life Examples
 - 1) Judges
 - 2) Kings
 - 3) Prophets
 - b. (:33-38) Their Admirable Heroism – Extreme Achievements / Extreme Grace to Endure Suffering
 - 1) (:33-34) Extreme Achievements
 - a) Powerful Triumphs of Faith
 - b) Unnatural Testimonies of Deliverance
 - c) Divine Enablements to Further God’s Agenda of Victory
 - 2) (:35-38) Extreme Suffering
 - a) Dealing with Death – Looking Forward to Resurrection
 - b) Dealing with Persecution, Imprisonment and Martyrdom
 - c) Despised by the World but Valued by God
 - d) Destitute of Earthly Homes but Destined for Heavenly Rest
 - c. (:39-40) Their Eternal Reward – Benefits Extend to Us
 - 1) (:39a) Faith Gains God’s Approval
 - 2) (:39b) Faith Requires Patience to Realize God’s Promises
 - 3) (:40a) Faith Looks to the Salvation Accomplished by Christ on the Cross
 - 4) (:40b) Faith Unifies All Believers

D. (12:1-17) EXHORTATION TO PERSEVERE IN FAITH BY FOCUSING ON JESUS AS YOU RESPOND TO SUFFERING AND DIVINE DISCIPLINE

- 1. (12:1-3) Persevere in Faith by Focusing on Jesus –
 Perseverance in Faith and Ministry Requires Minimizing Obstacles and Maintaining our Focus on Jesus Christ –
 Two Critical Ways to Persevere in Our Faith Journey
 - a. (:1) Keep Running Your Race (Fighting the Fight)
 - 1) Encouragement for Running the Race: Faith Works
 - 2) Encumbrances / Entanglements that Slow Us Down / Trip Us Up
 - a) Encumbrances that Slow Us Down
 - b) Entanglements that Trip us Up
 - 3) Endurance that is the Key to Victory
 - a) Speaks to Active Participation
 - b) Speaks to Agonizing Participation
 - c) Speaks to Athletic Participation

- d) Speaks to Authentic Participation
- b. (:2-3) Keep Focusing on Jesus
 - 1) (:2) Focus Your Vision on Jesus – Where are you looking for help?
Why is Jesus our All Sufficient Resource:
 - a) Jesus Fuels Our Faith
 - b) Jesus Anticipates Our Joy
 - c) Jesus Surpasses Our Perseverance
 - d) Jesus Secures Our Victory
 - 2) (:3) Focus Your Mind on Jesus – What are you thinking about?
 - a) A Model Worth Emulating – Don't Get Distracted
 - b) A Fight Won Convincingly – Don't Get Overwhelmed –
Our Fight is Easier
 - c) A Danger Ever Lurking – Don't Quit the Fight
- 2. (12:4-11) Benefiting from Divine Discipline –
Divine Discipline (in the Form of Suffering) Comes from the Hand of Our Loving Father
for Our Good
 - a. (:4-7a) 4 Reminders Regarding Spiritual Discipline
 - 1) (:4) Level of Suffering Caused by Discipline is Not Excessive
 - 2) (:5) Value of Discipline Reflects its Significance
 - 3) (:6) Necessity of Discipline Tied to the Love of the Father
 - 4) (:7a) Purpose of Discipline = Endurance
 - b. (:7b-10) 3 Analogies between the Discipline of Our Earthly Father and Our
Heavenly Father
 - 1) (:7b-8) Our Family Identity
 - a) (:7b) Identity of Legitimate Sons Confirmed by Discipline
 - b) (:8) Identity of Illegitimate Sons Exposed by Lack of
Discipline
 - 2) (:9) Our Attitude
 - a) Attitude towards Our Earthly Father in the Context of
Discipline
 - b) Attitude towards Our Heavenly Father in the Context of
Discipline
 - 3) (:10) Their Motivation
 - a) Motivation of Our Earthly Father in the Context of
Discipline
 - b) Motivation of Our Heavenly Father in the Context of
Discipline
 - c. (:11) 2 Impacts of Discipline
 - 1) Immediate Emotional Impact
 - 2) Long Term Behavioral Impact
- 3. (12:12-17) Response to Divine Discipline –
Encourage the Christian Community:
 - To Persevere in Running the Race and
 - To Pursue Peace and Purity
 - a. (:12-13) Perseverance in Running the Race Promotes a Healthy Christian
Community

- 1) (:12-13a) The Command (Action) – Encourage Perseverance in Running the Race
 - a) (:12) Shore Up the Weak Links (Isaiah 35:3)
 - b) (:13a) Stay in Your Lane (Proverbs 4:26)
- 2) (:13b) The Consequence (Goal) – Healthy Christian Community
- b. (:14-17) Pursuing Peace and Purity Guards Against Defilement and Disqualification
 - 1) (:14) The Command (Action) – Pursue Peace and Purity
 - a) Pursue Peace
 - b) Pursue Purity
 - 2) (:15-17) The Consequence (Goal) – Avoid Defilement and Disqualification
 - a) (:15) Avoid Defilement
 - b) (:16-17) Avoid Disqualification

(12:19-29) WARNING #5 – GREATER PRIVILEGES MEAN GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT BRINGS GREATER JUDGMENT IF WE FAIL HEED GOD’S WARNINGS

- 1. (:18-24) Superiority of Mount Zion to Mount Sinai
 - a. (:18-21) Mount Sinai was Unapproachable and Terrifying
 - 1) (:18) Terrifying Sights Associated with Mount Sinai
 - 2) (:19) Terrifying Sounds Associated with Mount Sinai
 - 3) (:20-21) Terrifying Testimony Associated with Mount Sinai
 - b. (:22-24) Mount Zion is Welcoming and Saving
 - 1) (:22a) Welcoming City of God
 - 2) (:22b) Welcoming Angels
 - 3) (:23a) Welcoming New Testament Saints
 - 4) (:23b) Welcoming Judge
 - 5) (:23c) Welcoming Old Testament Saints
 - 6) (:24a) Welcoming Mediator of a New Covenant
 - 7) (:24b) Welcoming Blood of New Covenant Sacrifice
- 2. (:25-29) The Serious Nature of God’s Warnings
 - a. (:25-27) Listen to God’s Warnings about Coming Judgment
 - 1) (:25) Take God’s Warnings Seriously
 - 2) (:26-27) Take God’s Promised Judgment Seriously
 - b. (:28-29) Receive God’s Kingdom with Thanksgiving and Reverence
 - 1) (:28a) Stand Firm in God’s Kingdom
 - 2) (:28b) Show Gratitude to God
 - 3) (:28c) Serve God with Reverence and Awe
 - 4) (:29) Seek Shelter from God’s Wrath

E. (13:1-17) EXHORTATION TO PERFORM CHRISTIAN DUTIES

1. (13:1-6) Practical Exhortations Regarding Social Duties –
Our Love and Reverent Service to God Must be Coupled with Cultivating:
 - Aggressive Love Towards the Brethren
 - Marital Fidelity and
 - Confident Contentment
 - a. (:1-3) Practical Exhortation to Aggressive Love –
Addressing Love for the Brethren
 - 1) (:1) Summary: Love for the Brethren
 - 2) (:2) Love for Strangers
 - 3) (:3a) Love for Prisoners
 - 4) (:3b) Love for the Mistreated
 - b. (:4) Practical Exhortation to Marital Fidelity –
Addressing Love within the Confines of Marriage
 - 1) Command
 - 2) Warning
 - c. (:5-6) Practical Exhortation to Confident Contentment –
Addressing the Love of Money
 - 1) (:5a) Command
 - 2) (:5b-6) Encouragement
 - a) (:5b) God’s Promise
 - b) (:6) Our Confidence
2. (13:7-17) Practical Exhortations Regarding Religious Duties –
Sustaining Perseverance Requires:
 - Stability in Grace and Faith
 - Sacrifices of Praise and Good Works and
 - Submissions to Our Spiritual Leaders
 - a. (:7-9) Sustaining Perseverance Requires Stability in Grace and Faith
Centered in the Immutability of Jesus Christ
 - 1) (:7) Stability Imitates the Faith of Our Former Godly Spiritual
Leaders
 - a) Appreciate Faithful Spiritual Leaders
 - b) Aspire to Imitate Their Faith
 - 2) (:8) Stability Centers in the Immutability of Jesus Christ
 - a) Unchanging in His Person
 - b) Unchanging in His Purposes
 - c) Unchanging in His Promises
 - 3) (:9) Stability Feeds on the Grace of God Consistent with
Traditional Christian Doctrine
 - a) Avoid Being Misled by Strange New Teachings
 - b) Absorb the Healthy Nourishment of Grace
 - b. (:10-16) Sustaining Perseverance Requires Sacrifices of Praise and Good
Works as We Identify with the Reproach of Christ and Focus on the City to
Come
 - 1) (:10-14) Identify with Christ
 - a) (:10-12) Appreciate the Superior Sacrifice of Christ

- b) (:13-14) Identify with the Reproach of Christ and Focus on the City to Come
 - 2) (:15-16) Offer Sacrifices of Praise and Good Works
 - a) (:15) Offer Sacrifices of Praise
 - b) (:16) Offer Sacrifices of Good Works
- c. (:17) Sustaining Perseverance Requires Submission to Our Spiritual Leaders as They Keep Watch Over Our Souls
 - 1) Responsibility of the Flock – Obey and Submit
 - 2) Responsibility of the Shepherds – Oversight
 - 3) Responsibility of the Flock – Support a Profitable Outcome

F. (13:18-25) CLOSING PERSONAL INSTRUCTIONS

THE DYNAMICS OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER AND ENCOURAGING FELLOWSHIP SUPPORT OUR GOAL OF TRUSTING OUR GREAT SHEPHERD TO EQUIP US TO DO THE WILL OF GOD

- 1. (:18-19) Closing Request for Intercessory Prayer
 - a. (:18) Grounds for the Prayer Request
 - 1) Beneficiaries of the Prayer Request
 - 2) Basis of the Prayer Request = Integrity
 - b. (:19) Goal of the Prayer Request
 - 1) Reinforcement of Request for Prayer
 - 2) Reunion
- 2. (:20-21) Closing Benediction Focused on the Equipping to do the Will of God
 - a. (:20) All Sufficient God
 - 1) Producer of Peace
 - 2) Pastor of the Flock
 - b. (:21) All Sufficient Equipper of the Saints
 - 1) Immediate Goal = Doing God's Will
 - 2) Motivation = Pleasing God
 - 3) Mediator = Jesus Christ
 - 4) Ultimate Goal = Glorifying God
- 3. (:22-25) Closing Postscript of Encouraging Fellowship
 - a. (:22) Final Exhortation to Heed this Epistle
 - b. (:23) Final Encouragement Regarding Upcoming Visit with Timothy
 - c. (:24) Final Greetings
 - 1) Greetings from the Author
 - 2) Greetings from the Believers in Italy
 - d. (:25) Final Benediction

TEXT: Hebrews 1:1-4

TITLE: *CULMINATION OF GOD'S REVELATION*

BIG IDEA:

NT REVELATION IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST TO ALL MANKIND IS FAR SUPERIOR TO OT REVELATION THROUGH THE PROPHETS TO THE JEWISH PATRIARCHS

INTRODUCTION:

What does the phrase “**Progressive Revelation**” mean to you? The unspecified author of this book to Jewish believers wanted to emphasize their privilege of having received the culmination of God’s revelation. God has now spoken in His Son, the living Word, who is preeminent in so many special ways. You can look at His person, His power, His work and clearly see His supremacy. There should be no temptation to forsake Christ and go back to the OT system as laid out in the prophets. The types and the messianic prophecies were intended to point us to the reality of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. Rejoice in the stage you now find yourself in these last days, enjoying the final word of God in terms of Progressive Revelation.

MacArthur: The revelation did not build from error to truth but from incomplete truth to more complete truth. And it remained incomplete until the New Testament was finished. . . It progressed from promise to fulfillment. . . It began with the “picture book” of types and ceremonies and prophecies and progressed to final completion in Jesus Christ and His New Testament.

F. F. Bruce: Divine revelation is thus seen to be progressive – but the progression is not from the less true to the more true, from the less worthy to the more worthy, or from the less mature to the more mature. How could it be so, when it is one and the same God who is revealed throughout? Men’s conceptions of God may change, but the evolution of the idea of God is quite a different thing from the progress of divine revelation. The progression is one from promise to fulfillment, as is made abundantly clear in the course of this epistle: the men of faith in Old Testament days did not in their lifetime experience the fulfillment of the divine promise in which they had trusted, “*because with us in mind, God had made a better plan, that only in company with us should they reach their perfection*” (Ch. 11:40, NEB).

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 man He has chosen His Son.

Guthrie: Because Hebrews begins like a sermon, without any mention of sender, addressees, or words of greeting, the author opens with a majestic overture, rhetorically eloquent and theologically packed.

I. (:1-2) THE SUPERIORITY OF GOD'S REVELATION IN THESE LAST DAYS IN HIS SON

A. (:1) Diversity of Revelation Long Ago through the OT Prophets

1. Timeframe of Revelation

“God, after He spoke long ago”

Phillips: As soon as we begin the Book of Hebrews, we encounter what is perhaps the single most important statement that could be made in our time: *“God spoke”*. This is one of the most vital things people today need to know. Ours is a relativistic age; as many as 70 percent of Americans insist that there are not absolutes, whether in matters of truth or morality. Secular society having removed God, there no longer is a heavenly voice to speak with clarity and authority. The price we have paid is the loss of truth, and with truth, hope.

- First, if God speaks in the Bible, then the Bible carries divine **authority**.
- Second, if God wrote the Bible, then it is enduringly **relevant**.
- Third, we also hold to the **unity** of the Bible.

Mohler: **Hebrews 1:1** begins with the words *“long ago.”* Just like Genesis and the Gospel of John, Hebrews opens with a chronological reference taking readers back to the beginning of creation.

2. Target Audience of Revelation

“to the fathers”

3. Transmission Communicators

“in the prophets”

Mohler: The Old Testament is a story in need of a conclusion – a messianic conclusion. The fathers and the prophets indeed spoke the word of God, but that word was not the final word.

4. Manifold Thread of Revelation

a. Many Portions

“in many portions”

- Fragmentary
- Incomplete
- Progressive nature

b. Many Ways

“and in many ways,”

- Dreams
- Visions
- Parables

- Poetry
- Historical Events
- Foreshadowings
- Types
- Prophecies (direct communication)

B. (:2) Culmination of Revelation Now in His Son

1. Timeframe of Revelation

“in these last days”

Thomas Hewitt: When Christ came the old era was fulfilled and the new age dawned; the final and eternal order became operative in the incarnate Son and the new-born Church; and it will continue to be until the consummation of all things.

2. Target Audience of Revelation

“has spoken to us”

This is God’s final revelation; His supreme revelation; the apex of His revelation; the culmination of His revelation

Piper: He was not silent. God communicates. He means to connect with us. He is not an idea to be thought about. He is a person to be listened to and understood and enjoyed and obeyed. He is a speaking person. There is no more important fact than this: There is a God who speaks that we might know him and love him and live in joyful obedience to him. God spoke. *God spoke.*

3. Transmission Communicator

a. Nature and Uniqueness of this Communicator

1) Son

“in His Son,”

A. W. Pink: (on the significance of the Transfiguration and its bearing on Heb. 1): The glory associated with Moses and Elijah was so eclipsed by the infinitely greater glory connected with Christ, that they faded from view.

Leon Morris: In essence the writer is saying God spoke “in one who has the quality of being Son.” It is the Son’s essential nature that is stressed. This stands in contrast to “*the prophets*” in the preceding verse. The consummation of the revelatory process, the definitive revelation, took place when he who was not one of “the godly fellowship of the prophets” but the very Son of God came. Throughout the epistle we shall often meet such thoughts. The writer is concerned to show that in Jesus Christ we have such a divine person and such divine activity that there can be no going back from him.

b. Status of this Communicator

1) Heir

“whom He appointed heir of all things,”

Psalm 2; Daniel 7:13-14

2) Creator

“through whom also He made the world.”

R. Kent Hughes: The immense scope of Christ’s inheritance comes from his dual functions as Creator and Redeemer. As Creator of the universe, he is its natural heir. (**Col 1:16b**) Everything in the universe has its purposes and destiny in the heir, Jesus Christ. (**Rom. 11:36**) Scripture is clear: everything in the physical universe is *for him and to him* and will consummate *in him* as heir of a new creation.

But in addition to his natural inheritance as Creator, as Redeemer he has also earned a vast inheritance of souls renewed through his atoning work of reconciliation on the cross. We are his inheritance! (**Eph. 1:18**)

II. (:3a) SUPERIOR REVELATION BECAUSE OF THE SUPREMACY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

A. Radiance of His Glory – Makes Visible God’s Glory

“And He is the radiance of His glory”

J. Vernon McGee: Brightness means "the outshining"; it means "the effulgence." The material sun out in space gives us a good illustration of this. We could never know the glory of the sun by looking at it because we can't look at it directly--it would blind us if we tried. But from the rays of the sun we get light and we get heat, and probably we get healing from it. That is the way we know about the sun. Now in somewhat the same way we would know very little about God apart from the revelation that God has given in His Son. The Lord Jesus Christ is the brightness we see. No one has seen God, but we know about Him now through Jesus Christ. Just as the rays of the sun with their warmth and light tell me about the physical sun, so the Lord Jesus reveals God to us today.

Mohler: The idea of “*radiance*” goes back to the notion of the *shekinah* glory in the Old Testament. The *shekinah* was a shining, visible glory that demonstrated the majesty of God, as in the exodus (**Exod 13:21; 40:34-35**) and at the dedication of Solomon’s temple (**1 Kgs 8:10-11**). Looking at Christ is the way we see most fully the glory of God.

B. Representation of His Nature – Makes Visible God’s Essence

“and the exact representation of His nature,”

Wuest: This word was used in classical Greek of an engraver, one who mints coins, a graving tool, a die, a stamp, a branding iron, a mark engraved, an impress, a stamp on coins and seals. Metaphorically it meant "a distinctive mark or token impressed on a person or thing, by which it is known from others, a characteristic, the character of." It

was a Greek idiom for a person's features. It was used of the type or character regarded as shared with others. It meant also an impress or an image.

R. Kent Hughes: Now, when you take these two facets – Radiator and Representor – together, you have a remarkable exposition of the identity of the Father in the Son. As **Radiator** – “*the radiance of God’s glory*” – Jesus is part of the source, one with the Father. This is what John emphasizes when he says, “the word was God” (**John 1:1**). But also as **Representor** – “*the exact representation of his being*” – Jesus is distinct, much as John also emphasizes when he says, “*the Word was with God.*” Jesus is all God, “*very God of very God.*” When you see him, you see the Father. But he is also a distinct person. This is all bound in with the mystery of the holy Trinity.

III. (:3b) SUPERIOR REVELATION BECAUSE OF THE SUPREMACY OF THE POWER OF CHRIST

“and upholds all things by the word of His power.”

Col. 1:16-17

Kent: the sense involves both upholding and movement toward some goal. It is one of Christ’s functions to sustain this universe in its existence and operation, and to carry it forward to reach the consummation which God has planned.

IV. (:3c-4) SUPERIOR REVELATION BECAUSE OF THE SUPREMACY OF THE WORK OF CHRIST

A. (:3c) Ultimate Reward for His Work

1. Work of Redemption and Atonement

“When He had made purification of sins,”

Mohler: The word purification is not one we typically use to summarize the gospel. This word encapsulates the priestly work of Christ and recalls the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. The rest of Hebrews, particularly **Hebrews 9-10**, will further expound on the significance of purification. The author introduces the term here in order to prepare readers for the trajectory of the rest of his argument.

2. Privilege of Enthronement – Place of Honor and Authority

“He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;”

F. F. Bruce: Thus the greatness of the Son of God receives sevenfold confirmation, and it appears, without being expressly emphasized, that He possesses in Himself all the qualifications to be the mediator between God and men. He is the Prophet through whom God has spoken His final word to men; He is the Priest who has accomplished a perfect work of cleansing for His people’s sins; He is the king who sits enthroned in the palace of chief honor *alongside* the Majesty on high.

Piper: Christ took his seat as the active ruling heir of all things by virtue of his death and resurrection. He not only has the right to be the heir of all things because he made all things, but also because he defeated his enemies and purchased a lost people from sin and death through his death.

B. (:4) Ultimate Recognition of His Work

1. More Excellent Ministry

“having become as much better than the angels,”

Kent: *Better* (*kreitton*), a term occurring thirteen times in the epistle, is one of the characteristic words of Hebrews as the author sets forth the superiorities of Christ to any other person, group, or institution.

Mohler: Literature from the intertestamental period – the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament, often called Second Temple Judaism – demonstrates an intense focus on angels. Some of this theological reflection was good, but it was also mixed with error. Many people in Israel considered angels to be both God’s messengers and Israel’s protectors. Many Jews looked at angels as those who would come as the army of God to rescue and vindicate the nation. Second Temple literature also attests to the rise of the notion of “personal angels,” or what we might call “guardian angels.” Due to this fascination with angels, the author of Hebrews, writing to a Jewish audience who was familiar with Second Temple literature, needed to recalibrate the theological understanding of his audience – particularly concerning Christ’s relationship to angels.

2. More Excellent Reputation

“as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

Verse 4 is a perfect transition into the main topic of Chapter 1 which is the Superiority of Christ over angels

George Zemek: Although v. 4 is syntactically dependent upon the main structure of **Heb. 1:1ff**, it is really the introduction to the next major section which compares Christ to the angels, **Heb. 1:4 – 2:18**.

R. Kent Hughes: Jesus is superior to the angels because he always was God’s Son and because two Old Testament Sonship prophecies (**Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14**) were marvelously fulfilled by him at his incarnation and resurrection and exaltation. His name is “*Son*,” while all that can be said of angels is that they are messengers.

Parunak: His work as redeemer leads to a position of honor superior to the angels. In closing this introduction, the author reminds us that we should not be surprised with this superior position. It is what we should already expect, based on the prior statements of v. 2. As Son and heir to the father, “*by inheritance*,” he already had a more excellent name. Now, by his work in purging our sins, he has in action become what he already was in position, better than the angels.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the connection between the doctrine of creation and the gospel?
- 2) Who is Jesus Christ revealed to be in this short introduction?
- 3) Do you have a sense of privilege of having access to the consummation of God's revelation in the person of Jesus Christ?
- 4) Why is the comparison to angels introduced here?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thomas Hewitt: The majestic and impressive opening forms an introduction to the Epistle as a whole. The main purpose of the writer is to show the absolute supremacy of the gospel revelation in the Son, who has accomplished a full and final reconciliation of God and man, over the imperfect revelation in the prophets. Both these revelations came from the same source. Both had the same divine origin – God; and the same divine purpose, fellowship between God and man, lay behind both. God unveils Himself that man may know Him and draw near to Him. The person, office and glory of the Son are brought forward as proof of His superiority.

Thomas Constable: The differences in the beginning of this epistle compared with the beginnings of other New Testament epistles are striking. There is no introduction of the writer, no mention of the original readers, and no benediction, all of which were common features of letters in the first century. The writer obviously wanted his readers to give their full attention to the greatness of Jesus Christ. Some students of Hebrews have concluded that the writer did not identify himself or his readers because he wanted to make Jesus Christ primary in the readers' thinking throughout this epistle. I think this is very likely.

Griffith Thomas: No fewer than seven things are said about Christ in proof of His superiority as the sphere and embodiment of the divine revelation (vv. 2-4).

- (1) Christ the Heir (v. 2)
- (2) Christ the Creator (v. 2)
- (3) Christ the Revealer (v. 3)
- (4) Christ the Sustainer (v. 3)
- (5) Christ the Redeemer (v. 3)
- (6) Christ the Ruler (v. 3)
- (7) Christ Supreme (v. 4)

R. Kent Hughes: What can be added to the eloquence of the seven-fold supremacy of the Son? He is:

- **Inheritor:** As Creator he is heir to the universe. As Redeemer he bought our souls and so made us his personal inheritance.
- **Creator:** He created the universe's one hundred thousand million galaxies, each with a hundred thousand million stars, each six hundred trillion miles across – and each fleeing away in never-ending expansion. Awesome!
- **Sustainer.** He is sustaining the galloping galaxies as well as the sub-microscopic universe of atoms – all by his spoken word.
- **Radiator.** Like the sun, he is the source and radiator of divine glory – not a reflection, but part of it! He *is* God.
- **Representor.** He is the exact representation of the Father's being. He is everything God is, yet separate. He is with God.
- **Purifier.** He is the cosmic sacrifice who paid for our sins with his blood in order to purify us.
- **Ruler.** He sits, having paid for our sins once and for all, as the supreme priest. He is at the right hand of Majesty in ineffable exaltation. And wonder of wonder, he prays for us.

Steven Cole: So in Christ there is both **continuity** and **contrast**. The continuity is that God spoke through the prophets and God spoke through Christ. But the contrast is, the prophets were many and fragmentary; Christ was one and complete. The prophets were all sinners; Jesus alone was perfectly holy. The prophets were preparatory; Jesus is the final fulfillment.

There is also a contrast of being. The prophets were mere men, but Jesus was God's Son. In the Greek, there is no word "His" and no definite article before "Son." The construction emphasizes the Son's essential nature (**Morris**). Jesus is the Son of God in two aspects: eternally, He is the Son, one with the Father, the second person of the Trinity. Temporally, He is God's Son incarnate, born of the virgin Mary, taking on our human nature so that He could bear our sins (**Luke 1:38**). It is in this second aspect that He is referred to here. Jesus, who is eternal God in human flesh, supremely and finally reveals God to us.

Leon Morris: With the statement about the Son's having effected purification of sins, the author comes to what is for him the heart of the matter. His whole epistle shows that the thing that had gripped him was that the very Son of God had come to deal with the problem of man's sin. He sees him as a priest and the essence of his priestly work as the offering of the sacrifice that really put sin away. The author has an unusual number of ways of referring to what Christ has done for man. The Savior made a propitiation for sins (**2:17**). He put sins away so that God remembers them no more (**8:12; 10:17**). He bore sin (**9:28**), he offered a sacrifice (*thysia*) for sins (**10:12**), he made an offering (*prosphora*) for sin (**10:18**), and brought about remission of sin (**10:18**). He annulled sin by his sacrifice (**9:26**). He brought about redemption from transgressions (**9:15**).

TEXT: Hebrews 1:5-14

TITLE: SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

BIG IDEA:

SERIES OF 7 OT MESSIANIC QUOTATIONS PROVE THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST OVER ANGELS

INTRODUCTION:

The Superiority of Jesus Christ over angels is not just a doctrinal exercise. It lies at the heart of the sufficiency of Christ to be an adequate Savior who can meet any need we might have. This passage is one of the strongest arguments for the deity of Jesus anywhere in Scripture. As believers in Jesus Christ, we benefit from all of these aspects of His demonstrated superiority.

In vv. 5-14 He is a more superior mediator than the angels; confirmed by a series of seven OT texts from the Septuagint (mostly from the Psalms): **Psalm 2:7; II Sam. 7:14; Ps. 97:7; Ps. 104:4; Ps. 45:6-7; Ps. 102:25-27** and **Ps. 110:1**.

I. (:5a) Psalm 2:7 – SUPERIOR BY VIRTUE OF GOD’S PUBLIC DECLARATION OF HIS UNIQUE SONSHIP – LINKED TO THE RESURRECTION

*“For to which of the angels did He ever say,
‘Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee’?”*

Thomas Constable: The phrase "to which of the angels" opens and closes this section of the text (cf. **Hebrews 1:13**). This literary device (an *inclusio*) marks off a literary unit by using the same word or phrase at the beginning and at the end of a discussion (cf. **Hebrews 2:5-16; Hebrews 3:1 to Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 5:1-10; Hebrews 5:11 to Hebrews 6:12; Hebrews 7:1-10; Hebrews 12:14 to Hebrews 13:20**). . . the title "Son" refers to Jesus in three separate respects. He was always the pre-existent Son (**Hebrews 1:3 a-b**; cf. **Hebrews 5:8**), He became the incarnate Son at His birth (**Hebrews 1:2 a**), and He became the exalted Son when He returned to heaven.

Kent: Elsewhere in the New Testament Paul uses the same quotation and applies it to the resurrection of Christ (**Acts 13:33**). Thus we must abandon any notions of origination or birth in the term “begotten.” Rather, the expression has to do with public declaration, acknowledgement, or inauguration. In conjunction with **Romans 1:4**, the idea seems clear that the one who was always the divine Son was openly declared or demonstrated to be such by the culminating events of resurrection and subsequent exaltation. Of course, Christ was previously acknowledged as Son by the Father at the baptism (**Matt. 3:17**) and transfiguration (**Matt. 17:5**), but the crowning event was the

resurrection and its aftermath. The psalmist clearly depicts God as directly addressing the Anointed One (i.e., Messiah, or Christ) and calling Him my Son.

Steven Cole: While the angels were sometimes referred to in the plural as “*sons of God*” (**Job 1:6**), and while believers are called “*sons of God*” (**John 1:12**), no single angel or believer was ever referred to as “the Son of God.” That title uniquely belongs to Jesus and signifies His deity, as the Jews themselves knew (**John 5:18**).

F. F. Bruce: on importance of “*Today*” -- He who was the Son of God from everlasting entered into the full exercise of all the prerogatives implied by His Sonship when, after His suffering had proved the completeness of His obedience, He was raised to the Father’s right hand.

These first two points are parallel:

II. (:5b) 2 Sam. 7:14 -- SUPERIOR BY VIRTUE OF GOD’S PUBLIC DECLARATION OF HIS UNIQUE SONSHIP – LINKED TO DYNASTIC REIGN

“And again, ‘I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me’?”

Deffinbaugh: This “father-son” relationship is not about one’s birth; it is about being installed on the throne.

Phillips: The point here seems to be Jesus’ special status over all the created realm. It does not mean that Jesus is first among creatures, but rather that he is exalted above the creatures. The idea is again that of inheritance and unique dignity. **F. F. Bruce** explains, “He is called firstborn because he exists before all creation and because all creation is his heritage.”

III. (:6) Psalm 97:7 – SUPERIOR BECAUSE HE IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP BY ANGELS

“And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him.’”

Look at how the apostle Paul forbid people to worship him

IV. (:7) Psalm 104:4 – SUPERIOR BECAUSE HE COMMANDS THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

“And of the angels He says, ‘Who makes His angels winds, And His ministers a flame of fire.’”

Service is a good thing -- not something to be denigrated; but it is vastly different from deserved dominion

Steven Cole: The main point of **verse 7** is that the angels belong to Jesus (“*His angels*”) and that they obey His commands. Thus they are His servants, and not vice versa. Also, the terms “*winds*” and “*fire*” point to the transitory, changing nature of their service, as contrasted with the eternal sovereignty and glory of Christ, as portrayed in **verse 8**. The point is that Jesus is superior to the angels because they worship and serve Him.

Leon Morris: Whereas he has Sonship, they are reducible to nothing more than the elemental forces of wind and fire. Also, the implication is probably that the angels are temporary in contrast to the Son, who is eternal.

Spurgeon: Angels are servants and not kings, they fly upon the divine errands like flames of fire, but they do not sway a scepter, neither have they a throne existing for ever and ever. Jesus is the anointed king, and though we share in the anointing yet is He far above us. Christ is infinitely greater than Christians. We are right glad to have it so. Angels are pure spirits, though they are permitted to assume a visible form when God desires us to see them. God is a spirit, and He is waited upon by spirits in His royal courts. Angels are like winds for mystery, force, and invisibility, and no doubt the winds themselves are often the angels or messengers of God. God who makes His angels to be as winds, can also make winds to be His angels, and they are constantly so in the economy of nature. God’s ministers or servants He makes to be as swift, potent, and terrible as fire, and on the other hand He makes fire, that devouring element, to be His minister flaming forth upon His errands.

V. (:8-9) Psalm 45:7-8 – SUPERIOR BECAUSE HE IS THE ETERNAL RIGHTEOUS RULER

“But of the Son He says, ‘Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions.’”

Phillips: All this being true, to whom else will we turn for the righteousness we so desperately lack, but need if we are to stand in God’s judgment? Who else will reign over this earth to establish righteousness? To what power, to what authority, will we run seeking safety and refuge, except the One whom God has enthroned forever, who bears the title, “*You, O God,*” whose scepter is that of righteousness, and who, at the end of days, will establish righteousness upon the earth?

Bruce Hurt: **Lawlessness** (*anomia*) signifies everything that is contrary to the will and law of God.

- **Lawlessness** is living as though your own ideas are superior to God's.
- **Lawlessness** says, "God may demand it but I don't prefer it."
- **Lawlessness** says, "God may promise it but I don't want it."

- **Lawlessness** replaces God's law with my contrary desires. I become a law to myself.
- **Lawlessness** is rebellion against the right of God to make laws and govern His creatures. All these things the Son hated in the days of His flesh (and still hates).

Jesus not only acted in righteousness (His conduct) but He also loved righteousness (His character). Because Christ loved (loves) righteousness, He hated (hates) lawlessness. Is this basic spiritual dynamic true in your life? Is it not true that where there is true love for God, there is abhorrence of sin? Yes, believers still sin, but we hate it as it is a direct affront to the grace and mercy of our loving Master and King. When we love God's right standards (all of His standards are right!), we will hate lawlessness in every shape, form or fashion. We will be like the men described in Ezekiel who "*sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed.*" (**Ezekiel 9:4**)

VI. (:10-12) Psalm 102:25-27 – SUPERIOR BECAUSE HE IS THE ETERNALLY EXISTENT, CHANGELESS CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

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

Steven Cole: To this Jewish church, these words were not just a theological statement about Jesus' superiority to the angels. They were also meant to be a source of great comfort in the midst of trials. The same eternal Creator who sustained the psalmist in the midst of his calamity would sustain them in the midst of their troubles. And that eternal Creator is none other than their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (**13:8**). Even if you are taken away in the midst of your days, you have a lasting refuge in the eternal, unchanging Lord Jesus Christ!

Phillips: It is traditional, when speaking of the attributes of God, to distinguish between his communicable and incommunicable attributes. Some of his attributes God can and does communicate to us, such as goodness, mercy, and holiness, to name a few. But other attributes are part and parcel of God's deity, and cannot be communicated to mortal creatures. In these verses, it is divine incommunicable attributes that are ascribed to the Son – attributes like eternity, omnipotence, and immutability. Indeed, we are deliberately reminded of **Genesis 1:1** – “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” Here that work of creation is ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ, with all the implications of divinity that accompany it.

VII. (:13-14) Psalm 110:1 – SUPERIOR BECAUSE HE IS THE EXALTED CONQUERING KING

“But to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies A footstool for Thy feet’? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does **verse 4** serve as an effective transition to this paragraph?
- 2) What are some of the errors of how the world pictures the functioning of angels?
- 3) How does God use angels to minister to the saints today?
- 4) Where do you look for the establishment of righteousness on the earth?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: The Son’s Supremacy over Angels

Jesus’ superiority to the angels rests on the fact that He is God.

The author uses the Old Testament to prove his point, since his readers accepted its authority. He uses seven passages, all taken from the Septuagint (LXX = the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament). We may group his arguments under five headings:

1. Jesus is superior to the angels because He is uniquely the Son of God (**1:4-5**).
2. Jesus is superior to the angels because they worship and serve Him (**1:6-7**).
3. Jesus is superior to the angels because He is the God who reigns eternally (**1:8-9**).
4. Jesus is superior to the angels because He is the eternal Creator of heaven and earth (**1:10-12**).
5. Jesus is superior to the angels because He sits at God’s right hand, whereas they are sent out to serve the saints (**1:13-14**).

Deffinbaugh: Higher Than the Angels

1:5-14 - Seven Old Testament texts which support the conclusion that the Son is higher than the angels:

- Because of the Son's unique relationship with the Father (**1:5**)
- Because of the inferior position of the angels (**1:6-7**)
- Because the Son is eternal (**1:8-12**)

Because the Son's position is higher than the angels (**1:13-14**)

I believe that every time a New Testament author cited an Old Testament text as some kind of proof, it was because he saw some kind of **correspondence** between what he was saying and what the Old Testament text was saying. The precise nature of this correspondence would, of course, differ from one instance to another. . .

We dare not ignore the relationship between **verse 4** and **verse 5**. **Verse 4** ended, "*Thus he became so far better than the angels as He has inherited a name superior to theirs.*" So it is all about one's name or title (or position). That's what these seven Scripture citations are all about – **the better name** that Jesus possesses. . .

As I seek to draw this lesson to a close, I would point out that the author's "conclusion" (or application if you prefer) comes in the next four verses – **Hebrews 2:1-4**. There he will exhort us to pay much closer attention to what the Son has revealed, knowing the greatness of the One who has spoken to us.

R. Kent Hughes: So to the beleaguered Jewish believer who was being tempted to say that Christ is an angel and thus escape persecution, God's Word issues a clear call:

- Christ is superior to angels because he has a superior name – he is Son;
- a superior honor – all the angels worship him;
- a superior vocation – he is Sovereign King;
- a superior existence – he is eternal and unchangeable;
- a superior status – he rules the universe.

Mohler: Yet while this passage gives us a clearer understanding of the function of angels in God's purposes of redemption, we must not miss the main point. Angels are spirits that minister to the body of Christ and are thus sent out by Christ himself. Angels are indeed remarkable. But they pale in comparison to the glory of the Redeemer, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He is superior to every angel – indeed to the entire angelic host.

Phillips: What is there you might need but that the risen and reigning Lord and Savior is the answer? There is nothing you might face, nothing you might lack, nothing you might need in all your weakness and sin and human frailty, that is not found abundantly in him who loves you and gave himself for you and now reigns forever as Savior and Lord, who remains the same and whose years shall have no end.

TEXT: Hebrews 2:1-4

TITLE: *WARNING #1 – DON'T DRIFT AWAY*

BIG IDEA:

IN LIGHT OF THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST, PAY ATTENTION TO THE AUTHENTICATED GOSPEL MESSAGE LEST YOU DRIFT AWAY AND SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES

INTRODUCTION:

This parenthetical warning is directed towards some group of professing Jewish converts who were under severe pressure to recant their loyalty to Christ and revert to Judaism. The majority of this group would be genuine believers as demonstrated by the exhortations to Christian conduct throughout the epistle. However, the danger is that there would be a limited number who would apostatize (like Judas) – revealing that they never were genuinely converted. (There is never any question that one could lose his salvation.) So the writer addresses them as believers, but stresses the need to persevere in the faith. Here the warning is specifically not to drift away but to pay attention to the Gospel Message – both in light of the supremacy of Christ and in light of its apostolic eyewitness testimony and divine corroboration. The certainty of judgment for those who fall away from the faith adds to the writer's serious tone in reinforcing this warning.

MacArthur: [takes a different gospel-oriented view = **Warning to the Intellectually Convinced**]

To whom is the warning directed? It cannot be to Christians. They can never be in danger of neglecting salvation – in the sense of not receiving it – since they already have it. They can neglect growth and discipleship, but they cannot neglect salvation. . . The warning must therefore be directed to non-Christians, specifically Jews, who are intellectually convinced of the gospel but who fail to receive it for themselves.

R. Kent Hughes: Some in the church were also in danger of being blown away from their moorings and drifting away from the truth of Christ and back into “the Dead Sea of Judaism.” In an effort to counter this, the writer has held high the supremacy of Christ:

- his **prophetic** supremacy as the final word of God (**vv. 1, 2**),
- his **cosmic** supremacy as Creator and Sustainer of all (**vv. 2, 3**),
- his **Levitical** supremacy as the ultimate priest seated in Heaven (**v. 3**),
- and his **angelic** supremacy in that he is superior to angels in name, honor, vocation, existence and reign (**vv. 3-14**).

This manifold superiority of Christ is meant to be an anchor to hold them to their Christian faith amidst the increasingly stormy seas of persecution. Indeed, it is meant to be the universal anchor for all imperiled souls for all time.

Robert W. Ross: Nothing should be permitted to cause us to drift past this one fixed point of safety [the Gospel]. No calamity, influence, force, or circumstance should be tolerated that weakens us with reference to the hope of salvation. A vessel launched unpiloted into midstream is made to drift past its landing point on the opposite shore by the currents at work in the stream. So the currents of life work against us unless we take heed.

Westcott: After establishing the superior dignity of the Son in comparison with that of angels, the writer of the Epistle pauses for a moment to enforce the practical consequences which follow from the truth before he sets forth the work of the Son for humanity. It is obvious that a revelation given through such a Mediator carries with it more solemn obligations on those who receive it and heavier penalties for neglect than a revelation made through angelic ministry.

I. (:1) THE SUBSTANCE OF THE WARNING – PAY ATTENTION

A. Anchor Down

“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard,”

Slogan of the Vanderbilt Commodores [Personal illustration]

R. Kent Hughes: Along with the fish, the other popular Christian symbol from the sea was the anchor. The inspiration for this came from **Hebrews 6:19, 20** where the hope produced by Jesus’ ministry as eternal high priest is described as *“an anchor for the soul”* – *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul. Firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, had entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”* So the anchor came to symbolize Christ and specifically the Christian hope emanating from the supremacy of his priesthood. The anchor became such a powerful symbol to the early church that it was found in paintings and in the design of Christians’ coffins. In death, Christians found great comfort in the knowledge that they were anchored by Christ, the great priest, and so were not adrift for eternity.

Mohler: *“For this reason”* – Given the superiority of Christ over the angels and his identity as the divine Son of God, Jesus both demands and deserves to be heard.

“what we have heard” = the truths about Jesus Christ and the Christian gospel

Kent: danger is that they might drift on by . . . even though he writes to professed Christians, he is wise enough not to take for granted that all profession is genuine

Mohler: *“Hearing”* the Word of God rightly is a spiritual hearing – one that involves believing, obeying, and submitting to what is heard. Right hearing is more a matter of the heart than a function of the ear.

B. Avoid Drifting Away

“lest we drift away from it.”

MacArthur: Both phrases have nautical connotations. The first refers to mooring a ship, tying it up at the dock. The second was often used of a ship that had been allowed to drift past the harbor. The warning is to secure oneself to the truth of the gospel, being careful not to pass by the only harbor of salvation. The closest attention must be paid to these very serious matters of the Christian faith. The readers in their tendency to apathy are in danger of making shipwreck of their lives.

II. (:2-4) THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE WARNING – NO ESCAPING JUDGMENT IF YOU DRIFT AWAY -- MORE SEVERE ACCOUNTABILITY UNDER THE NEW COVENANT THAN THE OLD COVENANT

A. (:2) Judgment for Disobedience to the Old Covenant

1. Fixed Requirements – No Wriggle Room

“For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable,”

Leon Morris: The OT does not speak of angels in connection with the giving of the law; but their presence is mentioned in other NT passages (**Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19**), in the LXX of **Deuteronomy 33:2**, and in Josephus (Antiq. XV, 136). The rabbis also thought of angels as there on that great occasion (SBK, 3:554-56).

2. Fair Recompense for Sin

“and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense,”

R. Kent Hughes: The writer uses a Hebrew argument style called *qal wa homer* (literally, “light and heavy”), which employs the reasoning that if something is true in a light or lesser thing, it is true in a heavy or greater thing. . .

Sometimes the punishment came directly from Heaven as when in one day 23,000 died or on another occasion when many were killed by snakes (**1 Corinthians 10:5-10**). At other times the just punishment came through legal processes.

Parunak: “*Transgression*” is a positive violation of God’s command. “*Disobedience*” is more a refusal to hear what he has to say, and thus focuses on sins of omission. The fundamental principle of God’s justice is that sin must be punished, and the righteous protected.

B. (:3-4) Judgment for Neglecting the New Covenant

1. (:3a) No Exemptions When it Comes to Accountability

“how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”

Thomas Hewitt: The privilege of hearing this great message of salvation conveyed by God’s own Son far exceeds the privileges of hearing the law given through God’s

servants. If then the transgressors of the law did not escape the penalty for every breach of that law but received their just reward, how can those under the new law escape God's judgment?

MacArthur: If disobedience to the older covenant of law brought swift judgment, how much more severe will be the judgment of disobedience to the New Covenant gospel of salvation, which was mediated by the Son who is superior to the angels (cf. **Mt 10:14, 15; 11:20-24**)? The messenger and message of the New Covenant are greater than the messengers and message of the older covenant. The greater the privilege, the greater the punishment for disobedience or neglect (**10:29; cf. Lk. 12:47**).

Kent: “neglect” – The word (*disregard*) was used of men who rudely and willfully ignored a gracious invitation to a feast (**Matt. 22:5**), and of Timothy's obligation not to neglect the exercise of his spiritual gift (**1 Tim. 4:14**).

You can't argue that you have some type of special dispensation that gives you an escape from accountability to the gospel imperative;
You also can't argue that there is any doubt about the substance of the gospel message and what is required in terms of repentance and faith.

R. Kent Hughes: The concern is for one's **attitude** – the one who has let the greatness of Christ slip away – the one who no longer marvels at the atonement – the one who no longer has a desire for the Word – the one who really does not pray in his spirit – the one who is drifting back to where he came from and has little concern about his drifting.

MacArthur: the three great reasons why a man should not neglect the gospel of salvation are:

- the character of Christ,
- the certainty of judgment,
- and the confirmation of God.

2. (:3b-4) No Confusion When it Comes to the Message and Required Response

a. Initial Proclamation by the Lord Himself

“After it was at the first spoken through the Lord,”

b. Subsequent Confirmation by the Eyewitnesses = Apostles and Early Disciples

“it was confirmed to us by those who heard,”

c. Supernatural Witness and Corroboration by God through the Holy Spirit

“God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

God has authenticated both His messengers and their message in a variety of very dramatic ways.

Kent: There was also divine confirmation of the message of salvation. By signs (supernatural occurrences which acted as proofs or indicators) and wonders (supernatural acts which produced awe among the beholders) and various miracles (a variety of displays of divine power), God indicated His involvement in the message of salvation. Many of these are recoded in Acts (e.g. **3:6-8; 5:12, 18-20; 6:8; 8:6; 9:33-34, 40-41**, et al.).

Mohler: miracles do not exist for their own sake. They do not ultimately point to themselves. Instead, miracles attest and validate God's major works in redemptive history. In the New Testament, miracles attest and confirm the truth about the identity and work of Christ.

F. F. Bruce: When Paul tries to recall the Galatian Christians to the simplicity of Christ, he reminds them that it was the message of faith and not the imposition of legal requirements that was confirmed among them in the beginning by God's supplying the Spirit to them and performing mighty works in their midst (**Gal. 3:5**). Similarly the recipients of Peter's first epistle are reminded how the gospel was first preached to them in the power of "*the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven*" (**1 Pet. 1:12**). The New Testament writers (including our author at this point) would not have appealed to the evidence of these miraculous manifestations if there was any possibility that their readers would reply that they had never seen or heard of such things. They were matters of common knowledge and widespread Christian experience, and the reference to them here is calculated to restore the readers' faith in the gospel as God's authoritative message.

Parunak: "*according to His own will*" -- It is interesting that the writer feels the need to remind them that these miraculous dispositions were rationed by God. Some people today feel that if we do not experience signs, wonders, and powers, and demonstrate showy gifts of the Spirit, our salvation has fallen short. Perhaps the same tendency was seen among the readers of this epistle. This phrase reminds us that these gifts are contingent, not universal. God provided them to attest the revolutionary message of the gospel.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does focusing on the supremacy of Jesus Christ help to anchor our souls in the truth and protect against spiritual slippage?
- 2) What are some of the distractions that can cause you to drift spiritually?

3) Since greater light brings greater accountability before God, how serious is this warning of God's judgment?

4) Do you think the miraculous sign gifts spoken of in the NT are being distributed by the Holy Spirit today? Why or why not? If so, for what purpose?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mohler: Sadly, we witness theological and spiritual drift all too often. It is the story of many denominations, churches, families, and individuals. Even the most cursory knowledge of church history demonstrates that heresy and theological liberalism do not capsize denominations and churches with one revolutionary wave. Instead, churches and individuals end up on the wrong side of the doctrinal equation by drifting a little at a time. Churches once orthodox in their theology slowly minimize and relax their theological convictions until they become unwilling to draw boundaries or speak clearly on issues essential to orthodox Christianity and the evangelical gospel.

Richard D. Phillips: The Book of Hebrews is notable for confronting us with the reality of **apostasy**. To be sure, the Bible teaches the eternal security of all true believers in Jesus Christ. . . Yet it is also true that not all who give profession of faith are true believers. . . We are secure through faith in Jesus Christ. But like a good tree, true faith is revealed by its fruit (**Matt. 7:17-19**). Therefore Peter tells us to "*be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure*" (**2 Peter 1:10**). "*Examine yourselves,*" Paul adds, "*to see whether you are in the faith*" (**2 Cor. 13:5**). We must therefore persevere and use the resources God gives us to bear fruit and thus not to drift away.

Steven Cole: The Danger of Drifting Spiritually

Since we have encountered such a great salvation, we must be careful not to drift away from it.

There are three main points:

1. The salvation Christ offers is indescribably great.

He calls it "*so great a salvation*" (2:3). He gives us four reasons that this salvation is indescribably great.

A. SALVATION IS GREAT BECAUSE IT IS THE ONE THING THAT EVERY PERSON NEEDS MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

B. SALVATION IS GREAT BECAUSE IT COMES TO US FROM NONE OTHER THAN THE LORD JESUS HIMSELF.

C. SALVATION IS GREAT BECAUSE EYEWITNESSES CONFIRMED IT AS TRUE.

D. SALVATION IS GREAT BECAUSE GOD HIMSELF CONFIRMED THE MESSAGE BY MIRACLES THROUGH THE APOSTLES.

2. Because God's salvation is so great, the consequences of neglecting it are terrible.

A. THE LAW IMPOSED SOME FRIGHTENING PENALTIES FOR DISOBEDIENCE.

B. THE NEGLECT OF THE GOSPEL WILL BRING FAR WORSE CONSEQUENCES.

3. In spite of the greatness of God's salvation, we all are in danger of drifting away from it.

As I said, the author uses "we" to include himself as vulnerable. The immediate cause of the Hebrews' drifting was that they were facing trials and the threat of persecution. Whenever we are there, we need to be on guard. We are then most in danger of drifting. But even at other times, drifting is easy because all it requires is neglect.

A. THE CAUSE OF DRIFTING IS NEGLECT.

B. THE ANTIDOTE TO DRIFTING IS PAYING ATTENTION.

T. C. Edwards: The first warning of the Apostle is, Take care that you do not drift. IN the Son as the Revealer of God we have a sure anchorage. Let us fasten the vessel to its moorings. That the Son has revealed God is beyond question . . . But the warning is based, not simply on the fact of a revelation, but on the greatness of the Revealer.

F. B. Meyer: It is the drift that ruins men. The drift of the religious world, the drift of old habits and associations, which in the case of these Hebrew Christians was setting so strongly toward Judaism, bearing them back to the religious system from which they had come out. The drift of one's own evil nature always chaffing to bear us from God to that which is earthly and sensuous, the drift of the pressure of temptation. The professing Christian who now scarcely pretends to open the Bible or pray came to so terrible a position not at a single leap but by yielding to the pressure of the constant waywardness of the old nature and thus drifted into an Arctic region where he is likely to perish benumbed and frozen unless rescued and launched on the warm Gulf stream of the love of God. It is so easy and so much pleasanter to drift, just to lie back and renounce effort and let yourself go whither the waters will. As they break musically on the sides of the rocking boat but, ah, how ineffable the remorse, how disastrous the result. Are you drifting? You can easily tell. Are you conscious of effort, of daily, hourly resistance to the stream around you and within? Do the things of God and of heaven loom more clearly on your vision? Do the waters foam angrily at your prow as you force your way through them. If so, rejoice. But remember that only divine strength

can suffice to maintain the conflict and keep the boat's head against the stream. If not, you are drifting. Hail the strong Son of man. Ask Him to come aboard and stay you and bring you into port.

MacArthur: I often think of a story that I read about the English explorer, William Edward Parry, who took a crew to the Arctic Ocean. They wanted to go farther north to continue their chartings, so they calculated their location by the stars and started a very difficult and treacherous march north. They walked hour upon hour, and finally, totally exhausted, they stopped. Taking their bearings again from the stars, they discovered that they were farther south than they had been when they started. They had been walking on an ice floe that was moving south faster than they were walking north. I wonder how many people think their good deeds, their merits, and their religiousness are taking them step by step to God, when in fact they are moving away from Him faster than they are supposedly walking toward Him. That is the tragedy of it. They awake one day to find, like Parry's crew, that all the time they have been moving in the wrong direction.

Wiersbe: The next time you sing "*Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*," recall that the composer, **Robert Robinson**, was converted under the mighty preaching of George Whitefield, but that later he drifted from the Lord. He had been greatly used as a pastor, but neglect of spiritual things led him astray. In an attempt to find peace, he began to travel. During one of his journeys, he met a young woman who was evidently very spiritually minded.

"What do you think of this hymn I have been reading?" she asked Robinson, handing him the book. **It was his own hymn!** He tried to avoid her question but it was hopeless, for the Lord was speaking to him. Finally, he broke down and confessed who he was and how he had been living away from the Lord.

"But these 'streams of mercy' are still flowing," the woman assured him, and through her encouragement, Robinson was restored to fellowship with the Lord.

It is easy to drift with the current, but it is difficult to return against the stream. Our salvation is a "*great salvation*," purchased at a great price. It brings with it great promise and blessings, and it leads to a great inheritance in glory. How can we neglect it?

Robert Whitaker:

Live for something; have a purpose,
And that purpose keep in view;
Drifting like a helmless vessel,
Thou can'st ne'er to life be true.
Half the wrecks that strew life's ocean,
If some star had been their guide,
Might have now been riding safely,
But they drifted with the tide.

TEXT: Hebrews 2:5-18

TITLE: *THE VALUE OF CHRIST'S HUMANITY*

BIG IDEA:

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY OVER ANGELS NOT COMPROMISED BY HIS HUMANITY

INTRODUCTION:

Throughout the gospel accounts we witnessed the disciples of Christ struggling to wrap their minds around the apparent incongruity of a Suffering Savior. It was difficult enough to try to make sense of the Incarnation (how could God take on humanity?); but even more difficult to accept the prophesied reality of His upcoming rejection, suffering and death on the cross. How could these things be? Here we have the author of Hebrews addressing some of these same underlying tensions as he deals with objections to the proposition that Jesus Christ is superior to angels.

MacArthur: Jews could not comprehend the idea that God would become man. Even less could they understand how, having become man, He could die. How could the anointed of God, the Messiah, be the victim of death? Consequently, wherever the gospel was preached to Jews, as in **Acts 17**, it was necessary to explain why Christ had to suffer and die (vv. 2-3). The cross was a serious stumbling block to them. Jewish converts even had difficulty with this issue. How could Jesus be greater than angels if angels never die? How could He be a Savior if He Himself were killed? These were lingering questions.

I. (:5-9) SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST OVER ANGELS TEMPORARILY OBSCURED BY HIS HUMAN MISSION OF REDEMPTION

A. (:5) Dominion Never Given to Angels

“For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.”

Although angels currently have an elevated role over man, that is only temporary because believers will reign with Christ in the world to come. The objection that must be answered here: Does the humanity of Jesus reduce Him to a status that is subservient to angels?

B. (:6-9) Dominion Given to Christ – Although Not Realized Yet

1. (:6-7a) Present State = Humanity = Lower than Angels (Psalm 8)

“But one has testified somewhere, saying, ‘What is man, that Thou rememberest him? Or the son of man, that Thou art concerned about him?’ Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels;”

Kent: Man is presently lower than angels because he is subject to mortality (**Luke 20:36**) and other frailties. But this is not a permanent condition for man, nor was it God's original intention.

R. Kent Hughes: The marvelous declaration of God's intention [for mankind to have dominion] can only be appreciated in the full context of the Psalm. The Psalmist is contemplating the mighty expanse of the evening sky, studded with its orbs of light, and he is so overwhelmed with the greatness of God that he bursts into psalm – first celebrating God's majestic name, then declaring God's worthiness of praise, and next wondering at God's intention for puny little man. . . Of course the intention was not new because it was originally spelled out in **Genesis 1:26-28**. . .

Think of man's astonishing **position**: "*You made him a little lower than the angels.*" Puny man is only lower than the angels in that man is in a corporal body and the angels are incorporeal. Man is therefore limited in a way angels are not and has lesser power. But man is not lower spiritually or in importance. What an astounding position for such temporary specks as us!

Think of man's astonishing **honor**: "*you crowned him with glory and honor.*" Adam and Eve were the king and queen of original creation. God set them in a glorious paradise and walked with them.

Consider man's amazing **authority**: ". . . *and put everything under his feet.*" This was given to mankind through Adam (**Genesis 1:28**). Man was given rule over the world.

2. (:7b-8a) Future State = Dominion Over All

"Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him."

Steven Cole: *If you feel weak, despised, or insignificant in this evil world, take courage! In Christ, we are more than conquerors.* Although it is difficult to fathom, in the ages to come we will reign with Christ in His kingdom. It doesn't really matter what the world thinks of you. What matters is what God thinks of you. If you have trusted Christ as the One who bore your sins on the cross, then God has imputed His righteousness to you. You are purified from your sins. You can know that although you are just a speck on planet earth, which is just a speck in this gigantic universe, God cares for you and has a purpose for your life. That purpose transcends the short life we have in this body, and extends through eternity in our glorified bodies that we will receive when Christ returns.

3. (:8b) Present Focus – What Do We See Right Now?

a. (:8b) Dominion Temporarily Obscured

"But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him."

Mohler: Many theologians refer to this tension as the already-not yet aspect of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God and the reign of Christ are in some senses already *inaugurated*, yet we are still waiting for the kingdom's *consummation*. However, this perceived chaos in the world around us should not cause us to doubt the veracity of the gospel message or the work of the last Adam.

- b. (:9) Human Mission of Redemption Has Already Led to Exaltation
“But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”

Mohler: the person and work of Christ are intimately intertwined. He is the eternal Son who comes to glory through suffering. As the glorious God-man, he is superior to all things, including the angels.

R. Kent Hughes: But whereas the height of **exaltation** for man is in being made a little lower than the angels, it was for Jesus the depth of his **humiliation**.

Hewitt: Should taste death means not only that He died (cf. **Mt. xvi. 28** and **Jn. viii. 52**), but that He tasted all the humiliation and bitterness of death. He experienced the wages of sin . . .

F. F. Bruce: As mankind's true representative, accordingly, He must share in the conditions inseparable from man's estate only so could He blaze the trail of salvation for mankind and act effectively as His People's high priest in the presence of God. This means that He is not only the one in whom the sovereignty destined for man is realized, but also the one who, because of man's sin, must realize that sovereignty by way of suffering and death.

II. (:10-18) SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST OVER ANGELS ENHANCED BY HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH HUMANITY

A. (:10-13) Necessity of Humanity to Truly Suffer

1. (:10) Suffering Deemed Appropriate

- a. Consistent with His Role in the Origination of All Things
“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things,”

Mohler: The main point of **verse 10** is the fittingness of the Father's plan to redeem humanity through a perfect and suffering Savior. The justice of God demanded a substitutionary atonement for the forgiveness of sins. This verse hints at the need (it was *“appropriate”*) of the active and passive obedience of Christ in order to secure our redemption and to atone for our sins.

R. Kent Hughes: Thus the writer answers those who say that a suffering Savior does not fit with the idea of a sovereign, cosmic Creator. The argument is, in fact, reversed. Do you want to see the character and power of God? Look at the cosmos. Turn your face like an astronomer to the Milky Way, and as your visage is illumined, let your mind go 600 trillion miles to the edge of our galaxy and visit its neighboring galaxy, the first of some hundred thousand million more “neighbors.” Then you will see something of him “*for whom and through whom everything exists.*” Do you want to see even more of God’s character and power? Then look to his final word, Christ, for in him you have an even greater display of his power and moral character. What God did through his suffering Son fits with his eternal power.

b. Consistent with His Role in the Destiny of the Elect
“*in bringing many sons to glory,*”

c. Consistent with His Role in His Mission of Redemption
“*to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.*”

Kent: Suffering is the common lot of all men in such a world. The particular sufferings in view here are the ones which brought Him to the goal for which He had been born. He accomplished the purpose of His coming when He suffered death for every man (2:9).

F. F. Bruce: He is the Savior who blazed the trail of salvation along which alone God’s “*mighty sons*” could be brought to glory. Man, created by God for his glory, was prevented by sin from attaining that glory until the Son of Man came and opened up by his death a new way by which humanity might reach the goal for which it was made. As his people’s representative and forerunner he has now entered into the presence of God to secure their entry there.

R. Kent Hughes: *divine hero / pioneer of their salvation* . . . It was impossible for God to *fully* identify and thus *fully* sympathize with mankind apart from Christ’s incarnation and human experience. But now Christ’s perfection makes possible an unlimited capacity to sympathize with those exposed to troubles and temptations in this life. . . . In one sublime sentence the author of Hebrews has taken the detractor’s objection (that suffering is unbecoming to a Savior) and demonstrated that suffering has instead produced a perfect, pioneer Savior who can save to the uttermost because he was perfected by the sufferings engendered by his incarnation. Suffering outfitted him to be a perfect pioneer of salvation. His suffering has blazed the way for the great multitudes of his redeemed to follow. How fitting a suffering Savior is!

2. (:11) Identification with Humanity

a. Common Source of Their Solidarity

“*For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one [Father];*”

MacArthur: In addition to becoming our Substitute and Author of salvation, He became our Sanctifier, the One who makes us holy. From our own perspective and experience, of course, it is difficult to think of ourselves as holy. Sin is too much with us. In thought and practice we are far from holy. But in the new nature we are perfectly holy.

“He who sanctifies” = Christ

“those who are sanctified” = believers

“are all out of one” – the text does not say “Father” here

Kent: The usual interpretation explains the “one” as God or the Father. God is the origin of the human nature of both Jesus and believers. . . . Another possibility is to explain “of one” as referring to the **common source** of their humanity (cf. **Acts 17:26**). This fits well into the argument of the passage, in which Christ’s humanity is set forth as honorable. It also provides an easier relation to the context regarding angels, for angels can also claim to be of God, and thus Christ’s different and superiority would not be clearly demonstrated. But to say that Christ and believers share a common descent from Adam is to set Christ apart from angels, and the author has already shown that man is not inherently nor ultimately inferior to angels.

Mohler: Since Christ (the Father’s commissioned Redeemer) and the church (those elected by the Father to redemption) are united in the plan and purposes of God for the history of redemption, Jesus is not ashamed to call us his “brothers and sisters.” As the Old Testament citations in **verses 12 and 13** confirm, the accent in this phrase is rooted in the reality that because believers are Christ’s “brothers and sisters,” we are also “children” of God.

b. Common Bond of *Relationship* as Brothers

“for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,”

Jesus does not make this assertion of angels

3. (:12-13) OT Prophetic Confirmation of This Identification with Humanity

a. (:12) Testimony of Messiah to Mankind (**Psalm 22:22**)

*“saying, ‘I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren,
In the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise.’”*

Kent: Three Old Testament quotations are cited to demonstrate the identification of Christ with men whom He came to save. The first is drawn from the messianic **Psalm 22:22**. . . . The second quotation is taken from **Isaiah 8:17** (Septuagint).

R. Kent Hughes: Having established the fact of the communion of human nature shared by Christ and his suffering people, the preacher now proceeds to extend further encouragement by explaining the privilege and character of Christ’s solidarity with his people.

- b. (:13a) Trust of Messiah in the Father (**Isaiah 8:17**)
“*And again, ‘I will put My trust in Him.’*”

R. Kent Hughes: as Isaiah realizes that his message gets no response, he seals it up (**8:16**) and declares, “*I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him*” (v. 17). Isaiah would have to depend on God. So it was with Christ as he shared the solidarity of our humanity . . . while undergoing persecution in the flesh Jesus depended on God. While in the frailty of human flesh, Jesus exercised faith! Even his final words on earth were words of dependence: “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*” (**Luke 23:46**). What solidarity – what communion of nature – Jesus shares with the suffering church. They suffered? So did he! They were weak? So was he! They must depend on God – just as he did!

- c. (:13b) Thrill of the Messiah in the Souls of the Redeemed
(Isaiah 8:18)
“*And again, ‘Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.’*”

Expression of joy (“*who for the joy that was set before Him*”) and confidence; confidence that what God said about the future would truly take place

Hewitt: Originally the passage referred to Isaiah and his children Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hashbaz. Our author sees in the prophet a type of Christ and in his children a type of the believing remnant whom He came to save.

B. (:14-16) Necessity of Humanity to Experience Death as the Pathway to Victory and Deliverance

1. (:14a) Identification with Humanity

“*Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same,*”

2. (:14b-15) Two Purposes Accomplished by His Death:

a. (:14b) Defeat the Devil

“*that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil;*”

b. (:15) Deliver Enslaved from Fear of Death

“*and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.*”

The two great enemies of mankind: the devil and death – both decisively defeated by Jesus Christ

3. (:16) Dispense Help to God’s Elect

“*For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.*”

Cf. **Gal. 3:7** – spiritual seed of Abraham in view

MacArthur: Ours is not a cosmic God, powerful and holy, but indifferent. He knows where we hurt, where we are weak, and where we are tempted.

Mohler: Hebrews 2:16 reengages the author’s exposition of the incarnation and the atoning work of Christ with the overall argument in chapters 1 and 2 of Christ’s superiority over the angels. The author reminds us that the last Adam is restoring humanity to God’s good purpose of having dominion over the world and displaying God to all of creation. Christ is superior to the angels because he himself is the image of the invisible God and the redeemer of the pinnacle of God’s creative activity – mankind. Indeed, as the One who helps “*Abraham’s offspring*,” his work is intimately interwoven within the entire fabric of redemptive history. Christ is the white-hot center of God’s purposes and plan for humanity.

C. (:17-18) Necessity of Humanity to Qualify as a Merciful / Faithful High Priest

1. (:17a) Identification with Humanity

“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things,”

2. (:17b) Role of High Priest

“that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God,”

Kent: Suffering is part of human life in the present world, and therefore Jesus experienced this as well. Such genuine involvement in human life qualified Christ as a merciful and faithful high priest. By His own sufferings, Christ knew human needs from the standpoint of personal experience, and thus can be expected to be merciful toward those in need. By remaining unswerving in His performance of His task, even when it meant suffering and death, Christ showed Himself to be faithful to His purpose. Hence the sinner can confidently entrust himself to this high priest to care for his relations with God.

Wiersbe: Being pure spirits who have never suffered, the angels cannot identify with us in our weaknesses and needs. But Jesus can! Jesus was “*made like unto his brethren*” in that He experienced the sinless infirmities of human nature. He knew what it was to be a helpless baby, a growing child, a maturing adolescent. He knew the experiences of weariness, hunger, and thirst (**John 4:6-8**). He knew what it was to be despised and rejected, to be lied about and falsely accused. He experienced physical suffering and death. All of this was a part of His “training” for His heavenly ministry as High Priest.

If you want an example of a man who was not a merciful and faithful high priest, then read the account about Eli (**1 Sam. 2:27-36**). Here was a high priest who did not even lead his own sons into a faithful walk with God. Eli even accused brokenhearted Hannah of being drunk (**1 Sam. 1:9-18**)!

3. (:17c-18) Two Purposes Accomplished by His High Priestly Ministry

a. (:17b) Purpose of Making Propitiation

“to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

b. (:18) Purpose of Strengthening Those Who are Tempted

“For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

F. F. Bruce: Now His people were not only enduring those trials which are common to mankind, but were being tempted in their run to be disloyal to God and give up their Christian profession. What a source of strength it was to them to be assured that in the presence of God they had as their champion and intercessor one who had known similar and even sorer temptations, and had withstood them victoriously!

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you overlook the ways in which Jesus can relate to you because of your common humanity?
- 2) In what sense do you feel the tension between the present “already” aspect of God’s kingdom and the future “not yet” aspect?
- 3) How does looking back at the temptations and sufferings of Christ during His earthly ministry help you to combat temptations and endure sufferings in your own life today?
- 4) What theological gospel meat can you draw out of this passage as it relates to doctrines like propitiation, the atonement and the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: Angelic position in the present order is certainly superior to humanity. They were involved in the giving of the Mosaic law to which men were subject (**2:2**). Angelic beings have certain governmental functions over the earth today, as is clearly stated by Daniel (**10:13**, “*prince of the kingdom of Persia*”; **10:20**, “*prince of Grecia*”; **10:13, 21**, “*Michael, one of the chief princes*”). They are also God’s emissaries at times in the natural world (**Heb. 1:7**). In the Book of Revelation, angels are frequently described as bringing divine judgments upon the present world (**chaps. 8, 9**). However, this is not an eternal arrangement, for Scripture uses no such terminology of angels regarding the coming age. . . believers are depicted as reigning with Christ for a thousand years (**Rev. 20:6**). In fact, believers are even declared as ultimately being

judges of angels (**1 Cor. 6:1-3**). Hence whatever angelic superiority may now exist is temporary in relation to man.

Richard Phillips: The fear of death is something mankind still faces today. How much of our busyness, or our frenzy for entertainment, is mainly an attempt to divert our gaze from the shadow death casts across our lives? Death is not merely an event that awaits us, but a power that rules us now, the leaven of futility that permeates all our achievements and denies our souls peace and contentment.

This, then, is a clear statement of the problem our Lord Jesus came to solve. It is from this that he saves us – not merely from unhappiness or dysfunction or failure in life. What we need to be saved from is far greater, the comprehensive reign of death because of sin – a reign that now holds us in bondage through fear, that at the end of our lives afflicts us with the experience of death, and that beyond the grave sees us damned before the judgment throne of the holy God. Death is the problem from which we must be saved. Death is the rod of Satan’s rule and the source of his laughter at our expense.

Deffinbaugh: **Chapter 1** focused on our Lord as the Son who is infinitely higher than the angels. **Chapter 2** has turned our attention to our Lord’s incarnation, when the Son took on human flesh and became, for a little while, “*lower than the angels.*” But in **chapter 2**, I do not find any statements like I find in one of the closing verses of: **chapter 1:**

13 But to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? (Hebrews 1:13)

Here, the Son is shown to be vastly higher than the angels in position, power, and prestige. And just as the first chapter closes, we see man elevated above the angels:

14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)

In this verse, the author tells us that the angels are not only subordinate (inferior) to the Son, he goes on to say that angels are subordinate to man. Angels are ministering spirits, spirits whose mission it is to serve the saints – all those who will inherit salvation. This same emphasis on man’s superiority to the angels follows throughout **chapter two. In verse 5** we read:

For he did not put the world to come, about which we are speaking, under the control of angels (Hebrews 2:5).

Thus, it is not angels who will be in charge in the “*world to come,*” but man, restored to his original place of authority and honor (**Hebrews 2:6-8**). And then we find this statement in **verse 16:**

For surely his concern is not for angels, but he is concerned for Abraham's descendants (Hebrews 2:16).

Thus, while man is temporarily “*lower than the angels*,” he will be “higher than the angels” in the age to come. The author’s point, which we are meant to grasp, is this: The only reason that man will be “*higher than the angels*” in the age to come – when we inherit salvation and thus fully enter into the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant – is because our Lord has brought it about through His incarnation.

At His incarnation, our Lord left the glories of heaven behind to take on humanity, and to dwell among men, ultimately to die as a man (the unique God-man) for men, so that their sins can be forgiven, and they can be restored to the glory they lost at the fall. After making atonement for our sins, our Lord was raised from the dead by the Father, ascended into heaven, and was seated at the Father’s right hand. Because of this, our Lord was exalted above the angels (see 1:13), until the day when He will return to reign over the earth, along with His saints. Those who believe in the person and work of Jesus on their behalf will not only have their sins forgiven, they will be exalted to a position of glory and power as well as our Lord. So our Lord chose to share His glorification and rise to power with His saints, with His “brothers and sisters.” He is exalted and glorified as lost sinners are saved and raised to positions of power and glory.

The Son set aside His glory to restore fallen men to fellowship with God and to positions of power and responsibility in His kingdom. He chose to manifest His greatness through us as we seek to manifest His greatness and glory to others.

And so here are the benefits of our Lord’s incarnation, according to the author of Hebrews:

1. Fallen man is restored to his former glory and authority through the incarnation of our Lord (2:5-18).
2. As a result of our Lord’s incarnation, all believers have become a family (2:11-13).
3. Because of the incarnation, Jesus defeated Satan and his colleagues, so that we are no longer paralyzed with the fear of death (2:14-15).
4. Because of the incarnation of our Lord, we have become Abraham’s seed, and thus are assured that we will enjoy the blessings God promised to Abraham (2:16).
5. Because of the incarnation, we now have a merciful and faithful High Priest (2:17-18).

R. Kent Hughes: Jesus, our great high priest, is our anchor.

We are anchored by a perfect priestly **Mediator** who, because he was made like us in every way (not simulated humanity but real humanity), is *merciful* to us and *faithful* as he ministers to the Father on our behalf. Let his priestly *mercy* and *faithfulness* anchor your soul.

We are anchored by a perfect priestly **Propitiator** who propitiated his own wrath on the cross, so that we are no longer under the wrath of God. We may experience hardship, even discipline, but never the wrath of God. Because of Jesus' great propitiating work, we are ever under love. Let this be an anchor for your soul.

We are anchored by a perfect priestly **Helper** whose sufferings in the course of temptation scarred his soul with sympathy. And thus "*He is able to help those who are being tempted*" to take the easy way out. Let this be an anchor for your soul.

TEXT: Hebrews 3:1-6

TITLE: *SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER MOSES*

BIG IDEA:

PERSEVERE IN THE FAITH BY CONSIDERING JESUS AS SUPERIOR TO MOSES

INTRODUCTION:

Moses was the most revered spiritual leader in all of Judaism. Without disparaging the honor or faithful service of this Jewish icon, the author of Hebrews in a few short verses easily demonstrates that Jesus operates on a different plane. The superiority of Jesus as the Son of God (truly deity as evidenced by His work as Creator of all) and our Supreme Apostle and Supreme High Priest must be our only focus as we are encouraged to persevere in the Christian faith. Our privileged standing in the family of God with a heavenly calling should motivate us to demonstrate by our perseverance that we truly belong to the household of God.

Kent: The author is rather contending with those who were so enamored with Moses that they were about to forsake the Christian society and return to Judaism.

Mohler: The argument does not contrast the faults and failures of Moses with the successes and achievements of the Lord. Instead, it highlights the faithfulness of Moses (3:2) and his achievement of faithfully discharging his office as a servant in the house of God. If Moss is worthy of glory as a servant, how much more worthy is Christ – the One who built the house?

Brett Scott: Hebrews 3:1–6 compares Jesus with Moses in order to lay a foundation for the exhortation that follows in 3:7–4:11. The comparison points up three important truths.

- First, the Old Covenant has been surpassed and superseded by the New Covenant.
- Second, the limited access to God through a human mediator (only Moses was given face-to-face access to God) has been surpassed by the provision of direct access to God for all His people.
- Third, though both Moses and Jesus were faithful in their positions, the access secured by Moses as a faithful servant of God has been far surpassed by the access to God enjoyed by Jesus, God's Son.

The contrast between Jesus and Moses serves as a rhetorical device to persuade the readers to accept the New Covenant, to enjoy their direct access to God, and to recognize Jesus Christ as the faithful Mediator between God and humans.

Christ's superiority to Moses aims not at disqualifying the latter as a servant within God's house, but rather at enhancing the honor of the former as Son over God's house (Heb 3:5). Moses' intimacy with the Law (the Old Covenant), his face-to-face access

to God, and his position as a faithful servant in God's house served as a "type" of the One to come who would be greater in all these areas.

(:1) PROLOGUE – CONSIDER JESUS -- IN HIS RELATIONSHIP TO US AS BELIEVERS

A. Our Privileged Position as Believers

1. Family Identity

“Therefore, holy brethren,”

Mohler: Our common brotherhood in Christ produces our new familial relationship and ultimate unity. . . *“Holy”* emphasizes that the blood of Christ has sanctified and cleansed the church. . . Holiness was an important feature of the Levitical system. Worshiping God rightly under the old covenant required holiness in every aspect of life among the old covenant people. . . Holiness could only come through sacrifice, which is to say, holiness was not a human achievement. Thus, when the author designates these people as a holy brotherhood, he makes a Christological claim. He is not congratulating them for achieving the status of holiness; he is rendering them holy on the basis of the priestly sacrifice Christ offered on their behalf.

2. Heavenly Calling

“partakers of a heavenly calling,”

Kent: They were sharers of a heavenly calling in that they had received the effective call of God to salvation, which was heavenly both in its origin from God and in its ultimate goal (**Phil. 3:14**).

Leon Morris: The address *“holy brothers”* is found only here in the NT . . . It combines the notes of affection and consecration. These people are members of the brotherhood and dear to the writer. They are also people who have been set apart for the service of God. The reference to *“the heavenly calling”* shows that the initiative comes from God. He has called them to be his own.

B. Our Focus = Consider Jesus (cf. Heb. 12:1-2)

“consider Jesus,”

Serious attention, careful study, meditation

Mohler: because Jesus is the merciful and faithful high priest who has tasted death for everyone and is the source of our salvation, Jesus merits our full consideration.

Deffinbaugh: *“Take note of Jesus”* – as others have noted, this could not only serve as the summation of this lengthy exhortation, it could very well capsule the message of the entire Book of Hebrews. It might even be a summary of the message of the Bible. Where else should we look?

C. Our Link to God

1. Supreme Apostle

“the Apostle”

Kent: He was God’s highest messenger to men. John’s Gospel speaks of Him as *“he whom God hath sent”* (**John 3:34**). Jesus spoke regarding Himself that *“the Father hath sent me”* (**John 5:36, 37**), and to the apostles whom He had chosen He said, *“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you”* (**John 20:21**).

MacArthur: And what are the characteristics of an *apostolos* or an ambassador? Well, number one, he has all the right and all the power and all the authority of the king in the country who sends him, and so did Jesus. He came clothed with the power of God. He came with all of God’s grace, all of God’s love, all of God’s mercy, all of God’s justice, and all of God’s power.

Secondly, an ambassador has to speak with the voice of the one who sent him. And so Jesus came and said, *“I speak not that which I decide to speak. I speak only what I hear the Father say.”* So Jesus was the perfect sent one from God. He came with all of God’s power, and with God’s voice He spoke.

2. Supreme High Priest

“and High Priest of our confession.”

Parunak: Our writer describes the unique, apostle of the Father. Our Lord’s titles in this verse complement each other. As apostle, he represents God to men. As high priest, he represents men to God.

I. (:2) BOTH CHRIST AND MOSES COMMENDED AS FAITHFUL

A. Faithfulness of Christ

“He was faithful to Him who appointed Him,”

B. Faithfulness of Moses

“as Moses also was in all His house.”

II. (:3-4) CHRIST SURPASSES MOSES IN GLORY BY VIRTUE OF HIS CREATIVE WORK AS GOD

A. (:3) Distinction Between Christ and Moses

1. Christ is Superior to Moses

“For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses,”

Christ is on a whole different level than Moses – you can’t really compare the two.

2. The Builder is Superior to the House

“by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.”

Kent: In spite of the greatness of Moses, whose responsibilities in Israel made him unquestionably the leader of God's people, he was still an integral part of those people, on the same plane with them as far as their relationship to God was concerned. Christ stands on a higher plane and deserves to be considered as the builder of the house, rather than a mere part of it.

B. (:4) Distinction Between the House and its Builder

1. Every House has a Builder

"For every house is built by someone,"

Self-evident truth

2. The Builder is God = Christ

"but the builder of all things is God."

III. (:5-6a) THE FAITHFULNESS OF A SON SURPASSES THAT OF A SERVANT

A. (:5) Moses was Faithful as a Servant in the House

"Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later;"

Mohler: Moses's life and ministry displayed the superiority of Christ. They meant to point away from Moses and toward the Messiah. Moses's ministry existed to testify about things to come. Passages such as **Deuteronomy 18:15** demonstrate this. As the author of Hebrews will later show, the priesthood, sacrifices, and entire old covenant system serve the same purpose.

B. (:6a) Christ was Faithful as a Son over His House

"but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house"

Constable: God's house over which Jesus Christ sits in authority represents the whole system of worship that our Lord inaugurated with the New Covenant. He sits in God's place, the holy of holies of this house. The tabernacle foreshadowed this final system of worship in which Jesus rules as King Priest. The tabernacle was a microcosm of God's greater house. Moses served in the model (prototype) faithfully. Jesus rules over the larger house faithfully, not as a servant, but as God's Son with full authority. . .

God's household consists of people, not boards, bars, and curtains. The writer was thinking of priestly functions, as is clear from the context. His concern was that his readers might not remain faithful to God (cf. **Mark 4:5-6; Mark 4:16-17**). This would result in their losing their privilege as priests that included intimate fellowship with God and the opportunity to represent God before people and people before God. This is what the Israelites as a whole lost when they turned away from the Lord and built the golden calf at Mt. Sinai (**Exodus 32**). Instead of all the Israelites being priests (**Exodus 19:6**)

God limited this privilege to the Levites who remained faithful when the other Israelites apostatized (**Exodus 32:26-29; cf. Numbers 3:12-13**). Just so today it is possible for us to forfeit the privilege of functioning as a priest in the future (cf. **1 Peter 2:5**). The writer shifted from using "house" to refer to the place where priestly functions take place, to using "house" to refer to the people engaged in those activities, namely, a household.

(:6b) APPLICATION – PERSEVERE IN FAITH AND HOPE

*“whose house we are,
if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.”*

Kent: reminds the readers of their responsibility to the faith they have espoused. Abandonment in favor of Judaism would demonstrate that they had never really become new creatures in Christ.

Mohler: The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not mean we enter God’s kingdom by faith and stay in God’s kingdom by works. Instead, it means we enter God’s kingdom by a faith that will persevere and never fail. By faith, we confidently trust that Christ’s righteousness belongs to us. He is our only boast. He is our unflinching hope.

F. F. Bruce: The doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints has as its corollary the salutary teaching that the saints are the people who persevere to the end.

Leon Morris: it is the Christian hope, the certainty that God will carry out his promises, especially those in the gospel. The Christian looks forward eagerly, expecting God’s triumph. To be God’s house then, means to persevere in quiet confidence, knowing that one has matter for pride in the Christian hope.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does our relationship with other believers reflect our family unity and our calling to holiness?
- 2) How would you define the role of Moses in the house of God, the role of Christ, and your role?
- 3) How do you relate to Jesus as both Apostle and High Priest?
- 4) Does the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints unsettle you or encourage you?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Deffinbaugh: The Importance of Moses in the Old Testament

Moses was a great mediator. When God revealed His glory at Mount Sinai, the people were terrified and asked Moses to be their mediator, between them and God: (**Deut. 5:25-27**)

Closely related to his role as mediator was Moses' function as an intercessor. Humanly speaking, the nation Israel would have been wiped out had it not been for Moses: (**Num. 14:11-20**)

This incident where Moses mediated on behalf of the nation Israel took place at Kadesh, and God makes it clear that this was the last of many similar interventions on Moses' part: (**Num. 14:22-23**)

Moses was especially esteemed for his role in the reception of the Law of Moses. In addition to this, he was a great military leader. Under Moses' leadership, the nation defeated the armies of those who opposed them, beginning with Pharaoh's army. Moses was also a judge and arbitrator for the nation Israel: (**Exod. 18:13-16**)

Let us not forget Moses the author. It is he who penned the first five books of the Old Testament. And finally, there is Moses the prototype Prophet: (**Deut. 18:15**)

God Himself testifies to the greatness of this man Moses: (**Num. 12:6-8; 12:3; Deut. 34:10-12**)

Cf. NT passages as well (**Matt. 23:1-2; John 5:45-46; John 9:28-29; John 6:32**)

Moses was a great man, but a bit too great in the minds of many of the Jews. He serves well the purpose of the author of Hebrews because Moses is the "high water mark" for men in the Old Testament. If our author can prove Jesus to be superior – vastly superior – to Moses, then Jesus must truly be great.

Steven Cole: To Endure, Consider Jesus

The Hebrew Christians had begun well. Early in their Christian experience they endured great suffering and persecution. Many had their property confiscated on account of their faith, and they endured it joyfully (**10:32-34**). But now they were in danger of drifting back into Judaism and neglecting their great salvation in Jesus Christ (**2:1-4**). So the author is exhorting them to endurance. . .

The author's point here is that both Jesus and Moses were faithful men. He compares rather than contrasts them because he knew that his audience thought highly of Moses and because God Himself commends Moses as a faithful man. In **Exodus 35-40**, there are 22 references to Moses' faithfulness to God (**John MacArthur, Jr., Hebrews** [Moody Press], p. 82). Jesus, of course, was more faithful than anyone, including Moses, because He never failed even once. But the author begins with this comparison. Then he goes on to show how Jesus is greater than Moses. . .

It is significant that when Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy, he did not report on how many he had won to Christ, how many churches he had planted, or how many evangelistic campaigns he had conducted. He said simply, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith*” (**2 Tim. 4:7**). He fought and he finished—he endured! If you want to join his ranks, take time often to consider Jesus.

Parunak: The conditional nature of this warning disturbs some, but it is completely consistent with our Lord’s teaching:

Mat 7:21 *Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

Even more pointedly, **Joh 8:31** *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;*

Paul makes the same point, in Colossians, which in so many ways anticipates Hebrews: **Col 1:21** *And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: 23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel,*

These texts do not teach works salvation. They do teach that salvation works. We are saved by grace through faith, plus nothing. But we know we are saved by the Spirit’s work in our lives:

1 Jo 2:3 *And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.*

Brett Scott: Three parallels serve as a background to the Jesus/Moses comparison: Moses delivered the Israelites from the bondage of slavery and Egypt, while Jesus delivered all believers from the bondage of sin and damnation (**2:14–15**). Through Moses, God constituted the Israelites as the people of God, while Jesus constitutes all believers as the sons of God (**2:10**). Moses brought the Israelites the Old Covenant, whereas Jesus brings all believers into the New Covenant, establishing a greater access to God for them (**4:14–16**), which had been only for Israel until Jesus came. In Jesus’ superiority He replaced—and exceeded—all Moses did. The three foundations are elaborated on in the following sections of this article. Each foundation is actually an integral part of the entire’ epistle. Hebrews includes fifty-six allusions to the covenant (oath, Law, etc.), twenty-six allusions to access to God, and fifty-four allusions to faithfulness.

THE "COVENANT" THEME

Jesus’ superiority over Moses and the establishment of His high priesthood leads to the

bold conclusion that the Old Covenant has been replaced (**7:12, 18; 8:6-7, 13; 10:9**). To establish the New Covenant and show it valid, the argument must be considered that the One bringing in the New Covenant is greater than Moses, who brought in the Old Covenant. Now that Jesus' priesthood replaced that of Levi, the Law of Moses must also be replaced because it was the legal basis of the Levitical priesthood (**7:11-19**). To the Jews, the Law was given the highest honor over everything except God Himself. Moses not only wrote the books of the Law, but Moses and the Law are intertwined throughout the Scriptures, almost inseparably. Twenty-one times in the Scriptures the Law is called the Law of Moses, and in the New Testament, Moses' name is used synonymously with the Law (**Matt. 8:4; 19:8; 22:24; Mark 7:10; 10:4; Luke 16:31; 24:27; Acts 6:11; 15:21; 21:21; 2 Cor. 3:15**).

The connections drawn between the sacrifices and the Law and between the offering of Christ and the will of God are extraordinarily important. They also prepare for the revolutionary statement that the Old Covenant has been annulled with the arrival of the New. The author of Hebrews validated this bold statement by appealing to the Old Testament (**Ps. 40:6-8; Jer. 31:31-34**). The Old Covenant was a necessary but provisional episode in the accomplishment of redemptive history. However, with the entrance of the New Covenant the Old was set aside.

For both Jesus and the New Testament authors the prophecy of a new covenant was of paramount importance. As **Bruce** writes, "It is the Epistle to the Hebrews that chiefly presents the pattern of promise and fulfillment in terms of the two covenants." Jesus is referred to as the Mediator or Guarantor of a New Covenant in **Hebrews 7:22; 8:6; 9:15; and 12:24**. The first covenant had a mediator (**Gal. 3:19-20**), but no surety is mentioned in connection with it. The New Covenant has a greater Mediator who is a surety (Guarantor) because by His blood His people are sanctified (**Heb. 10:14, 29**) and the eternal covenant (**13:20**) is established, never to be superseded by another. Jesus presented Himself as an unblemished offering, following the Law's requirements for a sacrificial victim (**9:14; Exod. 29:1; Lev. 1:3**). . . The New Covenant is established by sacrifice, but it is a new and unique kind of sacrifice, namely, the death of Jesus Christ, as explained and validated by the author's quotation of **Psalm 40:6-8**.

THE "ACCESS TO GOD" THEME

For believers, Christ is their divine Mediator (or "broker" in terms of the patron-client relationships that existed in the first century world). In the patronal society of the ancient Mediterranean world, "those who dispense second-order resources [i.e., strategic contacts or access to patrons] are brokers." Seen in the capacity of a "broker," Jesus secures favor from God on behalf of those committed to Him. Believers have access through Christ, their Mediator, to God, greatest of all patrons.

To have access to the house of a patron through a servant is good; however, to have access to the house through a son is far better. A son, more than a servant in a house, would be sought after as a mediator to the ruler of the house. "The role of a servant and of a son in a house are worlds apart." The subject of servant and son is taken up in

greater detail in the section on faithfulness. The removal of the barrier between God and human beings is an important theme in Hebrews.

This removal involves the cleansing of one's guilty conscience as a prerequisite for unhindered access to God (**Heb. 10:22**). The Jews then were not able to see the face of Moses glorified, and this although he was their fellow slave and kinsman. But you have seen the face of Christ in his glory. And Paul cries out: "*We with unveiled faces gaze upon the glory of the Lord.*" Just as priests going in to sacrifice "crossed the boundary lines into the perilous zone of the holy . . . for the benefit of the whole people, so believers have been allowed to cross this great boundary between God and man through the "once-for-all sacrifice" of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

THE "FAITHFULNESS" THEME

In Hebrews, both Jesus and Moses are portrayed as faithful. The statement that Moses was faithful in God's house (**Heb. 3:2, 5**) alludes to **Numbers 12:7**, where God said, "*My servant Moses . . . is faithful in all My household.*" Jesus was faithful in God's house in His superior position of Son. Thus the contrast is not between the faithfulness of Jesus and Moses, but between the **position** in which each was faithful. If the contrast had been the superior faithfulness of Jesus over Moses, Moses' unfaithfulness in Egypt (**Exod. 2:11–12**) and at the rock of Meribah (**Num. 20:10–12**) would surely have been presented as evidence. In fact in Hebrews, Moses' faithfulness is commended (**Heb. 3:2, 5; 11:23–28**). The contrast is between the position of a servant and that of a son and the difference in the resulting access (or mediation) provided. Moses as a faithful servant provided a certain level of access to God. However, believers, as already stated, have the Son as their Mediator of God's favor. Greater is the favor assured by Jesus, for He stands in closest proximity to God, actually bearing the reflected radiance of God's glory. Moses was faithful in God's house as a servant whereas Christ is faithful as a son over God's house (**3:5–6**). Jesus is more highly honored than Moses, not because Moses' faithfulness was in any way defective, but because Jesus occupies a higher office, as Son, High Priest, King, and Mediator of a greater covenant. Each is *pistos* appointed/faithful as leader or head of the people, but the former as servant, the latter as son. **Psalm 116** extols God for His faithfulness, showing that praise is the proper response to God's infinite faithfulness (**vv. 14, 18**). Similarly believers today should respond to the faithfulness of Jesus by expressing gratitude and by being faithful. In **Hebrews 10:19–36** readers are challenged to "*hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering*" (**v. 23**), to spur one another on and encourage each other (**vv. 24–25**), to stand firm (**v. 32**), and to persevere (**v. 36**).

Hebrews 3:1–6 points to Jesus' supreme honor, faithfulness, and access to God the Father as a High Priest, and His position as Apostle and Son. Therefore in view of His superiority, believers, having entered a New Covenant with God, have gained greater access to Him than was ever possible under the Old Covenant. In response believers should be faithful to Him and should hold fast to their confession of, their hope in, and their faith in "*Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith*"

Jesus did away with the Old Covenant and replaced it with a new one only after He fully satisfied and fulfilled the Old Covenant by His righteous death as a "once-for-all" sacrifice for sins (10:10). As a "boundary crosser" who entered the holy place, Jesus is also a "trailblazer" or "pioneer" who leads many sons and daughters into glory (2:10; 12:2). As a result believers have "*confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh*" (10:19–20). "*When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete*" (8:13). If the servant's (Moses') prayers offered on behalf of the people were answered, "*how much more*" will the prayers of the Son offered for believers be answered. The closeness of the Son to the Father is passed on to those who believe, so that they receive greater access to God than Moses experienced. Believers enjoy "*so much more*" the benefits of sonship now that they are heirs and adopted children of God. Therefore the writer to the Hebrews exhorted his readers, "*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful*" (10:23, NIV). http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/ntesources/ntarticles/bsac-nt/scott-heb3moses-bs.pdf

MacArthur: There are certain passages then, first of all, directed to Hebrew believers, true Christians who have received Christ. They have come out of Judaism, at least in the sense of faith. They have been born again. They have become followers of Jesus Christ. And as a result of that, they have been unsynagogued, ostracized, thrown out of the Jewish culture, and persecuted relentlessly. Because of this persecution, their faith was very weak and they tended to hold on to the rituals of Judaism. So they were true believers but hanging on to so of the ritual, some of the trappings of Judaism. . .

Then secondly, the group of Hebrew non-Christians who are intellectually convinced. Several passages in the book deal with them. And they are warned that since they know so much, they better act upon it, lest they fall away and never be renewed again to repentance. Those who know the truth and willfully reject the truth are severely warned, particularly in **chapter 10**, that they shall have much sorer punishment who willfully trodden underfoot the Son of God. Count it as blood, an unworthy thing or an unholy thing.

Then the third group, are the Hebrew non-Christians. They are unconvinced, period. They don't believe it at all. And to them the Gospel is presented several times in the book of Hebrews. So then there are three in view. And in each context, you must know to whom he writes or you will find yourself terribly confused about the character of Christianity.

In every text in the book of Hebrews, no matter who is addressed, the theme is always the absolute supremacy of Christ. If he's talking to believers who are still hanging on to Judaism, he says, "You don't need it. Christ is sufficient." If he's talking to unbelievers who are convinced, he is saying, "Come on, put your faith in him. Rest in Christ. He's sufficient." If he's talking to unconvinced, unbelieving Jews, he is saying the same thing, "Christ is superior. He is supreme. He is sufficient." And so message of Christ is the same, though the form may be the distinction in determining to whom he speaks.

So the theme we could say in a nutshell of the book of Hebrews is **the perfect Christ, supreme, superior, sufficient**. We need nothing in addition to Jesus Christ. This then becomes the pattern of the book and what the letter of Hebrews is designed to do. . .

But although we don't relate to Judaism, I think we do find ourselves very often lured into believing that our works and our religious trappings are what it's all about, that God expects more than just our faith and our love; He expects us to do certain little things to please Him. And while we accept God's free grace complete in Christ, we kind of hang on to an artificial kind of legalism rather than live the positive Christ-controlled, spirit-energized life. So the statements of Christ sufficiency certainly shatter all legalistic efforts, whether Judaistic or any other kind.

TEXT: Hebrews 3:7-19

TITLE: WARNING #2 -- AGAINST HARDNESS OF HEART AND UNBELIEF – PART 1

BIG IDEA:

AVOID HARDNESS OF HEART AND UNBELIEF BY RESPONDING IN FAITH AND ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER TO PERSEVERE

INTRODUCTION:

The history of the Jewish nation documents the failure of the people in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses to obey God and trust His providential care. Instead they provoked God to the point of being excluded from entering into the rest of Canaan. Now that we have such a superior Apostle and High Priest in Jesus Christ, let us be careful not to fall away due to hardness of heart and unbelief. Instead, we need to respond immediately with sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit. We need to encourage one another to persevere and demonstrate that we truly are partakers of Christ and ones who are privileged to enter into His rest.

Cf. **Matt. 13:20, 21** – the seed that springs up quickly but has no root and falls away when suffering and persecution come

Hewitt: a solemn warning is given to show that unbelief leads to disobedience, and unbelief and disobedience to apostasy, and that the inevitable result is the loss of God’s rest.

MacArthur: The writer of Hebrews, under the Spirit’s leading, has a great concern for his fellow Jews who are in this predicament. They have heard the gospel, some of them from the mouth of an apostle, but for various reasons they hold back from commitment. Some, apparently, had made a profession of faith or had given some statement of confidence in Christ, but were beginning to fall back. When they started getting ridiculed by their friends, they began to waver and hesitate. They were not willing to throw their whole weight on Jesus, and as a result they became apostate. Knowing the truth, they willingly and intentionally turned away from it.

I. (3:7-11) DON’T PROVOKE GOD WITH HARD-HEARTED UNBELIEF -- REMINDER OF ISRAEL’S FORMER FAILURE IN THE WILDERNESS

A. (:7-9) Learn the Lesson from History

1. (:7-8) Present Opportunity – Hear and Obey

“Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness,’”

Psalm 95:7-11

“just as the Holy Spirit says” -- Affirming the inspiration of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit; cf. **Heb. 4:12** for the power of the living Word that still speaks to us today

R. Kent Hughes: Every Jew knew this passage by heart because its opening line served as a call to worship every Sabbath evening in the synagogue.

Hewitt: In the original both *provocation* and *temptation* are proper names. In the LXX they are translations of the Hebrew words *Meribah* and *Massah*. The two illustrations given of the hardening of the heart are taken from the history of those who left Egypt under Moses. As one is found at the beginning of the wanderings (**Ex. xvii. 1-7**) and the other at the end (**Nu. xiv. 1-13**), the suggestion is that the hardening of the heart was a process which persisted for forty years.

Morris: To “*harden*” the heart is to disobey the voice of God and act in accordance with one’s own desires. This is what Israel did in the wilderness.

2. (:9) Past Failure -- Stubborn Rebellion and Persistent Unbelief

“Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years.”

Kent: refers to the wilderness period in which Israel saw numerous miracles and other instances of divine guidance, but still continued to resist. In spite of God’s unmistakable presence among them, they frequently acted as if they had been abandoned, and demanded continuing proofs of God’s leading. Such testing of God is a demonstration of unbelief, for it says in effect, “We don’t believe your promise to provide for us, and we demand new evidence. This went on for a period of forty years, throughout the entire wilderness experience from Rephidim onward. Such action in the face of repeated miracles was clearly inexcusable.

Mohler: Israel presumed on God’s kindness. God graciously preserved them for forty years. He delivered them. He kept them alive. He provided manna for them. He guided them through the desert with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. And yet they presumed on that grace and grumbled against the Lord.

MacArthur: Unbelief never has enough proof. Asking for more proof is simply a pretext, an excuse, a delaying tactic.

B. (:10-11) Fear God’s Wrath and Judgment

1. (:10) Serious Nature of Sin

a. Sin Arouses God’s Anger

“Therefore I was angry with this generation,”

Morris: We should not miss the reference to the anger of God. The Bible is clear that God is not impassive or indifferent in the face of human sin. He is a “*consuming fire*” (**12:29**), and his inevitable reaction to sin is wrath.

b. Sin Arises from Internal Rebellion

“And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;’”

Piper: Note well, the issue of perseverance is not first an issue of behavior. Don't be asking first: What actions does God want me to *do*? The issue in this text is one of the **heart**. It is a matter of believing or trusting or hoping in God. Look **verse 10a**: *“Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart.’”* Why didn't the people get to enter the promised land? You could say, they sinned and they rebelled and they murmured. Yes. But look at how this writer ends the chapter. **Verse 19:** *“And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.”* Persistent sin in the face of God's mercy is a sign of unbelief.

c. Sin is Antithetical to God's Will

“And they did not know My ways;”

2. (:11) Severe Consequences for Apostasy

a. Stirs Up God's Wrath

“As I swore in My wrath,”

Hewitt: intensity and depth of God's displeasure

b. Shuts One Out from God's Secure Blessing

“They shall not enter My rest.”

Here the rest involved in the OT example was the privilege of entering the Promised Land of Canaan under God's protection and provision as the secure place of blessing. But that rest typified much more for these Jewish believers as will be developed in the next paragraphs.

Morris: *“Rest”* points to a place of blessing where there is no more striving but only relaxation in the presence of God and in the certainty that there is no cause for fear.

Wil Pound: more than just entrance into the land of Canaan. *“Rest”* (*katapausis*) in the original means to cessation of activity and in this verse points to a place of blessing where there is no more striving. It is a permanent cessation of activity, or permanent rest. It is a relaxation in the presence of God knowing there is no reason to fear. The writer of Hebrews has a great interest in *“rest”* (**Heb. 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3-5, 8-11**).

II. (3:12-19) ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER LEST YOU FALL AWAY IN UNBELIEF

A. (:12-13) Urgency of Avoiding Apostasy Due to the Imminent Danger

1. (:12) Guard Yourself Against Apostasy

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

Imminent Danger: of an evil, unbelieving heart

R. Kent Hughes: Many of those, perhaps most, who left in the Exodus had an inadequate faith in God. At first, due to their miserable plight of 430 years of slavery, the brilliant leadership of Moses, the repeated miraculous plagues on Pharaoh, and the grand miracles of the pillars of cloud and fire and the parting of the sea, they were ready to follow God anywhere. But as soon as the initial glow wore off, they outrageously cried, “*Is the Lord among us or not?*” (**Exodus 17:7**). It was a fair-weather, herd-instinct faith – good until the first trial, when it dissolved in unbelief.

The depth of their defective belief produced one other subsidiary characteristic – *contempt/irreverence*. Hence all the railing against God and his faithful servants. Thus we understand that the pathology of a hard heart originates in *unbelief* that spawns a hardened *contempt* [which in turn shows itself in distinct behavioral patterns – namely, negativism, grumbling, quarreling and disobedience] and, as we shall see, a hardness that works out in sinful *disobedience*.

2. (:13) Encourage One Another to Persevere

“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

Imminent Danger: of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin

Hewitt: Sin is almost personified here, as it is in Romans vii. It deceives the sinner, exaggerating the satisfaction that can be gained from sin, then blinds his mind to spiritual truth and also to the certainty of God’s retribution.

Morris: The author sees Christian fellowship as very important. It can build people up in the faith and form a strong bulwark against sin and apostasy (cf. **10:25; Matt 18:15-17**).

B. (:14) Necessity of Perseverance for Genuine Believers

“For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end;”

C. (:15-19) Reminder Again of the Historical Example of Failure in the Wilderness

1. (:15) Root Problem = Hardening Your Heart by Rebellion

“while it is said, ‘Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.’”

2. (:16-18) Scope of the Problem

Series of 3 Questions with Answers showing the scope of the problem

a. (:16) Scope of the Rebellion = Entire Generation Led by Moses

“For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?”

b. (:17) Scope of God's Anger = Entire Generation that Sinned and Died

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

Hewitt: The question has been asked whether Moses and Aaron, who died in the wilderness, came under this condemnation.

Certainly they, as well as others in that generation, were not unbelievers, but for the purpose of this historical illustration they were all guilty of disobedience and excluded from the rest of Canaan. The application to spiritual apostasy is going to ratchet up both the level of sin and the depth of the judgment to the final outpouring of God's wrath.

c. (:18) Scope of Loss of Blessing = All Who Were Disobedient

“And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?”

3. (:19) Root Problem = Unbelief

“And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.”

CONCLUSION:

1 Cor. 10:1-6

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What sort of temptations and failures tend to diminish our sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit calling us to renewed faith?

2) How have we provoked God?

3) How would you describe the deceitfulness of sin?

4) Are there some lessons from your own history that you need to revisit and make sure that you are applying?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. Kent Hughes: It all began so well [the Exodus] – but ended so poorly. Of the 600,000 men (the million-plus Israelites who began so well), only two over the age of twenty ever got to the Promised Land – and that was forty years later. The rest fell, disappointed corpses in the desert. The grand and terrible lesson of Israel's history is that it is possible to begin well and end poorly. In fact, this tragic human tendency dominates much human spiritual experience.

It is this concern that haunts the writer of the book of Hebrews, as we have repeatedly seen. His fear is that the doleful fate of the generation of the Exodus will be repeated in the experience of the Jewish Christians in their storm-tossed little church. He undoubtedly personally knew this little flock. Many of their spiritual exoduses had been beautiful, even dramatic. But now that they were undergoing hardship, would they finish well? Not if they made the same errors as the Israelites did when troubles came.

F. F. Bruce: A later generation of Israelites was warned by the psalmist not to follow the bad example of their ancestors' refusal to listen to God, lest disaster should overtake them in turn; and now a still later generation has the same warning impressed upon it by the writer to the Hebrews. Although the writer does not say so in so many words, it may well be that he saw a special significance in the "forty years" of **Ps. 95:10**. We have evidence of a belief that God's dealings with Israel, which began with a probationary period of forty years, would be rounded off at the end-time by a probationary period of like duration; and (if this epistle was written shortly before A.D. 70), it was nearly forty years now since Jesus had accomplished His "exodus" at Jerusalem. Hence the urgency of the present appeal to the readers to take heed "*so long as it is called To-day*" (**verse 13**).

MacArthur: The basic warning from the psalm ("*Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*") is used three times in **Hebrews 3 (vv. 7-8, 13, 15)** and once in **chapter 4 (v. 7)**. . . It refers to the period of grace . . . In other words, it refers to the present moment. . . You never know how long you will have to decide . . .

In his earlier ministry **D. L. Moody** often would end his message with, "Go home and think about what I've said." One night in Chicago he told the people to do this and to come back the next night ready to make a decision. That night the Chicago fire broke out, and some who had been in his congregation died. That was the last time he told anyone to think over the claims of Christ and make a decision later. No one knows if he will have a tomorrow in which to decide.

Wil Pound: There is an unbelief that consists in a rejection of the truth of the gospel. An unbelieving heart causes a person to depart "*from the living God*." The words "departing" or "falls away" (*apostenai*) signifies "turn away from, forsake, apostatize from." The idea is not depart, but "standing off from, to step aside from." It "is not merely unbelief, but disbelief, refusal to believe describing a evil heart marked by

disbelief" (A. T. Robertson). This is the word from which we get the word apostasy which is a departure from and repudiation of one's position. The individual has renounced his former professed belief and is now totally opposed to what he believed before. There was pressure being applied to these Hebrew Christians to fall away or depart from their faith in Christ. There was the temptation to return to the Levitical sacrifices and absolutely reject the atoning sacrifice of the Anointed of the Lord. Our writer calls this apostasy from the living God. For him it is impossible to turn back from the highest revelation of God in Christ and possess true saving faith in God.

Deffinbaugh: Resisting a Rest

Even in the Old Testament, the issue is not man's works, but man's faith in God to work. That is what rest is about, resting in faith. It is not the absence of activity or work, but it is the absence of trust in one's own abilities and strength. Our faith must be in God.

Just as that first generation heard God's Word proclaimed and witnessed the attesting signs and wonders which accredited that Word, so the writer to the Hebrews claims that his audience has received God's revelation – not through Moses, but through the Son. And that revelation was validated by the miracles, gifts, and signs that God performed through His apostles. So we must believe God's Word and obey, rather than rebel against Him.

So what lessons are there for us to learn from our text? Allow me to suggest a few. First, we have a lesson in **hermeneutics** – the interpretation of God's Word. The author of **Psalm 95** found in Israel's wilderness wanderings lessons for those who lived centuries later, lessons in faith. The author of Hebrews then takes the lessons of Psalm 95 and applies them to his day and time. The key for us is to understand Hebrews so that we can grasp its application to this generation.

Second, we should observe from our text that the exhortations of **Psalm 95** and Hebrews are the same and can be summed up in three messages:

1. Listen and pay careful attention to God's Word
(**Psalm 95:7b; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:1-4**).
2. Don't become hard hearted and disobedient due to unbelief
(**Psalm 95:7-11; Hebrews 3-4**).
3. The consequence of unbelief is failure to enter into God's "rest"
(**Psalm 95:11; Hebrews 3:11, 18**).

Third, we cannot conclude that failure to enter God's "rest" is synonymous with failure to get to heaven. An entire generation of Israelites (minus Joshua and Caleb) failed to enter Canaan, and thus failed to enter God's "rest." Among those who failed to enter the land were Moses and Aaron, but we can be confident that they did go to heaven. The next generation, under Joshua, did enter the land, but we would be hard pressed to

say that they were all going to heaven. Surely there were unbelievers among them. And in the psalmist's day, he was still warning about failing to enter God's "rest," and yet his generation was in the land. Let us wait until our next lesson to clarify what "entering God's rest" means.

Fourth, it does seem that the words of **Psalm 95** and also those of **Hebrews 3** and **4** had a unique application to that "first generation" of Jews to witness the greater "exodus" of Jesus in His incarnation, earthly ministry, death, and resurrection. These words must have given any surviving first generation witnesses of the coming of Christ something to ponder. Would these words in Hebrews not have been similar to the words of Paul and others as they preached to the Jews in their synagogues?

Fifth, we are our brother's keeper. **Verses 12 and 13** indicate that every believer has some responsibility for the spiritual well-being of his fellow believers. We are to gather together faithfully to encourage one another and to watch for signs of spiritual ill-health. I fear that many churches are not living up to their responsibilities with respect to caring for one another's spiritual health. I suspect that in all too many churches, church discipline does not exist. It does exist in our church, but this text indicates that just exercising church discipline on willfully sinning saints (by profession, at least) is not enough.

We need to be much more proactive (exhortation) in our care for one another, rather than merely being reactive (discipline). We need to be faithful to gather for worship, exalting God for His greatness, recalling His acts of mercy and salvation. That is the kind of fuel which promotes faith. We need to be more aggressive in admonishing our brothers and sisters as we see spiritual dangers ahead. This is why we believe the gathering of the church each Sunday is so important. It provides us with the opportunity to encourage one another. And this is why we have a meeting where all of the men can speak and lead, because we need to be ministering to one another so that we enter into rest, rather than drifting toward rebellion and discipline. May God give us the grace to do better as we gather as a church.

Piper: Everything in **chapter 3** (and I would argue that everything in this book) is written to encourage and empower you to be earnest and vigilant and focused in the fight to maintain strong assurance in Christ. Let me show you this so that you get a feel for how important this is to the writer to the Hebrews. Over and over again the writer urges us to persevere in our hope and not to throw away our confidence, because this is the living evidence that we truly have become partakers of Christ. For example:

- **Hebrews 2:1**—*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*
- **Hebrews 3:6**—*We are his house, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.*

- **Hebrews 3:14**—*For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end . . .*
- **Hebrews 6:11–12**—*And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*
- **Hebrews 10:23**—*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful . . .*
- **Hebrews 10:35**—*Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.*
- **Hebrews 12:1**—*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

Steven Cole: The other main view is that of Reformed theology, that saving faith is God’s gift, imparted to us when He saves us. Salvation originates with God and depends totally on His purpose and power. Since He promises to complete what He began to the praise of His glorious grace, all of God’s elect will persevere in faith unto eternal life. This view, which I believe is the truth, holds that there is such a thing as false faith. It is possible for some who profess faith in Christ later to fall away from the faith, thus demonstrating that their faith was not genuine. But saving faith, by its very nature, perseveres. Continuance in the faith is the evidence that our faith is from God, and not from man.

This is not to say that persevering faith is effortless or automatic. God ordains the means as well as the ends. God’s sovereignty in salvation never negates human responsibility. God elects all whom He saves, but the elect are responsible to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ. Although God promises that His elect will all finally be saved, we are exhorted to persevere in faith. God’s sovereignty and human responsibility are not at odds!

Our text is a strong exhortation to persevere in the faith. Genuine believers will heed the warning and hold fast their faith in times of trial. False believers will grumble against God and fall into sin and unbelief when trials hit, just as many in Israel did in the wilderness. So the author exhorts the church (“*brethren*,” **3:12**) to “hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (**3:14**). He shows us four aspects of persevering faith:

To persevere in faith, there is a great sin to avoid, a great service to practice, a great salvation to hold to, and a great story to personalize.

1. To persevere in faith, there is a great sin to avoid (3:12).

A. TO AVOID THIS TERRIBLE SIN, WE MUST SEE HOW EVIL UNBELIEF REALLY IS.

Consider five aspects of unbelief that should cause us to be on guard against it:

- 1). UNBELIEF IS THE WORST OF ALL SINS, BECAUSE IT IS THE ROOT OF ALL SINS.
- 2). UNBELIEF IS A SIN THAT HARDENS THE HEART.
- 3). UNBELIEF IS A PERSISTENT THREAT TO ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE.
- 4). UNBELIEF, LIKE ALL SIN, DECEIVES US.
- 5). UNBELIEF IS INSEPARABLE FROM DISOBEDIENCE.

B. TO AVOID THIS TERRIBLE SIN WE MUST EXERCISE GREAT CAUTION.

C. TO AVOID THIS TERRIBLE SIN, WE MUST AVOID RITUALISTIC RELIGION AND WALK CLOSELY WITH THE LIVING GOD.

2. To persevere in faith, there is a great service to practice (3:13).

“But encourage one another day after day, ...” The verb can also mean to exhort. The root word has the idea of coming alongside someone to give aid. It is used as a name for the Holy Spirit (**John 14:16, 26**, “Helper”). Briefly, note three things about this service of encouragement:

A. ENCOURAGEMENT IS A SERVICE FOR EVERY MEMBER OF THE BODY.

B. ENCOURAGEMENT IS A SERVICE THAT IS NEEDED DAILY BECAUSE THE ENEMY ATTACKS DAILY.

C. ENCOURAGEMENT IS A SERVICE THAT IS NEEDED BECAUSE OF THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

3. To persevere in faith, there is a great salvation to hold fast to (3:14).

“For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.” Two things:

A. SALVATION UNITES US TO CHRIST.

B. WHILE FINAL SALVATION FOR BELIEVERS IS CERTAIN, IT IS NOT AUTOMATIC.

4. To persevere in faith, there is a great story to personalize (3:15-19).

The author comes back to the story of Israel in the wilderness, quoting again from **Psalm 95**: “*Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.*” Then he brings this story home to his readers by asking three sets of two rhetorical questions each (the KJV mistranslates **3:16**). The first question in each set is answered by the second question. He wants his readers to see that their situation parallels exactly that of Israel in the wilderness. In **3:19** he sums up his point, tying it back to the idea of unbelief in **3:12**.

The first question and answer show that *this story applies to all professing believers*. Who provoked God when they heard His voice? The same group that Moses had led out of Egypt. While there was a truly saved remnant in that company, most of them grumbled, disbelieved God, and died in the wilderness. The author is saying to all professing Christians, “This applies to you!” Even if we are true believers, **John Owen’s** comment is apropos: “The best of saints have need to be cautioned against the worst of evils” (*Hebrews: The Epistle of Warning* [Kregel], p. 53).

The second question and answer show that *professing believers who persist in sin should expect God’s anger, not His rest*. If we are not true believers, our sin in the face of knowledge will incur God’s final judgment. If we are true believers, our sin will bring on His strong discipline. Either way, you don’t want to go there!

The third question and answer show that *those who incurred God’s judgment in the wilderness were not only unbelieving; they were disobedient*. As we’ve seen, you cannot separate the two. Unbelief that is unchecked quickly moves into disobedience. Often unbelief is a smokescreen used to hide disobedience. Unbelief is more socially acceptable than sin, so we posture ourselves as struggling with intellectual issues. But beneath the surface, we know that if God’s Word is true, then we need to turn from our sins, and we don’t want to do that. The disobedient who failed to enter God’s rest were one and the same with the unbelieving.

His final summary (**3:19**) also shows that unbelief renders us not only *unwilling*, but also *unable* to appropriate God’s blessings. Either faith opens the blessings of God’s eternal rest to you, or unbelief bars you from them. To persevere in faith, we need to personalize the story of Israel in the wilderness. We need to avoid their awful sin of unbelief that rendered them unable to enter God’s promised rest.

Robert W. Ross: The perished generation failed on two counts –
1) hardness of heart, and
2) unbelief.

This led them into error and finally to judgment. Their unbelief was manifested in attitudes still common.

- They murmured or complained;
- They set up alternate plans and sought alternate leadership;
- They openly rebelled against God;
- They expressed dissatisfaction with God's provision;
- And, finally, they grudgingly accepted their place in God's plan.

TEXT: Hebrews 4:1-13

TITLE: WARNING #2 -- AGAINST HARDNESS OF HEART AND UNBELIEF – PART 2

BIG IDEA:

AVOID HARDNESS OF HEART AND UNBELIEF SO YOU DON'T MISS OUT ON PERSEVERING IN FAITH AND REALIZING GOD'S REST

INTRODUCTION:

The confusing aspect of this topic of entering into God's rest is that there are so many different levels of how the term "Rest" can be applied to believers. Certainly the historical example for the nation of Israel of crossing over the Jordan River and entering into the Promised Land provides a base starting point. This does not seem to strictly typify heaven (although that seems to be a secondary level of application) but more the rest by faith in the resources and provision of God. There are still battles to be fought and temptations to be overcome and victories to achieve in Canaan. But there is a rest in God's blessing and security. Moses and Aaron and many other adult Israelites were prohibited from entering into this rest in Canaan because of unbelief (not fully trusting God's commands and promises along the journey) ... but that in no way disqualified them from inclusion in the family of God from the standpoint of eternity.

However, in the context of the book of Hebrews where apostasy is in view and the issue is perseverance in faith, the failure to enter into God's rest does seem to be associated with exposure as not being genuinely included in the family of God by faith. So all points of the analogy cannot be pressed. The rest for a believer today seems to have both an "already" and "not yet" aspect to it – just like it does for participation in the kingdom of God. There is a sense in which we enter into God's rest right now as we avail ourselves of Christ's invitation to "Come to Him" and He will give us rest (**Matt. 11:28-30**) – both rest today and rest for eternity. We need to rest right now from the burden of trusting ourselves and trying to please God by our own efforts. There is an entrance into present "Peace with God" and yet still the anticipation of future ultimate peace. So the full realization of that rest awaits future glorification when we cease from the good works which He has prepared ahead of time for us to accomplish by His grace and strength.

Kent: The exhortation is built upon the premise that God's promise to enter into his rest is still valid. The failure in the wilderness did not nullify it, nor did the next generation which actually entered Canaan complete it. . . The problem was that some of the readers were contemplating a return to Judaism on the false assumption that Christianity was not itself sufficient. They thought they had fallen short unless they resumed all the rites and ceremonies of the Old Testament system. The writer wants to make it clear that this is not so.

To summarize the idea of rest in these two chapters, it can be seen that the concept may have as many as four aspects:

1. God's rest (or creation rest): **4:4**
2. Canaan rest: **3:7-19**
3. Salvation rest: **4:1, 3a, 8, 9**
4. Heaven rest: **4: 10, 11**

Basic to the entire discussion is God's rest, begun at the conclusion of creation. It is this present blissful condition of God which He longs to share with men. From this beginning the author develops the theme from one step to another. The physical rest in Canaan was merely one limited aspect, and is used as a type of picture of a deeper spiritual concept. That spiritual reality is the spiritual rest which the true believer may have even in this life, but it does not bring the fullest satisfaction until the future day when believers actually enter God's presence in heaven and "*rest from their labors.*" God's salvation for man thus is covered in broad strokes, and is shown to involve physical as well as spiritual blessings, both in time and in eternity.

Richard Phillips: When we say that Hebrews holds a "realized" eschatology, we mean that the writer emphasizes our present possession of things that God has promised. Although those blessings will be fully received at the end of history, we already begin to realize their benefits now by faith.

Vine: What has been given of Israel's history in **chapter 3** is now applied with emphasis on two facts,

- (1) that Israel failed to enter into rest through unbelief,
- (2) that rest was yet assured and that believers who are not seeking rest here but who accept the present world as a wilderness, should enter God's rest now.

I. (:1-7) OPPORTUNITY TO ENTER GOD'S REST

A. (:1-2) Fear of Missing Out

1. (:1) Availability of God's Promise Must Not Be Neglected

"Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it."

Our rest must be found in God alone; any other pursuit of ultimate rest will be futile and unproductive

A. W. Pink: "*Therefore*" -- The opening words of this chapter bid us seriously take to heart the solemn warning given at the close of 3. God's judgment upon the wicked should make us more watchful that we do not follow their steps.

John Owen: The *fear* intended in this verse is a combination of two things. First, it is a reverent understanding of God's holiness and greatness, and his severity against sin. Second, it is using the means of grace carefully to avoid the evil of unbelief and disobedience.

2. (:2a) Access to Truth Not Enough

“For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also;”

Mohler: these verses remind us that the message of salvation was not different for those in the Old Testament. Regrettably, many false teachers have pointed to the numerous commands in the Old Testament and argued that works saved old covenant saints, but now, by the work of Christ, grace saves new covenant saints. This text, however, demonstrates that the same “good news” preached in the new covenant was also preached in the old covenant. Of course, now that Christ has come and fully revealed the Father (**John 14:8-9**), new covenant believers have a fuller picture and a greater understanding of how God has acted to save. Nevertheless, old covenant saints were saved by faith in the promises of God just as we are today. Paul makes this clear in **Romans 4:1-25** when he argues that Abraham was justified by faith.

Ray Stedman: He means the “good news” of the divine rest, which was promised in the Old Testament and, also, is still promised to them. It’s helpful if we remember that the term, gospel, may be used in a technical sense of Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and was raised again, and was seen. That’s the technical term of the gospel. But it also means, simply, good news. So the good news concerning the Abrahamic Covenant, that there would be a seed of Abraham, through whom the whole world would be blessed, all the families of the earth be blessed, that’s called gospel in **Galatians chapter 3 in verse 8**, also. It is good news.

So good news is the characteristic expression to keep in mind, but the details of it vary with the particular context.

3. (:2b) Application of Faith Needed to Not Miss Out

“but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.”

F. F. Bruce: The practical implication is clear: it is not the hearing of the gospel by itself that brings final salvation, but its appropriation by faith; and if that faith is a genuine faith, it will be a persistent faith.

B. (:3-5) Faith Still Efficacious Today

1. (:3) Proposition: Participation Not Nullified by Prohibition

a. Faith Grabs Hold of the Promise of God’s Rest

“For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,”

So there is a sense in which we have the opportunity to enter into God’s rest right now – even though there is still a future aspect, an eternal aspect to that rest.

Kent: The truth insisted upon by the author is that Israel’s failure to believe, and the subsequent oath of God which prevented their participation in His rest did not annul the fact that God’s plan for believers to enter this rest would still be carried out. . . it should

be regarded as a statement present experience in which true believers presently enjoy God's rest to a certain extent, while at the same time looking forward to a glorious consummation in the life to come.

Spurgeon: Do not tell me that there is no rest for us till we get to heaven. We who have believed in Jesus enter into rest even now. Why should we not do so? Our salvation is complete. The robe of righteousness in which we are clad is finished. The atonement for our sins is fully made. We are reconciled to God, beloved of the Father, preserved by his grace, and supplied by his providence with all that we need. We carry all our burdens to him and leave them at his feet. We spend our lives in his service, and we find his ways to be ways of pleasantness, and his paths to be paths of peace. Oh, yes, we have found rest unto our souls! I recollect the first day that I ever rested in Christ, and I did rest that day. And so will all of you who trust in Jesus as I trusted in him.

b. Prohibition Remains In Place

“As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest,”

Exclusion from God's rest is associated with God's wrath – not just temporary discipline as a Father would lovingly administer to his child.

Ray Stedman: Now, the reason that sounds contradictory, if you think about it for a moment, all he wants to do is, simply, to affirm that there is a rest, and the fact that he's sworn his wrath at certain ones would not enter into his rest is evidence there was such a thing as a rest. God would never say, “You're not going to enter into my rest,” if there was no rest at all. So the fact that he warned the Old Testament professing individuals, “You're not going to enter into the rest,” is evidence that there is such a rest.

c. Promise of God's Rest Traced Back to Creation

“although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.”

God is the one who has defined Work; and He is the one who defines Rest.

2. (:4-5) Proof Texts

a. (:4) Rest Available Since Creation

“For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’;”

Kent: What is this rest of God? Certainly it did not connote the cessation of all activity, for that is contradicted by the Biblical teaching of miracles and providence, as well as by the statement of Jesus cited from **John 5:17** (“My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working”). Inasmuch as the author takes us to God's rest after creation, the prominent thought would seem to lie in the concept of the rest which comes with accomplishment, completion, and satisfaction. At the conclusion of creation, God “rested” from His project because it was accomplished; and because His work was

good, His rest was also one of satisfaction and enjoyment. This rest of eternal blessedness and fulfillment is what God wants to share with His children.

Ray Stedman: So God rested on the seventh day from His works. Incidentally, the kingdom of God upon the earth is the extension of that rest which God enjoyed when he created all things and the beauty and glory of that creation.

b. (I:5) Prohibition Does Not Nullify Availability

“and again in this passage, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”

C. (:6-7) Focus on Responding Today

1. (:6a) Door is Still Open

“Since therefore it remains for some to enter it,”

Wuest: The writer now proceeds to show that those under Moses have failed completely of the rest in Canaan through unbelief, that those under Joshua had entered into the temporal, physical, and material rest in Canaan, and that the rest under Joshua was not a complete and final one since God invited Israel into rest during David’s time. The words *“it remaineth”* are the translation of *apoleipo*. The idea is “remains over from past times.” The promise of rest had not been appropriated in the first instance, and in the second instance the character of the rest was not final, so that the promise of rest still holds good. The rest was not provided for nothing. God’s provision of a rest implies that some will enter into it. But the appropriation of that rest is still future. Some, therefore, must enter into it.

MacArthur: When man lost God's rest, God immediately began a recovery process. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, some would be brought back in. He created man for fellowship with Himself, and His plan would not be thwarted, either by a rebellious archangel or by disbelieving mankind. By divine decree, therefore, there has always been a remnant of believers, even among mostly disbelieving Israel. *"In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (Ro 11:5)*. The way of God's rest has always been narrow, and only a few, relative to all of mankind, have ever found it. But some must enter into it, because God's purpose must be fulfilled. By sovereign decree He designed a rest for mankind and some, therefore, are going to enter it.

2. (:6b) Disobedience is Still the Disqualifier

“and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,”

Morris: The writer concentrates on two generations only: the wilderness generation and his contemporaries. There had been other generations who might have appropriated the promise. But the focus is on the first generation who set the pattern of unbelief and then on the writer’s generation, who alone at that time had the opportunity of responding to God’s invitation. All the intervening generations had ceased to be and could be ignored for the purpose of the argument.

2. (:7) David Warns Against Hardening Your Heart

“He again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.’”

Ray Stedman: Delay hardens the heart, especially when we are fully aware that we have heard the voice of God in the inner soul. Every shrug of the shoulder that puts off acting on God’s urging for change, every toss of the head that says, “I know I should, but I don’t care,” every attempt at outward conformity without inner commitment produces a hardening of the heart that makes repentance harder and harder to do. The witness of the Spirit must not be ignored, for the opportunity to believe does not last forever. Playing games with the living God is not only impertinent, but also dangerous.

II. (:8-11) PERSEVERANCE NEEDED TO ENTER GOD’S REST

A. (:8) Future Orientation of God’s Rest

“For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.”

This proves that we are talking about a different level of rest than just that which was provided upon the entrance into Canaan in Israel’s prior experience.

Mohler: The author has already demonstrated that Christ is superior to the angels and Moses. Now he must demonstrate that Christ is superior to Joshua.

Morris: The name “Joshua” is the Hebrew form of the Greek name “Jesus.” . . . There had been a “Jesus” who could not led his people into the rest of God just as there was another “Jesus” who could.

B. (:9-10) Perseverance is the Realization of God’s Rest

1. (:9) Sabbath Rest Available

“There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.”

Ray Stedman: God’s glorious rest, in which man may participate by faith, is still available. That’s what he is saying. The human longing for peace and rest is future, and it’s given by God. It’s in the coming kingdom of God.

2. (:10) Sabbath Rest Patterned After God’s Cessation from His Works

“For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.”

The analogy breaks down if you view the believer as ceasing from his **bad works** (self effort at trying to earn salvation) since God’s works were good. So it must refer to some type of final rest from works:

- Either the rest of believers at the end of their life as they have persevered in performing good works by the grace and power of God (**Rev. 14:13**)
- Or a reference to Christ resting from His earthly works and returning to heaven

Kent: To cite Christ's example as an incentive for believers to follow (**v. 11**) is fully consistent with the author's practice elsewhere of regarding Christ as the believer's forerunner, opening the way for him to follow (**6:20**). . . the singular "*he*" in **verse 10** is noteworthy and may suggest a change to Christ.

Parunak: His work was to purge us from our sins. Having completed that work, he entered into his rest, at the right hand of the Father. So the sequence of thought is:

1. God rested on the seventh day, **Gen 2**
2. The Son of God, having finished his work, sat down at the right hand of God
3. We will one day enter that rest

C. (:11) Exhortation to Pursue God's Rest

"Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience."

There is both a present and future orientation for our salvation. We need to apply diligence as we persevere in our confession and in our faith in the Lord Jesus.

This verse provides an excellent transition to **vv. 12-13** and could be taken with either what comes before it or what comes after it.

Spurgeon: It is an extraordinary injunction, but I think he means, let us labor not to labor. Our tendency is to try to do something in order to save ourselves; but we must beat that tendency down, and look away from self to Christ. Labor to get away from your own labors; labor to be clean rid of all self-reliance; labor in your prayers never to depend upon your prayers; labor in your repentance never to rest upon your repentance; and labor in your faith not to trust to your faith, but to trust alone to Jesus... I remember an old countryman saying to me, long ago, "Depend upon it, my brother, if you or I get one inch above the ground, we get just that inch too high"; and I believe it is so. Flat on our faces before the cross of Christ is the place for us; realizing that we ourselves are nothing, and that Jesus Christ is everything.

John MacArthur: The need for God's rest is urgent. A person should diligently, with intense purpose and concern, secure it. It is not that he can work his way to salvation, but that he should diligently seek to enter God's rest by faith—lest he, like the Israelites in the wilderness, lose the opportunity. God cannot be trifled with.

III. (:12-13) ACCOUNTABILITY WILL EXPOSE THE FALSE PROFESSORS OF FAITH

A. (:12) Accountability Applied by God's Word

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Profession of faith does not mean necessarily that our faith is genuine. Jesus said that in the last day many would claim to have identified with Him and worked on His behalf, but He will judge that He never knew them as genuine disciples.

Morris: The Word of God passes judgment on men’s feelings (*enthymeseon*) and on their thoughts (*ennoion*). Nothing evades the scope of this Word. What man holds as most secret he finds subject to its scrutiny and judgment.

F. F. Bruce: we may compare Paul’s language about the coming day when the Lord “will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5). It is not surprising, accordingly, that a judicial function is here attributed to the word of God. It is “discriminative of the Heart’s thoughts and intents”; this is the rendering of **E. K. Simpson** who, in a survey of the use of the adjective *kritikos* (ARV “quick to discern”) by Aristotle and others, says: “In all these examples it is a sifting process that is at work; and what winnowing-fan can vie with the gales of the Spirit blowing through the Word?”

MacArthur: The Word of God is not only saving and comforting and nourishing and healing, it is also a tool of judgment and execution. In the day of the great judgment His Word is going to penetrate and lay bare all hearts who have not trusted in Him. The sham and hypocrisy will be revealed and no profession of faith, no matter how orthodox, and no list of good works, no matter how sacrificial, will count for anything before Him. Only the thoughts and intentions of the heart will count. God’s Word is the perfect discerner, the perfect *kritikos* (from which we get “critic”). It not only analyzes all the facts perfectly, but all motives, and intentions, and beliefs as well, which even the wisest human judges or critics cannot do. The sword of His Word will make no mistakes in judgment or execution. All disguises will be ripped off and only the real person will be seen.

The word translated open had two distinct uses in ancient times. It was used of a wrestler taking his opponent by the throat. In this position the two men were unavoidably face to face. The other use was in regard to a criminal trial. A sharp dagger would be bound to the neck of the accused, with the point just below his chin, so that he could not bow his head, but had to face the court. Both uses had to do with grave face-to-face situations. When an unbeliever comes under the scrutiny of God’s Word, he will be unavoidably face-to-face with the perfect truth about God and about himself.

B. (:13) Accountability Applied by God’s Omniscience

“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

You can't fake out God. All the pretenders are exposed.

Morris: Here the same truth is expressed in different imagery. This time the impossibility of hiding anything from God is illustrated by the thought of nakedness.

F. F. Bruce: We may conceal our inner being from our neighbors, and we can even deceive ourselves; but nothing escapes the scrutiny of God; before Him everything lies exposed and powerless. And it is with Him, not with our fellow-men or with our own conscience, that our final reckoning has to be made. Stripped of all disguise and protection we are utterly at the mercy of God, the Judge of all. Therefore, "*let us give diligence . . .!*"

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of pattern of rest have we built into our life in order to show our dependence upon God and to allow for time to reflect and meditate on His goodness and His provision and care for us?
- 2) To what extent are we relying on the finished work of Jesus Christ to usher us right now into the blessing of spiritual rest by faith in Him?
- 3) How can we devote ourselves to completing the work that God has for us here on earth in anticipation of our heavenly rest with a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment?
- 4) How can we make sure that we live in a way that we expose our heart to the Word of God rather than trying to cover up or overlook our sins?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. Kent Hughes: Few have lived as stressful and frenetic a life as **Hudson Taylor**, founder of China Inland Mission. But Taylor lived in God's rest, as his son beautifully attests:

Day and night this was his secret, "just to roll the burden on the Lord." Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkiang might hear, at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor's favorite hymn ["Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art"]. He had learned that for him, only one life was possible – just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.

Fellow-Christians, there is a rest for you. It is not beyond your capacity. You can have it if you wish.

MacArthur: [takes a very narrow view of intended audience here] **Hebrews 4** continues the warning to informed but unresponsive Jews that began in **3:7**. These Jews not only knew the basic truths of the gospel but had even renounced Judaism. Still they did not trust in Christ. The warning, of course, applies to anyone who is hesitating in committing himself fully to Jesus Christ . . . They halted at the crucial point of decision. . . **Unbelief forfeits rest** – that is the writer’s thought.

Richard Phillips: Jesus offers our souls the same benefits offered to Israel in the Promised Land: bountiful provision and complete security. Indeed, the language Moses used for the Promised Land may be directly applied to our spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ: “*A land flowing with milk and honey . . . A land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year*” (**Deut. 11:9-12**).

Christians experience trials of all sorts, just as Israel’s faith was challenged on the way to the Promised Land. But Paul could write of God’s salvation rest words that God’s faithful people have always found true: “*My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus*” (**Phil. 4:19**).

Richard Phillips: [makes a strong case for the present day observance of some pattern of sabbath keeping – one day of rest and devotion to worshipping God – even if it is on Sunday, the Christian sabbath]

He addresses the arguments used to claim that the fourth commandment = the law of keeping the Sabbath -- no longer applies today:

- 1) Now that the reality has come, the symbol has served its purpose
- 2) The fourth commandment is the only one not repeated and reinforced in the NT
- 3) Paul says in **Col. 2:16-17** that we are not under obligation to observe special ceremonial days

Here are his responses:

- 1) the very point of **verse 9** is that the reality to which it points has not yet come . . . there is still a valid need for and benefit from the sign of the Sabbath rest – showing our dependence upon God
- 2) all the other Ten Commandments remain valid today as part of God’s moral law
- 3) Paul was correcting those whose faith consisted of little more than keeping a calendar of special days

Conclusion: At a minimum, Christians need to set aside time not only to worship God but also to enjoy him and his bounty, to rest upon him and experience at least a partial taste of that Sabbath rest that is to come.

MacArthur: [takes the opposite view] Sabbath rest was instituted as a symbol of the true rest to come in Christ. That is why the Sabbath could be violated by Jesus, and completely set aside in the New Testament. When the true Rest Land came, the symbol was useless.

F B Meyer: Sabbath rest -

There is a rest for weary souls. — God speaks of it as **His Rest**. He entered it, we are told, when He had finished His work; and beheld it to be very good; and ever since the door has been standing open for the travel-stained, weary children of men to enter it. To every other creation-day there were evening and morning, but not to this; it partakes of the nature of eternity in its timeless bliss.

Let us rejoice that this rest remaineth. — Of course, the Sabbath, which was and is a type of it, could not exhaust it. And Canaan, with its sweet plains and cessation of the wilderness wanderings, could not completely fulfill it; because centuries after it had been given through Joshua, in the Psalms God spoke of yet another day, as though his rest were still future.

The rest may be a present experience. — The word “remains” has diverted the thoughts of commentators who have supposed it referred to heaven. There is rest, sweet rest, there. But “remains” means “unexhausted, unrealized, by aught which has taken place.” The rest is for us here and now. “We which have believed do enter into rest.” Where is it? In the bosom of Christ: “*Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.*” It is in ploughing the furrow of daily duty — “*Take my yoke; ... and find rest.*”

This rest is compatible with great activity. — He that enters into the Divine rest is not reduced to quietism. On the seventh day the Creator rested from creation; but He works in providence. Jesus, on the seventh day, rested from Calvary; but He pleads in heaven. Cease from your own works, after a similar fashion; abandon your restless planning and striving; by the grace of the Holy Spirit better service will be produced.

TEXT: Hebrews 4:14-16

TITLE: *LEVERAGE OUR SUPERIOR HIGH PRIEST*

BIG IDEA:

**3 PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SUPERIORITY OF THE
PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST**

INTRODUCTION:

This is a perfect transitional paragraph that bridges the gap between what we have already learned of the superiority of Christ and our new section that will focus on His high priestly qualifications. What an encouragement to persevere as we focus on Jesus seated at the right hand of God in the heavenlies. What an encouragement in our sufferings and temptations to know that Jesus understands us completely and has compassion for us. What an encouragement to believers to see the practical ways in which Jesus as our great High Priest grants us access to the throne of grace so that we have just the right type of help we need at just the right time.

Mohler: As the great high priest, Jesus redefined the office because, even though he was tempted in every way as we are, he never sinned and he has passed through the heavens into the very throne room of God to be our mediator.

Brooke Foss Westcott: Briefly, he shows, we have a High-priest who has Himself entered the rest of God (v. 14); who can perfectly sympathize with us (v. 15); so that we can ourselves draw near to God, with whom He is (v. 16).

A T Robertson "Let us keep on holding fast." This keynote runs all through the Epistle, the exhortation to the Jewish Christians to hold on to the confession (**Hebrews 3:1**) of Christ already made. Before making the five points of Christ's superior priestly work (better priest than Aaron, **Hebrews 5:1-7:25**; under a better covenant, **Hebrews 8:1-13**; in a better sanctuary, **Hebrews 9:1-12**; offering a better sacrifice, **Hebrews 9:13-10:18**; based on better promises, **Hebrews 10:19-12:3**), the author gives a double exhortation (**Hebrews 4:14-16**) like that in **Hebrews 2:1-4** to hold fast to the high priest (**Hebrews 4:14-15**) and to make use of him (**Hebrews 4:16**).

I. (:14) OUR SUPERIOR HIGH PRIEST ENCOURAGES US TO PERSEVERE

A. Christ Persevered to Reach His Heavenly Throne in the Presence of God

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,”

Kent: Just as the Aaronic priest passed from the altar through the outer court and then through the holy place to the holy of holies beyond the veil, so Christ also has passed from view. It was not a momentary passing through some earthly chambers, but an ascension through the heavenly regions to the actual throne room of God. Hence His present absence from our view is no disadvantage as compared to Aaronic priests, but is

due to the fact that He is actually performing for us what Aaron could accomplish only in the most limited and largely symbolic way.

R. Kent Hughes: going through the first heaven (the atmosphere), the second heavy (outer space), and finally into the third heaven (the most holy of all places, the presence of God. cf. **2 Corinthians 12:2-4**). And there he sat down (something no high priest had ever done!) because his atoning work was finished. He remains at God's right hand, making intercession for us.

B. Christ is our Savior and the Eternal Son of God

"Jesus the Son of God,"

Lenski: his name is added, "*Jesus*," which again calls to mind his incarnation, his life, sufferings, and death here on earth, but with the mighty apposition "*the Son of God*," which expresses his deity. Our High Priest is infinitely great in his person and his office.

C. Christ is the Focus of Our Confession as We Persevere

"let us hold fast our confession."

We do everything in union with Christ; we have died with Him, been buried and been raised up to new life so that we can hold fast our confession of faith in Him.

Piper: The confession is simply our unshakable hope (**Hebrews 10:23**) that God is for us and will work to bring us into his final rest and joy. Hold fast to that because you have a great High Priest. That's the first conclusion. For weeks we have been seeing the call to hold fast and to be diligent and to take heed. Here we see it again. Only here the writer is spreading out powerful reasons not only for why you should hold fast to your confession, but also why you *can*! God is for you. You have a great High Priest. He is alive. He is in the presence of God. He is the Son of God. He is sympathetic. So hold fast to your hope.

II. (:15) OUR SUPERIOR HIGH PRIEST EMPATHIZES WITH OUR WEAKNESSES

A. Christ Has Compassion for Us

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses,"

He took on humanity so that He can fully identify with mankind. He can be the sufficient mediator to represent us before God the Father.

F. F. Bruce: His transcendence, however, has made no difference to His humanity. . . Christians have in heaven a high priest with an unequalled capacity for sympathizing with them in all the dangers and sorrows and trials which come their way in life, because He Himself, by virtue of His likeness to them, was exposed to all these experiences.

Kent: The negative way in which this statement is introduced suggests that rebuttal is being made to an objection. Was it being implied that having a high priest in heaven was no substitute for a priest on earth to whom one could go with his problems?

R. Kent Hughes: The revelation of the **sympathy of God** was an incredible revelation in its ancient setting. The Stoics believed that the primary attribute of God was *apatheia*, the inability to feel anything at all. They reasoned that if he could feel, he could be controlled by others and therefore would be less than God. The Epicureans believed that God dwelled in *intermudia*, the spaces between the worlds, in complete detachment. . . The method for the unparalleled sympathy of God was, of course, the incarnation of his Son in human flesh.

B. Christ Has Overcome Every Temptation We Might Face

“but One who has been tempted in all things as we are,”

C. One Caveat in Christ’s Identification with Mankind: Christ Was Not Tempted by Any Sin From Within

“yet without sin.”

Morris: This may mean that Jesus was tempted just as we are except that we sin and he did not. But it may also mean that he had a knowledge of every kind of temptation except that which comes from actually having sinned. There are supporters for each interpretation. But it may be that the writer was not trying to differentiate between the two. At any rate his words can profitably be taken either way. The main point is that, though Jesus did not sin, we must not infer that life was easy for him.

Kent: the point in the passage does not seem to be whether He sinned or not (of course, He did **not**), but whether He was truly tempted and thus could really sympathize. It seems better to regard apart from sin as naming the only exception I the way Christ was tempted as compared to ordinary men. None of His temptations arose out of a sinful disposition, such as all fallen men have since Adam. All of Christ’s temptations came to Him from outside Himself (i.e. from Satan). This in no sense violates the truth that Jesus was genuinely tempted, and that He thus understands and sympathizes with men who face such situations.

III. (:16) OUR SUPERIOR HIGH PRIEST EMBOLDENS OUR PETITIONS FOR HELP

A. Approach Christ with Boldness

1. We Should Have Intimate Access to Christ

“Let us therefore draw near”

Kent: Since our great high priest is in the most advantageous place (heaven), and is both Son of God and yet through His human experiences is fully qualified to understand our needs, we have the best of reasons for using the good offices He provides.

Richard Phillips: Because Jesus is our high priest, we are reconciled to God. This means that we can approach him freely. We do not have to hide from him; we do not have to flee like Adam in the garden; the veil barring us from God's presence is torn because of the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. We may now . . . approach boldly into the presence of God that once was barred by our sin.

2. We Should Have Confident Access to Christ
"with confidence"

No hesitation or sense of insecurity or insignificance; no fear of rejection; no tentativeness in our approach

3. We Should Have Powerful Access to Christ
"to the throne of grace,"

Sufficient for whatever we need out of the riches of His grace and the power and authority of His dominion

Hewitt: It is called a "*throne of grace*" in contrast to the "throne of judgment" which displays the awful majesty of God; and the Christian should come to it regularly and with confidence.

B. Approach Christ to Obtain Mercy and Grace

1. To Obtain Mercy
"that we may receive mercy"

2. To Obtain Grace
"and may find grace"

C. Approach Christ for Help in Time of Need

"to help in time of need."

Kent: it is what believers need when their weaknesses seem overwhelming. Mercy speaks of God's relieving of man's miseries. Grace is the favor of God which He bestows without regard for merit to those who put their trust in Him. In times of weakness, temptation, and sin, believers find in their access to God through Christ the timely help that is tailored to their particular need.

MacArthur: How can anyone reject such a High Priest, such a Savior – who not only permits us to come before His throne for grace and help, but pleads with us to come in confidence? His Spirit says, "Come boldly all the way to God's throne that has been turned into a throne of grace because of Jesus. Come all the way up, receive grace and mercy when you need it – before it is too late and your heart is hard and God's 'today' is over." The time of need is now. What a High Priest we have. He sympathizes and He saves. What more could He do?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you have trouble identifying with the ministry of Jesus on your behalf as a great high priest? How can the OT background of that office and function help to improve your connection to Christ in this regard?
- 2) How do both the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ contribute to your appreciation of His priestly role?
- 3) What are some ways in which you are tempted to think that Jesus does not really understand your weaknesses or your temptations?
- 4) Since we have such bold access in prayer to the one who can provide us with the mercy and grace we so desperately need, why don't we pray more?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Phillips: God requires us to persevere in faith through the trials of this Christian life. He gives us a great reason to press on – the saving work of our great high priest, who is able to save us to the uttermost. He has gone ahead of us to open the doors and unlock the treasures of God's mercy and grace. Prayer is a great resource God gives us, one that we must not neglect if we are to grow strong in the faith and persevere through difficulties. Prayer brings us to a throne of power and authority, but also a throne of grace to all who are in Christ. Therefore, let us draw near to God with reverence, with joy, with great expectations, and especially with the confidence that belongs to the sons and daughters of the King of heaven and earth.

Steven Cole: The Throne of Grace
Since Jesus is our great yet sympathetic high priest, we must persevere and we must pray.

There are two commands here: Hold fast our confession (persevere; **4:14**); and, Draw near with confidence (pray; **4:16**). They are both based on the truth about who Jesus is: Since Jesus is our great high priest, the Son of God, who has passed through the heavens, we must hold fast our confession. And, since Jesus is a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, we should draw near to the throne of grace for help in our times of need. Thus His transcendence to the right hand of God's throne and His humanity are both essential elements of His unique effectiveness as our high priest.

If we want to persevere through trials and receive His help through prayer, we must

understand who He is.

1. Since Jesus is our great high priest who has passed through the heavens, we must persevere (4:14).

The author tells us who Jesus is and how we should respond.

A. JESUS IS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST WHO HAS PASSED THROUGH THE HEAVENS.

We see Jesus' greatness in two ways here:

1). JESUS IS GREAT IN HIS OFFICE AS HIGH PRIEST AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

We have difficulty relating to the concept of a high priest, but to the Jews, it was an important office. Moses' brother Aaron was the first high priest. He was the mediator between the people and God. He and his fellow priests offered the sacrifices on behalf of the people. They had to follow a detailed procedure spelled out by God. Any variance or innovation meant instant death, as Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu discovered when they offered "strange fire" on the altar (**Lev. 10:1-3**).

2). JESUS IS GREAT IN HIS PERSON AS GOD IN HUMAN FLESH.

B. WE MUST PERSEVERE.

"Confession" implies not only our private belief in the essential doctrines of the faith (especially with regard to Jesus' deity and humanity), but also our public declaration of this truth in the face of persecution. We make such a public profession of faith in baptism, but that profession is put to the test when persecution arises. Are we only fair-weather believers who deny the Lord when it becomes costly to believe, or will we stand firm even to death because we know whom we have believed?

2. Since Jesus is our sympathetic and sinless high priest, we must pray in times of need (4:15-16).

A. JESUS IS OUR SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST.

B. JESUS IS OUR SINLESS HIGH PRIEST.

Verse 15 raises the question, "Was it *possible* for Jesus to have sinned?" We need to answer this carefully (I am following Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Zondervan], pp. 537-539). Scripture clearly affirms that Jesus never committed sin (**Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22**). It also affirms that His temptations were real, not just playacting. The Bible also affirms, "*God cannot be tempted by evil*" (**James 1:13**). Since Jesus was fully God, how then could He *really* be tempted, much less commit a sin? Here we plunge into the mystery of how one man can be both fully God and fully human, as Scripture plainly affirms of Jesus.

Since Jesus is one *person* with two natures, and since sin involves the whole person, in this sense, Jesus *could not* have sinned or He would have ceased to be God. But the question remains, “How then could Jesus’ temptations be real?” The answer seems to be that Jesus met every temptation to sin, not by His divine power, but by His human nature relying on the power of the Father and Holy Spirit. As Wayne Grudem explains, “The moral strength of his divine nature was there as a sort of ‘backstop’ that would have prevented him from sinning..., but he did not rely on the strength of his divine nature to make it easier for him to face temptations...” (p. 539).

As you know, Scripture sometimes affirms something of Jesus that could only be true of one of His natures, but not both (**Matt. 24:36**). Jesus’ divine nature could not be tempted or sin, but His human nature could. Don’t stumble over the fact that you cannot fully comprehend this. Rather, accept the testimony of Scripture: Jesus truly was tempted and He never sinned. These facts mean that He understands what we are going through and He is able to come to our aid when we are tempted (**2:18**).

Because Jesus is a sympathetic and sinless high priest...

C. WE SHOULD DRAW NEAR IN PRAYER.

“Draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” “*Throne of grace*” is an oxymoron. To the ancient world, a throne was a forbidding place of sovereign authority and judgment. If you approached a throne and the king did not hold out his scepter, you were history! You definitely would not draw near to the throne for sympathy, especially with a trivial problem. But the author calls it the throne *of grace*. He makes it clear that we are *welcome* at this throne. He answers four questions:

- (1) *Why* draw near?
- (2) *When* should we draw near?
- (3) *How* should we draw near? And,
- (4) *What* can we expect when we draw near?

1). WHY DRAW NEAR? WE SHOULD DRAW NEAR TO THE THRONE OF GRACE BECAUSE WE ARE WEAK AND WE HAVE THERE A SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST.

We don’t come because we’ve got it pretty much together and we just need a little advice. We come because we are weak (**4:15**). Jesus didn’t say, “Without Me, you can get along pretty well most of the time. Call Me if you need Me.” He said, “*Without Me, you can do nothing*” (**John 15:5**). And when we come to the throne of grace, He doesn’t ridicule us or belittle us for our weaknesses. He welcomes us as a father welcomes his children to his side to protect them from some danger.

2). WHEN SHOULD WE DRAW NEAR? WE SHOULD DRAW NEAR TO THE THRONE OF GRACE WHENEVER WE NEED HELP.

We should come in a “*time of need*,” which is at *all* times! A main reason we do not pray is that we don’t realize how needy we are. We think we can handle things on our

own. Just call in the Lord when things get really intense. But the fact is, we depend on Him for every breath we take and for every meal we eat, even if we've got a month's supply of food in the freezer. Praying without ceasing (**1 Thess. 5:17**) is necessary because we are constantly in over our heads. Prayer is the acknowledgement that our need is not partial; it is *total!*

3). HOW SHOULD WE DRAW NEAR? WE SHOULD DRAW NEAR TO THE THRONE OF GRACE DIRECTLY, WITH CONFIDENCE IN OUR HIGH PRIEST.

The author does not say, "Draw near through your local priest." He says, "*Let us draw near.*" *Us* means every believer.

Our confidence is not in how good we've been or in how well we can pray. Spurgeon pointed out that God will overlook our shortcomings and poor prayers just as a loving parent will overlook the mistakes in the sentences of his toddler. Even when we have sinned badly, if we draw near to confess our sins, He will cleanse our wounds and begin the healing process, just as a parent would carefully clean and bandage the wounds of his child. Finally,

4). WHAT CAN WE EXPECT WHEN WE DRAW NEAR? WE WILL RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN OUR TIME OF NEED.

What a wonderful promise! We won't be scolded for having a need. We won't be told that our need is too trivial for such an important high priest to be troubled with. We will receive mercy and find grace to help. "Help" is a technical nautical term that is used elsewhere only in **Acts 27:17** to describe the cables that the sailors wrapped around the hull of Paul's ship during the storm so that it would not break apart. We encountered the verb in **Hebrews 2:18**, where it has the nuance of running to the aid of someone crying for help. When your life seems to be coming apart at the seams because of the storm, cry out to our sympathetic high priest at the throne of grace. You will receive mercy and find grace to help.

What is the difference between *mercy* and *grace*? They somewhat overlap, but *mercy* has special reference to God's tenderness toward us because of the misery caused by our sins, whereas *grace* refers to His undeserved favor in freely forgiving our sins, which actually deserve His judgment (see R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* [Eerdmans], pp. 169-170). Together, both words reflect the good news that "*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them*" (**2 Cor. 5:18**). All that trust in Christ and His shed blood as the payment for their sins have free access at the throne of grace to God's boundless mercy and undeserved favor!

Conclusion

I like John Piper's analogy that prayer is our walkie-talkie to get the supplies we need in the spiritual war that we are engaged in. It's not an intercom to call the maid to bring extra beverages to the den. In other words, prayer isn't to make us comfortable and

cozy, oblivious to the advancement of God's kingdom purposes. Prayer is our walkie-talkie to bring in the needed supplies as we seek first His kingdom and righteousness. If you're under fire in the battle, persevere—hold fast your confession, because Jesus is our great high priest. If you have needs, pray—draw near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help in the battle.

Ray Pritchard: A Friend in High Places

Sometimes when we are in the middle of a hard time well-meaning people will say, “I know what you are going through.” In my opinion that is often a cruel thing to say. How can you be sure you know what another person is thinking or feeling? I think it's better not to say that because if you really do know what another person is going through, your heart will make that clear to them. And if you don't, it's far better not to say anything at all. . .

How good it is to know that he was tempted just as we are. The text means that Jesus faced every kind of temptation we can face. Basically every temptation falls into one of three categories: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (cf. **1 John 2:14-17**). Jesus defeated the devil in those three areas. Where we failed, he succeeded. Where we gave in, he stood strong. Where we collapsed under pressure, Jesus obeyed his Father. He was tempted, yet he never sinned by giving in. I find great comfort in these words of **C. S. Lewis** in his book *Mere Christianity*:

“A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in....Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means (p. 142).”

This has enormous implications for our spiritual life. *Because Christ was tempted and never gave in, we may be sure that he is never surprised by anything we say or do.* We gave in too early so we never felt the full force of temptation. But Jesus let the waves of temptation rush over him and stood like the Rock of Gibraltar. When we pray we don't have to worry that we will somehow shock him. He's heard it all and seen it all. We can go ahead and be totally honest about our failures. He knows about it even before we tell him.

We've got connections in heaven. We've got a friend at the throne of grace who delights to answer our prayers. He's the Right Person with the Right Past in the Right Place. Because he feels your pain, he can sympathize with what you're going through. Nothing you say will surprise him. Come boldly. Come often. Come to the throne of grace and pour out your heart to God. You will not be turned away.

Ray Stedman: The Priest Who Can Truly Help

Jesus, as high priest, is both great and has gone through the heavens. This last phrase denotes his completed work of redemption and transcendent availability. The practical result of that availability is that there is no necessity for anyone to give up faith under the pressure of peril or persecution, for the help needed to stand is both sympathetically offered and fully effective. This offer of help from on high to any who struggle with the pressures and problems of life on earth is undoubtedly the most widely neglected resource for Christians. It proposes simply and clearly to meet every situation, not with human wisdom but divine---and not with merely human strength, but God's inexhaustive strength! History provides many examples of those who have tried this offer and found it eminently true. Yet despite this encouragement from the past and present, many believers look only for human help, and if it is not available, succumb quickly to discouragement, defeat, despair and even suicide. These verses are often quoted as part of a Christian's defense provision, but too often forgotten when actual times of trouble arrive.

The basis for our great high priest's sympathy is that he has fully shared our plight. The writer has already (2:17) reminded his readers that Jesus was "*made like his brothers in every way*" and that this was done "*through suffering*" (2:10). Now we are told that he has been tempted in every way, just as we are. As Adam and Eve before the Fall could be tempted even in their innocent state, so Jesus could feel the force of temptation to the full, though he remained without sin. He exceeds us in his awareness of the power of temptation. "Such endurance involves more, not less, than ordinary human suffering" (Bruce 1964:86). Only the sinless can experience the full intensity of temptation, for the sinful yield before the limit of temptation is reached. We may count on his sympathy for our feelings of pressure and constraint to evil, and be assured, as the psalmist says, "*he knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust*" (Ps 103:14). . . .

The throne of grace to which we come for help is pictured by the mercy seat in the old tabernacle. That mercy seat, where God could meet with sinful humans because of the blood of sacrifice sprinkled upon it, is the throne of power in the universe from which grace constantly flows to needy suppliants. Mercy is the remission of deserved judgment, while grace is the supply of undeserved blessing. Both are needed by sinful believers such as we all are, and both are available to us when we come with confidence. We are loved as children and cherished as recipients of the great salvation won by the blood of our great high priest!

TEXT: Hebrews 5:1-10

TITLE: SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

BIG IDEA:

THE QUALIFICATIONS AND DIVINE APPOINTMENT OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE HIGH PRIESTLY ROLE ARE LINKED TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

INTRODUCTION:

In light of what the Jews understood about the role of the high priest from the Levitical system in the OT, how could Jesus Christ be qualified to minister? In this paragraph we find the essential qualifications for a high priest along with the emphasis on the divine appointment. It is clear that Jesus proved superior in every way as those details are analyzed. Then the unique mission of Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry is presented to confirm His adequacy to be the source of eternal salvation for all those who would believe.

Richard Phillips: The Book of Hebrews stands out among the other epistles of the New Testament in its single-minded attention to the person and work of Jesus Christ . . . If you only comprehend who Christ is and what he has done, this will make you persevere in the faith against all difficulties. If we get Christ straight . . . everything else will come into focus and we will hold fast to the end.

I. (:1-3) QUALIFICATIONS FOR PRIESTHOOD

A. (:1a) Solidarity with Humanity

1. Taken from Among Men

“For every high priest taken from among men”

R. Kent Hughes: Solidarity, oneness with humanity, was fundamental to priestly ministry and is explicitly stated in verse 1.

2. Represents Man to God

“is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God,”

Richard Phillips: The priest was a mediator, not only representing the sinful people before God, but actually bringing them back into fellowship with God through his work on their behalf. A priest had to be human to represent other humans, but he also had to be human in order to identify with them.

B. (1b) Sacrifice for Sin = Mission

“in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;”

Hewitt: *Gifts* in this passage most probably signifies inanimate “offerings and oblations”, and *sacrifices* would seem to refer to the offering of animate things, viz. slain beasts. In the Old Testament, however, this distinction does not always hold good, but where both words are used together it would appear to do so.

C. (:2) Sensitive / Compassionate Mediator Who Can Identify with Weakness

1. Gentle – Not Harsh

“he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided,”

Hewitt: There should be no lack of feeling on the part of the high priest for those who have fallen into error and sin, nor should he be unduly disturbed, otherwise he may fail to bear gently with them. This feeling of moderation should arise naturally from a knowledge of his own sinful weaknesses . . .

2. Understanding – Not Insensitive

“since he himself also is beset with weakness;”

R. Kent Hughes: There is a remarkable parallel between the chemistry that produces the ability to “*deal gently*” (awareness of **weakness** plus **sinfulness** equals **gentleness**) and the first three Beatitudes. . . Conversely, a harsh, judgmental, unsympathetic spirit is a telltale indication that one has outgrown his sense of weakness and awareness of sin. Many evangelicals fall to this syndrome after humbly coming to Christ at conversion, for their initial experience of sanctification deludes them into imagining they are better than others. Such arrogance, however, actually disqualifies them from spiritual ministry.

D. (:3) Sacrifice for Sin = Mission

1. Necessity of Sacrifices for Sins

“and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins,”

2. Scope of Sacrifices for Sins

“as for the people, so also for himself.”

Mohler: Just as the people were beset with sin, so also was the high priest beset with sin. Therefore, he was obligated to offer up sacrifices for his own sin before he could offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people. His own sin required atonement before he could enter the most holy place. It tarnished him to the point that he could not enter God’s presence and intercede on behalf of the people without first purifying himself through sacrifice.

Kent: God took into account the sins of the high priest by establishing the Day of Atonement ritual in such a way that the high priest made atonement for himself before he did so for the people. **Leviticus 16** describes the annual observance. Before killing the goat of the sin offering on behalf of the people and sprinkling its blood within the veil in the holy of holies, he first entered the veil with the blood of a bullock which was a sin offering for himself and his household (**Lev. 16:6, 11-4, 17**). After caring for his

own atonement, the high priest then offered the blood of a goat as a sin offering for the congregation. A second goat was released into the wilderness as the “scape goat,” picturing the removal of the iniquities of Israel (**Lev. 16:10, 20-22**). The ceremonial observances reminded the priest of his own sinfulness, and thus should have helped him to “*deal gently*” with his wandering brethren.

II. (:4-6) DIVINE APPOINTMENT BASED ON DIVINE DECREES – SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

A. (:4) Sovereignly Called by God

1. Negatively: Not by Human Initiative

“And no one takes the honor to himself,”

2. Positively: Sovereignly Called by God

“but receives it when he is called by God,”

3. Example of Aaron

“even as Aaron was.”

R. Kent Hughes: All Israel’s priests were to come only through divine appointment (**Exodus 28:1-3**; cf. **Leviticus 8:1ff.**; **Numbers 16:5**; **20:23ff.**; **25:10ff.**). Attempts to do otherwise met with catastrophic judgment. Korah and his 250 followers were swallowed by the earth because they elevated themselves to the priestly office by burning unauthorized incense (**Numbers 16:16-40**). Saul lost his reign because impatiently assumed Samuel’s priestly function (**1 Samuel 13:8ff.**). And Uzziah, wrongly utilizing a priestly censer, broke out with leprosy that lasted until his dying day (**2 Chronicles 26:16-21**).

2 OT PROOF TEXTS:

B. (:5) Submission to the Will of the Father

“So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, ‘Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee’;”

Wuest: The writer is careful to let the reader see that it was no personal ambition on Messiah’s part that resulted in His becoming a high priest, but rather the fact that God called Him to that position, and that the call to priesthood was based upon the fact that the Messiah was God’s Son. **Bruce** says regarding this: “Christ’s priestly vocation ceases to be an accident in history, and becomes an essential characteristic of His position as Son: sonship, Christhood, priestliness, inseparably interwoven.”

Kent: Inasmuch as Jesus was of Judah, not of Levi and Aaron, it must be demonstrated that to regard Him as priest is not an illegal intrusion into the priestly office. It needs to be shown that Jesus possessed a call from God to the priesthood. Two passages from the Psalms are cited as proof texts that Christ holds His priesthood by divine

appointment . . . the two quotations fully substantiate Christ's qualifications as a Melchizedek-type priest, showing Him to be recognized by God as king as well as priest. . . His identification as my Son and His establishment as a priest forever are both features that are superior to anything known in the Levitical system. . . God has planned that Messiah should concentrate in Himself the authority of kingly rule, and this will involve also His spiritual ministration as the great high priest. Because He is the Son of God, believers need not fear that abuse of His power will occur, or that either aspect will be ignored. He is presently our high priest in heaven, and when He comes again it will be to reign as King of kings, while continuing His perfect representation of His people to God.

C. (:6) Status According to the Order of Melchizedek

"just as He says also in another passage,

'Thou art a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.'"

Richard Phillips: Someone may be qualified for a position without actually having the authority to hold it. Qualification is a prerequisite, but there must be an appointment to the office if the work is to be acceptable and binding. . . The high priest must be appointed by God, not only so that he will serve selflessly, but also so that we might know that God himself has authorized his ministry in this capacity.

Phil Newton: We must not miss the emphasis of **He 5:6**. For the writer stresses that while the Jewish high priests were appointed divinely in the order of Aaron to serve their office, the appointment of Jesus Christ supersedes all of them. His appointment is unique in that he has no claim to the high priesthood humanly speaking since he was from the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi. The high priesthood was not up for grabs or given to the highest bidder. It was a sacred trust of Aaron's sons. But Christ was appointed as the only high priest whose mediatorial work would have eternal value. All of the others were mere shadows of Him who would be appointed by God as Mediator. Without a mediator we have no way to God. We have seen that time after time in analyzing our sinful condition. Only one has been appointed. Only one has been accepted by God: the Son Whom He declared, "*a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*" Here was the predicament facing this first century audience. Some were thinking that they could chart their own course to God. They could divine their own way to eternal life. Much like the multitudes in our own day that think that the rules change or bend for them, they thought that obedient faith in Jesus Christ was not the only way to God. But the only priest whose work is "forever" is Jesus Christ. Therefore, the only one who can break through the barrier of our sinfulness and deliver us in righteousness to the Creator is the One who bore God's judgment for us at the cross. Are you one whose faith in Jesus Christ is slipping and sliding away? There's one anchor for the soul-Jesus Christ.

III. (:7-10) PREPARATION FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

A. (:7) Supplications for Deliverance

1. Request

“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death,”

Should *ek* be translated “*from death*” (expressing a desire for the cup to be avoided) or “*out of death*” (expressing a desire for resurrection)? You could see this either way.

Mohler: Jesus did not pray in order to be saved from dying; he prayed in order to be saved out of death through the resurrection.

2. Answer

“and He was heard because of His piety.”

Parunak: He did not pray that the cup would pass by him, but that it would pass from him. He is not asking to be delivered from the burden of drinking from it. That was the purpose for which he came into the world. But he prays that his death would not persist; that after he has drunk, the cup would pass from him. And this prayer, the Father granted.

Guzik: If Jesus asked that the cup be taken away from Him (**Luke 22:42**), and the cup was not taken away, how can it be said that He was heard? Because His prayer was not to escape His Father’s will, but to accept it - and that prayer was definitely heard.

B. (:8) School of Suffering

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”

Mohler: As Jesus experienced the trials associated with human existence, he learned how to obey his Father in them. Suffering taught Jesus how to submit his will to his Father’s will. We see this lesson at its sharpest point in Gethsemane and on Calvary. The cross meant terrible agony of heart and body for Christ, but he remained resolute in his willingness to be obedient, even obedient to the point of death (**Phil. 2:8**). By faithfully enduring the suffering ordained by the Father’s plan to redeem sinners through his own blood, Jesus learned obedience.

C. (:9-10) Superior Priesthood According to the Order of Melchizedek

1. (:9a) Summary of Completed Preparation

“And having been made perfect,

2. (:9b) Source of Eternal Salvation

“He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,”

R. Kent Hughes: This does not mean Jesus passed from disobedience to obedience. Nor does it mean that he developed from imperfection to perfection. The idea is that he became **complete** in his human experience.

Richard Phillips: righteousness is the source of salvation, and by his perfect life and sacrificial death the words of the apostle Paul are abundantly true: Jesus Christ is “*our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption*” (1 Cor. 1:30). Now the way to God what was closed by sin is opened by Christ’s righteousness.

3. (:10) Status According to the Order of Melchizedek
“*being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.*”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this high priestly ministry of Jesus magnify and intensify the depths of our sin problem?
- 2) What is the point in the emphasis on the suffering that Jesus experienced? How does suffering prepare us to minister to others?
- 3) What is the point of the comparison between the priesthood of Jesus and that of Melchizedek?
- 4) In what sense can believing in Jesus be equated with “*obeying Him*”?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: The Kind of Priest You Need

Thus if you want to know the significance of this central theme of the Book of Hebrews, you must ask God for a clearer understanding of His absolute holiness and majesty, and for a deeper insight into your own sinfulness and uncleanness apart from Christ. This will lead you into a deeper appreciation of what Jesus did for you on the cross as the high priest who entered the holy place, not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with His own blood (9:11-14). And, you will find that a deeper appreciation of God’s holiness, your own sinfulness, and the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice is one of the most practical doctrines in the Bible, because it humbles your pride. Pride is at the root of every relational conflict and just about any sin that you can name. With that as an introduction, I am again going to follow the Puritan method of first explaining the doctrine and then giving its “use,” or application. The theme of our text is:

Jesus Christ perfectly fulfills the qualifications for the kind of high priest that we all need.

Doctrine:

1. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR HUMAN HIGH PRIESTS WERE TO MEDIATE BETWEEN MEN AND GOD, TO SYMPATHIZE WITH HIS FELLOW SINNERS, AND TO BE CALLED BY GOD TO THE OFFICE (5:1-4).

A. THE WORK OF THE HIGH PRIEST: AS A MEDIATOR, HE OFFERS GIFTS AND SACRIFICES FOR SINS ON BEHALF OF MEN IN THINGS PERTAINING TO GOD (5:1).

B. THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE HIGH PRIEST WITH THE PEOPLE: HE CAN SYMPATHIZE WITH THEM, SINCE HE IS A FELLOW SINNER (5:2-3).

C. THE APPOINTMENT OF THE HIGH PRIEST: HE DOES NOT TAKE IT UPON HIMSELF, BUT MUST BE CALLED BY GOD (5:4).

2. JESUS PERFECTLY FULFILLS AND EXCEEDS THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE HIGH PRIEST (5:5-10).

The author shows here how Jesus not only fulfilled the requirements for the Aaronic priesthood, but superceded them by being a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (a theme he will expand on in **chapter 7**). He presents Jesus' qualifications in reverse order to those of the high priest:

A. THE APPOINTMENT OF JESUS AS HIGH PRIEST: HE DID NOT TAKE IT UPON HIMSELF, BUT GOD APPOINTED HIM AS A PRIEST ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK (5:5-6).

B. THE IDENTIFICATION OF JESUS, OUR HIGH PRIEST, WITH US: HE PRAYED AND LEARNED OBEDIENCE THROUGH WHAT HE SUFFERED (5:7-8).

There is debate about the content of Jesus' request. If He was asking to be saved from death, in what sense was His prayer heard, since He was not delivered from that awful death? Probably Jesus was asking to be sustained through the agony of bearing our sins, and to be brought through death into resurrection and complete restoration with the Father. The word "piety" (NASB) is better rendered "reverent submission" (NIV). It refers to His reverential submission to the will of the Father when He prayed, "*not My will, but Yours be done*" (**Luke 22:42**).

The author's point is that Jesus is our perfect high priest in that His prayers and obedience through His sufferings show that He can sympathize with us in our sufferings. Therefore, we should obediently persevere in trials through prayer.

C. THE WORK OF JESUS, THE PERFECT HIGH PRIEST: HE IS THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION TO ALL WHO OBEY HIM (5:9-10).

Then (5:10) the author comes back to God’s designating Jesus as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, which places Him in a category by Himself, above the Levitical priests. He will develop this further in **chapter 7**, after the extended exhortation of **chapter 6**. His point, then, in this section is to show that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfills and exceeds the qualifications of the high priest in the Old Testament. To go back to that old system would be to return to a severely inferior system and to abandon the high priest that we desperately need.

Parunak: The Messiah is like other priests in three ways:

- his mission in reconciling sinful people to a holy God (v. 1),
- his identity with the people whom he represents (vv. 1-3),
- and his appointment to this office (v. 4).

Vv. 5-10 apply these three themes in chiastic order to the Messiah (Table 2, chart).

	Levitical Priests (1-4)		Messiah (5-9)
Mission	1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:		9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;
Identity	2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. 3 And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.		7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; 8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;
Authority	4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.		5 So also [the] Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. 6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Table 2: Comparison of the Christ with Levitical Priests

In 5:1-10, the author uses the quote about Melchizedek to emphasize the similarity between our Lord and other priests: both hold office by divine appointment rather than personal initiative. Now he wants to show how Melchizedek distinguishes the Lord from the Levitical priests, but he hesitates, given his readers’ lack of spiritual understanding. He will eventually press ahead, but not before issuing a sober warning, the third of the warning passages.

David Harrell: The High Priesthood of Jesus Christ

Under the old covenant, God appointed priests to be the mediator of his relationship to men. God appointed them to speak to man on his behalf and to speak to God on man's behalf and all of this was pictured in the Levitical priesthood, all of the sacrifices and cleansings and rituals and symbols, but what was pictured ultimately became a reality in Christ. What was promised was fulfilled in the perfect great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his sacrifice, our sins can be forgiven and we have access into the

presence of God and this is really at the heart of the epistle to the Hebrews as we are going to see in chapters 5 through 9.

First of all, in this text we see the author speaking of two essential qualifications of a high priest. . . So first we see that the **priest had to be a man appointed by God**. Now, although the Jews worshiped angels, they understood that a priest could not be an angel and the reason for that is because an angel knows nothing of the temptations and the sufferings of men, and this is why Jesus was such a problem to them. The claim that he was not only God incarnate, that God would become a man, but then to say that he could become our priest, I mean, how could such a person be sympathetic with the great struggles of humanity if he was God? How could he understand what we deal with? Well, obviously the answer is that he, the Lord Jesus, took upon himself the nature and the body of a man so that he could be tempted and he could suffer in the ways that we do and be our substitute on the cross of Calvary. . .

Secondly, he had to be **sympathetic with those to whom he ministered**. Notice **verse 2**, "*he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness.*" The two words "deal gently," a fascinating concept in the original language, *metriopatheia*, it's a fascinating term. It can be translated "have compassion." But this really only describes this idea of dealing gently only describes part of what this term really meant. It carried the idea of a virtue that maintains the middle ground or, shall we say, the mean between two extremes. In other words, a priest had to manifest in his character a balance between, for example, excessive grief and utter indifference; between extreme patience and harsh condemnation. There had to be a balance and he could not be, for example, overly sympathetic to the point of being naïve or saccharine, which means excessively sweet or sentimental. But he also had to avoid the opposite extreme of being impatient and hardhearted. He had to be able to deal gently. You see, being overly sympathetic could result in giving bad counsel to the people that came to him. It could result in offering to God offerings that were unwarranted, offerings that were inappropriate. And being excessively austere or harsh, unapproachable, too severe, could drive people away. It could crush their spirit. So priests had to be balanced. They had to be able to show moderation. They had to be approachable and compassionate and patient and discerning in order to give wise counsel and able to effectively comfort and console individuals but they couldn't be so sympathetic that they were unable to say the hard things that would need to be said, to offer rebuke and call men to repentance and even pronounce condemnation and judgment on the most obstinate and rebellious. They had to show great forbearance and yet they had to be able to speak forthrightly. This was the idea of dealing gently and like each of us, the priest had to find that middle ground between being indifferent to sin and angry with sinners. . .

So two essential qualifications: he had to be appointed by God and, secondly, he had to be sympathetic with those to whom he ministered, allowing him then to offer gifts and sacrifices. And secondly what we see here in the text is that **this was all perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ**. Notice **verse 5** and here we see he was appointed by God. "*So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'*" And here the inspired author

presents his case in a very compelling way by taking the Jews all the way back to the Old Testament in **Psalm 2:7**. And you will recall that this is obviously what happened, God the Father said this to Jesus at his baptism, a clear statement affirming his divine appointment to the priesthood. . .

But here we learn that Jesus is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Now, the author is going to expand upon this in **chapter 7** but I believe a brief explanation is in order. You see, in the days of Abraham we are told in **Genesis 14**, mainly **verse 18**, and this was long before the Aaronic priesthood was ever established, there we learn that Melchizedek who, by the way, his name means "righteous king," surprise, surprise, Melchizedek was King of Salem and Salem was ancient Jerusalem. And we learn in that text that he was a "*priest of God most high*." Now when we come to **Hebrews 7:3**, we learn that his priesthood was unending, it was eternal unlike that of Aaron which began in the days of Moses but then ended in A.D. 70 when the Romans came in and destroyed the temple. So Melchizedek was a type of Christ, in other words, an Old Testament person that pictured or prefigured a superior antetype which was the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect and eternal priest. And though Melchizedek is in no way the equal of Christ, his unique priesthood and even his name typify Jesus Christ and his work in a number of significant ways and when we get to **Hebrews 7**, we will examine those. So the idea here is that Melchizedek's priesthood elevated the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ even beyond that of Aaron. That's the argument. **Verse 10**, he was "*designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek*."

TEXT: Hebrews 5:11-14

TITLE: WARNING #3: REBUKE FOR SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY – PART 1

BIG IDEA:

4 MARKS OF SPIRITUAL DELINQUENTS – IT'S TIME TO GROW UP

INTRODUCTION:

Definition of Delinquent: “failure in or neglect of duty or obligation”

The author of Hebrews feels the need to take a timeout in his presentation of the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ – patterned after the order of Melchizedek – to rebuke some of his audience for their surprising spiritual immaturity. Whether these are backslidden believers who need to grow up or unbelievers who have never truly moved on to the reality in the New Covenant, they need a kick in the rear.

A. M. Stibbs: Note the detailed contrast between the two types (a child and the mature), their condition (unskilled and faculties trained by practice), and their diet (milk and solid food). Note that ability acquired, through the *word of righteousness*, to distinguish good from evil is evidence of maturity.

I. (:11) CAN'T FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL TRUTH

A. Impacts Quantity of Intake of Doctrinal Truth

“Concerning him [i.e. the way Melchizedek prefigures the priesthood of Christ] we have much to say,”

B. Impacts Understanding of Intake of Doctrinal Truth

“and it is hard to explain,”

Hewitt: The subject of Christ's priesthood was one of considerable difficulty but it was certainly not beyond explanation, nor was it beyond the writer's ability to explain it, but his readers had become confused and limited in their minds through apathy and mental listlessness.

C. Impacts Concentration Regarding Intake of Doctrinal Truth

“since you have become dull of hearing.”

Kent: characterized as *lazy* or *sluggish*. At the moment they were already this way in their hearing. The danger was that this might soon characterize their very selves. We note also that this condition was an acquired one. They have become (*gegonate*) dull in the hearing. Their original eagerness to hear and respond to the Word of God had cooled. Now they were no longer ready listeners. Other interests had captured their attention.

R. Kent Hughes: When people truly come to Christ, their initial posture is one of intense listening.

Lenski: The perfect tense implies that the readers were once keen of hearing but have fallen into a dulled condition. This is now their state, and it is due to their inclination no longer to believe in Christ Jesus.

David Curtis: the word "dull" is *nothros*, which comes from two Greek words; one meaning: "no" and the other meaning: "to push", hence its meaning is: "no push" thus to be slow or sluggish. It is used only here and in 6:12 in the New Testament. It appears in 1 Clement 34:1, where it refers to a lazy and careless workman. Here it has the idea of mental laziness. So dull hearing doesn't mean there is anything wrong with your physical ears. It means there is something wrong with your heart. The heart is not eager and diligent to embrace the promises and turn them into faith and patience. To a person in this state, it is very difficult to explain anything, for nothing, however simple in itself, can be understood if it is not attended to. They were spiritual sluggards.

II. (:12a) CAN'T TEACH DOCTRINE EVEN AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

A. Compromising the Mission of Making Disciples

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers,"

B. Regressing in the Understanding of Doctrinal Basics

"you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God,"

David Curtis: These Hebrew believers should be able to teach others, but the writer says, *"You need someone to teach you again"* - this implies that spiritual laziness not only prevents progress in the Christian's life, but it produces retrogression. If you're not moving forward, you are going to be going backward. The second law of thermodynamics is the law of increasing disorder. This law works in our Christian lives. You don't just stand still; if you're not growing, you're moving backward.

III. (:12b-13) CAN'T HANDLE SOLID FOOD THAT NOURISHES RIGHTEOUS LIVING

A. (:12b) Regression in Diet

"and you have come to need milk and not solid food."

R. Kent Hughes: He assaults his friends with a grotesque image – adult infants who are still nursing. Think of the tragic absurdity of full-grown men and women in diapers who are neither capable or, nor desire solid food and who sit around sucking their thumbs.

B. (:13) Regression in Spiritual Development

1. Lacking Wisdom for Righteous Living

“For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness,”

Constable: The writer’s point in these verses is not just that spiritual babies lack information, which they do, but that they lack experience. A person becomes a mature Christian not only by gaining information, though that is foundational, but by using that information to make decisions that are in harmony with God’s will.

2. Functioning at the Level of Infancy
“for he is a babe.”

IV. (:14) CAN’T EXERCISE DISCERNMENT BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

A. Missing Out on the Healthy Diet

“But solid food is for the mature,”

B. Missing Out on Healthy Development

“who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

Kent: The milk user in this illustration is the infant who is confined to milk. He has not grown sufficiently so as to tolerate more solid food. The illustration is applied to the spiritual infant who is incapable of anything except the simplest of spiritual truths. His spiritual perceptions are not yet accustomed to the word of righteousness.

Hewitt: They who *are of full age* have reached an advanced stage of spiritual understanding. They are mature or full grown in the deep mysteries of the Word of God. This condition is not gained by apathy or by slothfulness, for there is no room in the Christian life for mental laziness. It is gained by the regular exercise of the spiritual faculties in the Word of God and in the doctrines of the Christian faith, for there is no easy way to spiritual maturity. From this position those of *full age* can discern both good and evil; they have an exact, or right, judgment in all things.

David Curtis: The writer of Hebrews is afraid that his readers may choose poison, the poison of apostasy. That under the pressure of circumstances and trials, they'll get discouraged and give up. They'll throw their Christian faith overboard and walk away. Very often when a game gets tough, people quit; especially children. And when the game of life gets tough, when it's difficult to persevere in the pathway of obedience to God, a Christian, particularly an immature one, may say, "I quit."

Lenski: The rebuke is ended, and the writer counts on its effect, namely that his readers will shake off their sluggishness in hearing, will not compel him to begin their instruction over again but will rise to sufficient maturity to profit by what he will tell them as simply as he can regarding Melchizedek and Jesus.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are you making progress in your Christian life or are you regressing?
- 2) What characterizes dullness in one's approach to Christian doctrine?
- 3) How important are the foundational building blocks of Christian doctrine and how does doctrinal understanding translate into practical righteousness?
- 4) How would you characterize your level of discernment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. Kent Hughes: Spiritual maturity – being full-grown – is possible if we simply take God's Word seriously:

- By listening with all we have.
- By becoming fully acquainted with its "teaching about righteousness" and living it out.
- By constantly applying God's Word to the decisions of life.

Away with the infant formula and on to the solid food of God's Word!

Steven Cole: Let me add that we live in a day of dumbed-down Christianity, where we have an aversion to sound doctrine. The mantra of our day, even among evangelicals, is, "Doctrine is dead head knowledge that just leads to arguments and division. So be careful not to get into doctrine too far!" But the fact is, every believer has doctrines! They may be *sound* doctrines, in line with Scripture, or they may be screwy doctrines that are inconsistent with Scripture. Theology is simply the process of synthesizing and harmonizing the teachings of the whole Bible on the major subjects that it discusses. So if you are a Christian, you can't avoid being a theologian. The question is, are you growing to be sound in your theology, or are you shallow, mixed up, and unbiblical in your theology?

Constable: The Danger of Immaturity (The Third Warning) 5:11-6:12

"*Dull of hearing*" (**Hebrews 5:11**) and "*sluggish*" (**Hebrews 6:12**, Gr. *nothroi* in both cases) form an inclusio that frames this pericope and sets it off as a distinct textual segment. This Greek word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The first two warnings in Hebrews were against drifting (**Hebrews 2:1-4**) and disbelief (**Hebrews 3:7-19**). All the warning passages in Hebrews involve actions in relation to the Word of God.

"It is commonly assumed on the basis of **Hebrews 5:11** to **Hebrews 6:3** that the community addressed had failed to mature in faith and understanding, and consequently required rudimentary instruction rather than the advanced exposition of Christ's

priesthood and sacrifice presented in **Hebrews 7:1 to Hebrews 10:18**. The problem with this reconstruction of the situation is that it is not supported by the detail of the text. The biblical interpretation and the presentation of Christology in **Hebrews 1:1 to Hebrews 5:10** presuppose advanced Christian instruction and a level of understanding that corresponds to the adult consumption of solid food and not to a diet of milk. In addition, the writer shows no inclination to review with his hearers the foundational elements of the Christian faith [**Hebrews 6:1**]. He clearly regarded the hearers as mature. He reminds them that they have ingested over a considerable period of time the instruction that qualified them to be the teachers of others (**Hebrews 5:12**). Consequently, the portrayal of them as infants who have to be nurtured with milk is not an actual description of some or all of the members of the community. It is irony, calculated to shame them and to recall them to the stance of conviction and boldness consonant with their experience (**Hebrews 6:4-5; Hebrews 6:10**) and hope (**Hebrews 6:9-12**). The community has deviated from its earlier course (cf. **Hebrews 10:32-34**) by becoming sluggish in understanding (**Hebrews 5:12**). Their regression to infancy must represent a quite recent development. It was apparently an attempt to sidestep their responsibility in a world that persecuted them and held them in contempt, but it threatened their integrity. The purpose of **Hebrews 5:11 to Hebrews 6:12** is to preserve the community from such aberration by reminding them of what they have experienced and what they possess through the gospel ..." [Note: Lane, p135.]

Kenneth Wuest: Before beginning a study of this difficult section, we must indicate its **analytical structure**. The section consists of a description of the spiritual status of the Jew whom the writer wishes to reach, of a warning not to go back to the abrogated sacrifices of the Levitical system, and of an exhortation to put a heart faith in the New Testament sacrifice, the Messiah. It is one of the passages found throughout the book containing a **warning not to go back to the type but to go on to faith in the reality**.

This individual is described as hard to teach and dull of hearing (**He 5:11**), one who ought to be able to teach but cannot (**He 5:12**), one who is a babe (**He 5:13**), who was enlightened, who tasted of the heavenly gift and had been made a partaker of the Holy Ghost (**He 6:4**), one who had tasted the Word of God and the powers of the age to come (**He 6:5**), and who had been brought to repentance (**He 6:6**).

He is exhorted to put off once for all any dependence upon the Levitical sacrifices and to go on to faith in the New Testament Sacrifice (**He 6:1**). The first part of this exhortation is strengthened by the warning that should he fall away, that is, renounce his professed faith in Messiah as the High Priest of the New Testament and return to the abrogated sacrifices of the First Testament, he would be crucifying the Son of God. This would be an act which would make it impossible to restore him again to that place of repentance to which he had been brought (**He 6:6**). The second part of the exhortation is repeated in the words, "*that ye be not slothful but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises*" (**He 6:12**), this second exhortation to faith being strengthened by the example of the saved among these Jews who showed by their lives that they really had exercised saving faith, the "*beloved*" of **He 6:9**. We must be careful to note that this letter to the Hebrews is written to the professing church made

up of saved and unsaved, but the concern of the writer is with reference to the unsaved.

Spurgeon: The apostle was about to allegorize upon Melchizedek. He had intended to set forth that that venerable and priestly king was, so far as scriptural information goes, without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of years nor end of life, and that he was superior to Levi, seeing that Levi's progenitor paid tithes to him and received his blessing. The apostle was about to show that Melchizedek was a type of Jesus, who, as a priest, is without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of years, but is a priest forever according to the power of an endless life. But the apostle paused, for he felt that this allegory of Melchizedek was too strong meat for those who were not full-grown men. We have all heard, I dare say, of the divine who was foolish enough to take the three baskets full of sweet meats that were upon the head of Pharaoh's baker and to say that they represented the Trinity. I have heard of another who preached from this passage in **Ezra 1:9**—"twenty-nine knives"—and went to show that they were types of the twenty-four elders. What he did with the surplus five I don't know. Was God's Book ever meant to be a toy for the amusement of childish imagination? Surely, no. The strong meat of allegory must be for half-inspired saints like John Bunyan, and those masters in Israel who are not to be carried away upon the back of every figure, but who can ride their figures like good horsemen, with a bit in the mouth of the allegory, and make it keep in a straight road and bear them safely on to their destination.

John Piper: So now we have a sense of what's wrong with this church.

- They are drifting instead of rowing against the current of sin, and that means drifting backward toward destruction.
- They are neglecting the great salvation they claim to have.
- Their grip on joyful, zealous hope is slipping.
- Their hearts are hardening to the truth of God's Word.
- Their conversation is losing its spiritual urgency.
- Their ears are getting dull.
- They are losing their desire to press on to maturity.
- They are becoming weak and sluggish.

And the result of all this is that they are in danger of shrinking back from the beginning they had made, becoming hardened to spiritual things, falling away from the living God, and losing their souls.

The opposite of all this is Perseverance—hanging in there as a zealous, growing Christian. There are two alternatives for those of us who claim to trust Christ as Savior and Lord. One is to press on toward maturity in knowledge and faith and hope and holiness. The other is to drift slowly into indifference and dullness and, eventually, destruction. And one of the great errors of this church was that they thought there was a halfway point where they could stay as professing Christians, not pressing forward and not drifting backward. But there is no such place. That's the point of this book. Either we press on toward the inheritance or we drift back toward destruction.

MacArthur: [takes a different approach to the entire passage.]

In the book of Hebrews the Holy Spirit is not contrasting two kinds of Christianity. He is not contrasting immature Christians and mature ones. He is contrasting Judaism and Christianity, the unsaved Jew in Judaism and the redeemed Jew in Christianity. He is contrasting the substance and the shadow, the pattern and the reality, the visible and the invisible, the facsimile and the real thing, the type and the anti-type, the picture and the actual. . .

Now, what he's saying here is...is just very simple. Some have said that this is talking to Christians, and he's saying to Christians, "You shouldn't be immature Christians. You should be grownup Christians." That's a good principle. That's a terrific principle. That's a Biblical principle. I don't think that's what being taught in **Hebrews chapter 5**. I think he's talking here to Jews who are intellectually convinced, but still hanging onto Judaism and, incidentally, folks, Judaism is the ABCs of the new covenant, is it not? And he is saying to them, "Come on to maturity in the new covenant."

Now, I'm going try to defend that thesis, because it is a little foreign to most interpretations; but I think it's consistent. So we say then that the question is not a question of whether one's a baby Christian or a mature Christian. The issue is...is an **evangelistic appeal**. Come on to Christ. **Come all the way**. Many of these readers have professed to believe, but they're still hanging onto the patterns of Judaism. They wouldn't let go. They weren't saved, and they're in great danger, **chapter 6 verse 4**, of falling back and then finding it impossible to be renewed to salvation again. So when we're talking about maturity here, we're talking about the maturity of accepting Christ, you see, and coming into all the full-grown truths of the new covenant. . .

In **5:11** through **6:3**, the Holy Spirit says, "Grow up from the...the ABCs of Judaism, and come all the way to maturity. Leave the milk of the Old Testament. Come to the solid food of the new covenant. Come to Christ. Leave Judaism." That's exactly what he's saying. Then in **6:4**, he says, "If you don't, you're in serious danger of coming all the way up, hearing all of the truth, then falling away, and being lost forever." Because, my friends, if a man hears all the truth of Jesus Christ, considers it carefully, and walks away, he's hopeless. What else can God do once he's known the truth? ...

And, finally, in **verse 9**, he turns to Christians and says, "*But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you and things which accompany salvation.*" And, at that point, he turns to Christians and lays on them the need to grow spiritually and to make sure they, too, don't fall back into old patterns. So the passage, then, is directed primarily as a warning to the unsaved. Now, someone is bound to ask me, "Do you think that the passage has anything to do with Christians?" Well, in an indirect sense, very definitely. If spiritual ignorance and fooling around with the ABCs is a serious problem for an unsaved person, how much more serious would it be for a Christian? How much more tragic for a Christian who never really grows up to fully understand the new covenant. But the direct issue is to the unsaved. Each warning in Hebrews is

directed to the intellectually convinced who are on the edge of decision, but haven't yet responded to Christ. So we believe it to be a warning to them.

TEXT: Hebrews 6:1-8

TITLE: WARNING #3: REBUKE FOR SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY – PART 2

BIG IDEA:

FAILURE TO PROGRESS TO GENUINE CHRISTIANITY DOOMS ONE TO THE FRUITLESS LIFE OF IRREVERSIBLE APOSTASY

INTRODUCTION:

There are certain basic transitional truths that build upon Old Covenant doctrine and prepare the new Jewish convert to embrace the teachings of Christ. The author of Hebrews is concerned that some in his audience are on the brink of slipping back into Judaism and not pressing on with their Christian commitment. This concern could be expressed as a warning against apostasy (professing believers falling away from their identification with Christ and His church – proving that their faith was never genuine). Or there may be individuals as well who need to be prodded to fully appropriate personal faith in Christ rather than spinning their wheels with mere intellectual knowledge. In either case, there is an exhortation to press on to Christian maturity. Even nature itself offers illustrations that fruitfulness is the proof of genuine healthy life. In your spiritual life, you are either moving forward, or you are falling backward. You cannot just tread water.

Richard Phillips: The warning, therefore, is that, like those who left Egypt as part of Israel, we may have a very real experience of the phenomena of God’s saving power through our participation in the church. By virtue of our affiliation with the people of God, by being in their midst, we can have the very great privileges described in our text and yet not actually enter into salvation . . . That was the very situation with those who left Egypt in the exodus, but who fell away under hardship into rebellion and were judged by God so that they died in the desert. As we saw earlier in our studies, this is as stark a portrait of eternal despair as appears in all the Scripture. (cf. **Matt. 7:21-23**)

How do people “*fall away*”? They fall away by doing what the Israelites did in the desert: by removing their trust in the Lord, repudiating his authority and the salvation he offers, and denying him worship.

T. C. Edwards: What gives point to the whole section now to be considered is the connection between development of doctrine and a corresponding development of the moral nature.

I. (:1-3) ADVANCING BEYOND THE ELEMENTARY FOUNDATION

A. (:1a) Exhortation to Spiritual Maturity

1. Build on the Foundation

“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ,”

Kent: not in the sense of “repudiate,” but in the sense of advancement beyond the first stage.

2. Press on to Maturity

“let us press on to maturity,”

Westcott: The thought is not primarily of personal effort . . . but of personal surrender to an active influence.

Kent: The believer’s responsibility is to stop putting hindrances in the way. By allowing Christ’s priesthood to do its work in our lives, we may arrive at that spiritual maturity (*teleiotes*) that is expected of each believer within a reasonable time.

B. (:1b-2) Moving Beyond the Foundation of Basic Catechism

1. Soteriology = Initial Response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

“not laying again a foundation of”

R. Kent Hughes: New Testament scholarship is in general agreement that the six facets [3 sets of 2 items] of “*the elementary teachings about Christ*” (v. 1) listed in **verses 1-3** outline the primitive catechism used in Jewish churches to induct converts. Thus, we get an intimate glimpse of “the basics,” the foundation you would have been taught before being baptized and accepted into a Jewish church 2,000 years ago.

Piper: All these are common Old Testament beliefs or current practices among the Jews. When these readers were evangelized and converted, these things, it seems, had been made foundational as a way of helping them understand the work of Christ. Christ is the goal and fulfillment of all these things. So when verse 1 says they should leave the “elementary teachings about Christ (or literally: “the word of the beginning of Christ”), what I think it means is that they should not occupy themselves so much with the pre-Christian foundational preparations for Christ that they neglect the glory of the gospel and how to use it to grow into maturity and holiness.

a. Repentance

“repentance from dead works”

R. Kent Hughes: Turning away from the dead works of the Law and one’s doomed attempt at self-salvation. . . Conversion meant a conscious turning away from the old way of life.

Jeremy Myers: As the book of Acts, Galatians and Hebrews reveals, it has always been difficult for Jewish people to give up trying to obey the law, and turn instead to depend solely on the grace of God. But this is what they must do if they are going to operate under grace rather than the law. They must repent from the dead works of the law, and realize that living by the law will not put them in good standing with God. This is what the Jerusalem council was all about in **Acts 15**, and what Paul spent so much time

explaining to his fellow Jews and writing about in Romans and Galatians. When we are Christians, we must depend upon the grace of God, not upon the works of the law.

b. Faith

“and of faith toward God,”

2. Pneumatology = Instruction in Initial Ceremonial Rites Related to the Holy Spirit

“of instruction about”

R. Kent Hughes: The idea here is that the Hebrew church employed the customary Jewish cleansing rites, as well as the Old Testament customs of laying on of hands, to teach the deeper, ultimate significance of Christian baptism and laying on of hands – namely, the baptism of the Holy Spirit (cf. **Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13**) and also commissioning and empowering for Christian service (cf. **Acts 13:1-3**).

a. Washings

“washings,”

Jeremy Myers: Getting baptized was a way to show that they had died to their past, and been raised to new life and a new way of living. Many Jews would have received the baptism of John, which is a baptism of repentance, as well as the water baptism for the Christian which is an outward symbol of the inner Spirit baptism. It was important for them to understand the difference between the various baptisms, and the significance of each.

b. Laying on of Hands

“and laying on of hands,”

Jeremy Myers: To the Jews, laying on of hands meant identification. In the Old Testament, when they laid their hands on the sacrifice before it was slaughtered to identify themselves with it. When it was sacrificed, it was as if they were being killed with it. Similarly, in the New Testament, when the church laid hands on new converts, it was to show them that they were all one and were all identified with one another (**Acts 8:12-17; 9:17; 10:1-7**). When they sent out missionaries, they again laid hands on them to show that they were identifying with them in their ministry and mission (**Acts 13:1-3**).

3. Eschatology = Instruction in Basic Christian End Times Events

a. Resurrection of the Dead

“and the resurrection of the dead,”

Jeremy Myers: One of the ruling segments of Judaism, the Sadducees, did not believe that people were resurrected from the dead (**Acts 23:8**). There were possibly some Jewish Christians who did not believe in it either, or didn't know what to believe. But since the resurrection of Christ is so important to Christianity (**1 Cor. 15:14-17**), it was

important that they understand that people are raised from the dead, and Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead. It is also important that they understand the various future resurrections. There are at least three resurrections in the Bible, possibly four. There is first of all the spiritual resurrection that happens to us when we believe in Jesus for eternal life. We die and are raised to new life in Christ (**Romans 6**).

The next resurrection is actually called the First Resurrection, because it is the first physical resurrection. This resurrection began with Jesus Christ, Who is the Firstborn from among the dead, continues with the rapture and resurrection of all the dead in Christ, and then culminates with the resurrection of all the tribulation and Old Testament Saints after the Tribulation (**1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 20:3-5; Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19**).

The third resurrection is the resurrection of all the unsaved dead at the end of the Millennium. They will be raised from the dead, given new bodies because Christ died from them too. But then because they did not believe in Jesus for eternal life, and therefore do not have eternal spiritual life, they will be cast into the Lake of Fire with the devil and his angels. This is also called the second death.

b. Eternal Judgment
“and eternal judgment.”

Leon Morris: 2 topics that went together and were important for Jews and Christians alike. They form a reminder that this life is not everything. We are responsible people, and one day we shall rise from the dead and give account of ourselves to God. This must have been of importance to new converts in a time when many people thought of death as the end of everything.

C. (:3) Enablement by the Sovereignty of God
“And this we shall do, if God permits.”

Kent: an acknowledgment that only God can change the course of a man’s life when it is going in the opposite direction.

Mohler: We cannot assume the future. Anything is done only if God permits. This awareness deepens dependence on God and drives prayerful expectation of perseverance.

Jeremy Myers: After laying down six huge doctrines which Christians should learn and understand so that they can move on the maturity, the author says that we will only learn them and only move on from them, if God permits. Once again, it is all back to God. Growing into maturity is at God’s discretion and by his permission. We are called to know what He wants us to know, and to do what He wants us to do, but moving on to maturity is still on His timetable. We will learn these doctrines if God permits. And even when we learn them, we will only move on to maturity if God permits.

Richard Phillips: That is where you want to be found, firm and secure upon the rock that is the Word of our Lord. Yes, the winds will roar and the rains will beat against you. But standing and building upon that rock, not as infants living on milk alone but as men and women of the faith nourished by the whole counsel of God that is meat indeed, you will prevail until the end.

II. (:4-8) AVOIDING THE DANGER OF IRREVERSIBLE APOSTASY

A. (:4-6) No Second Chance for Apostates

1. (:4-5) Counterfeits Look Like the Real Deal

a. Enlightened

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened”

b. Gifted

“and have tasted of the heavenly gift”

Wayne Grudem: Inherent in the idea of **tasting** is the fact that the tasting is temporary and one might or might not decide to accept the thing that is tasted. For example, the same Greek word (*geuomai*) is used in **Matthew 27:34** to say that those crucifying Jesus “*offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.*” The word is also used in a figurative sense meaning “*come to know something.*” If we understand it in this figurative sense, as it must be understood here since the passage is not talking about tasting literal food, then it means that these people have come to understand the heavenly gift (which probably means here that they had experienced some of the power of the Holy Spirit at work) and to know something of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come. It does not necessarily mean that they had (or did not have) genuine saving faith, but may simply mean that they came to understand it and have some experience of spiritual power.

c. Indwelt

“and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,”

Wayne Grudem: By analogy, **Hebrews 6:4-6** speaks of people who have been “*associated with*” the Holy Spirit, and thereby had their lives influenced by him, but it need not imply that they had a redeeming work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, or that they were regenerated. By similar analogy with the example of the fishing companions in **Luke 5:7**, Peter and the disciples could be associated with them and even to some degree influenced by them without having a thoroughgoing change of life caused by that association. The very word *metochos* allows for a range of influence from fairly weak to fairly strong, for it only means “one who participates with or shares with or accompanies in some activity.” This was apparently what had happened to these people spoken of in **Hebrews 6**, who had been associated with the church and as such associated with the work of the Holy Spirit, and no doubt had been influenced by him in some ways in their lives.

d. Empowered

*“and have tasted the good word of God
and the powers of the age to come,”*

R. Kent Hughes: the participation in spiritual realities of those who “*fall away*,” . . . parallels the privileged experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness who fell away and died in unbelief.

2. (:6a) Counterfeits are Exposed When They Fall Away from the Faith
“and then have fallen away,”

R. Kent Hughes: [Not talking about some hypothetical situation that can never occur; not talking about Christians who actually lose their salvation –]
The view many, including myself, hold is that those who fall away are not true believers, but rather men and women who only appear so. They are people who have received a thorough exposure to the gospel – for example, the catechized Jewish believers of the preceding verses – and have made an ostensible profession of faith and have been received into the fellowship of God’s people. However, at a later point they have abandoned their profession, even becoming opponents of Christ.

3. (:6b) Condition of Apostasy is Irreversible
*“it is impossible to renew them again to repentance,
since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God,
and put Him to open shame.”*

Essentially this is the unpardonable sin because you have rejected God despite having been privileged with the greatest possible light.

Piper: This passage says that there is a spiritual condition that makes repentance and salvation impossible. And it says that this condition may look in many ways like salvation, but it isn’t. And it leads to destruction. And so this text is a warning to us not to assume that we are secure when our lives have some religious experiences but no growing fruit. And the reason for showing us this serious situation is so that we will flee from it, and move to solid ground and lasting joy.

Steven Cole: Some in the Hebrew church were in danger of precisely the same sin. They had participated in a corporate sense in God’s abundant blessings of salvation, but now they were tempted to re-turn to Judaism. But to do that would be to fall away from Christ, and even worse, to join those who had crucified Him! In so doing, they would be crucifying Christ all over again, and putting Him to open shame by agreeing with the unbelieving Jews that He is not their Savior and Messiah. To do that would put them close to being cursed, and if they died in this state of renouncing their faith, they would face the fires of eternal judgment. . .

Thus I believe that both the broad and immediate context of Hebrews, plus other biblical texts and examples about apostasy, support the view that the author is talking

here about false believers who were associated with God's people and the blessings of salvation, but who were not truly saved. To fall away means deliberately to reject and repudiate the substantial light that they have been given about Christ and the gospel. In so doing, repentance becomes impossible—not for God (Mt 19:23, 24, 25, 26), but rather, it is morally impossible because by this deliberate rejection of the truth, they harden their hearts and place themselves beyond repentance. Thus we can sum up the main idea of our text:

Repentance becomes impossible when a person has been fully exposed to the blessings of God's people, but falls away through deliberate unbelief and denial of Christ.

B. (:7-8) Illustration from Nature – Fruitfulness is the Proof of Genuine Life

1. (:7) Fruitfulness Connected to God's Blessing

a. Fruitfulness

“For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled,”

Westcott: The law of human life, the condemnation which follows from the neglect of blessings, is illustrated by an example from nature.

b. Blessing

“receives a blessing from God;”

A. M. Stibbs: It is impossible in the early stages to distinguish between the wheat and the tares, or between the seed that will wither or be choked and the seed that will bring forth fruit unto life eternal. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:P12; 2 Tim. 2:18, 19. Judgment is determined not by the beginning but by the *end* or **fruit** (vv. 7, 8). That is why this writer is so concerned that those who have begun to experience the grace of Christ should prove their genuineness by going on to its true end. Cf. 2 Pet. 1:5-11.

2. (:8) Thorns and Thistles Connected to God's Cursing

a. Thorns and Thistles

“but if it yields thorns and thistles,”

b. Cursing

*“it is worthless
and close to being cursed,
and it ends up being burned.”*

Morris: Land that produced nothing but weeds faced nothing but fire.

Piper: So the picture is not of a field that had life and vegetation and then lost it. The picture is of two different kinds of fields — one is fruitful and blessed; the other is barren and cursed. I think the point is this: if we have sat in church with the light and

the Spirit and the word and the work of God coming to us and blessing us and even shaping us in some degree, but then turn our back on it, we are like a field without vegetation and will come into judgment. The rain we have drunk (light, Spirit, word, powers) produced no life in the field.

Westcott: The judgment on the land, fruitful only for ill, is given in three stages.

- It is rejected: such land cannot any longer be reckoned as land for fruitful service
- It is nigh unto a curse: it presents the outward features of the curse (**Gen. iii. 17** f.)
- Its end is burning.

Mohler: Happily, Hebrews does not end with this warning. The author assures believers that he had to write the warning for the unbelievers in the church needing to hear it. Pastorally, he is not seeking to put insecurity in the hearts of Christians. Believers who are faithfully following Christ's commands can be confident in their salvation. If we seek assurance of our faith, we will find it by doing the things faithful Christians do. We will grow out of the elementary things and into maturity.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Should I be personally concerned about the potential for apostasy in my life?
- 2) Are there ways that I have not developed as a normal, healthy child of God but have remained in an infant-like state?
- 3) How can I better appropriate the spiritual privileges God has granted me?
- 4) What type of fruit is evident in my life right now?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: There are at least two reasons why this kind of apostasy is re-crucifixion of Christ.

One is that Christ was crucified the first time to make his people pure and holy. That's why he shed his blood. **Hebrews 13:12** says, "*Jesus also suffered outside the gate that he might sanctify the people through his own blood.*" He died to sanctify us. He died to make us pure and holy and devoted to him (see **Hebrews 9:14; Titus 2:14**). So when we turn our backs on purity and holiness and devotion, which his cross was designed to bring about, we say yes to the impurity and worldliness and unbelief that nailed him there in the first place. This means we crucify him again.

There is another reason this kind of falling away is a re-crucifying of Christ. When a person chooses against Christ and turns back to the way of the world and the sovereignty of his own will and the fleeting pleasures of earth, he says in effect that these are worth more than Christ is worth. They are worth more than the love of Christ and the wisdom of Christ and the power of Christ and all that God promises to be for us in Christ. And when a person says that, it is the same as saying, “I agree with the crucifiers of Jesus.” Because what could shame Christ more today than to have someone taste his goodness and wisdom and power and then say, “No, there is something better and more to be desired.” That puts him to a public shame.

It is one thing for a stranger of the faith to resist Christ. But it is another thing for a person who has been in the church and has been enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift and become a partaker of the Holy Spirit and tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come — it’s another thing for that person to say after all those blessings and all those experiences, “I think what the world offers is better than Christ.” That is a re-crucifying of Jesus and a putting him to public shame worse than any outsider could, who never tasted the truth.

J. Ligon Duncan: He is talking about someone who has made what looks like a credible outward profession of faith in Christ and yet at some point down the line has repudiated, has turned his back on Christ. This is a person who is outwardly professed Christ. His profession looks very similar, if not identical to the profession of other true believers in the congregation. And yet, at some point, he turns his back on Christ. And so, of course, this warning reminds us that there is such a thing as a false profession. There is such a thing as claiming to be a believer, and yet not being a believer.

So it is vital for us to recognize that distinction and recognize that that requires us self-examination. What is it that Peter tells us in **II Peter 1:10, 11**? That we are to make our calling and election sure. This is precisely what the author of Hebrews is calling us to here. In fact, the book of II Peter has many similar warnings to the book of Hebrews and can help us understand more clearly what the author of Hebrews is saying here.

So let me say it one more time. Apostasy does not mean a true believer can fall away from God. But it does mean that it is possible that a person can make a false profession and that that false profession can be found out to be a false profession by that person’s repudiation or apostasy from Christ. A classic example of this is John’s description of those who were part of the congregation and yet departed.

Look at **I John 2:18**.

“Children, it is the last hour and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen, from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us, for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.” . . .

What is the evidence of this spiritual apostasy? It's made clear in verses 7 and 8. **Spiritual fruitlessness.** That's the evidence and proof that they have fallen away. They do not bear fruit. Isn't it interesting that in verses 4 and 5, when we look at those preconditions of those who have fallen away, not one of those preconditions is a fruit. They all speak of experiences or gifts, but not fruits. Does that not remind us that it is so important for us to seek as signs of spiritual maturity not gifts of the Spirit, but the fruits of the Spirit? You see, not all of us are going to be equally gifted and it is frighteningly possible to mistake gifting for fruit. But what we must seek for is the fruit, the product of the gifts of the Spirit, the work of grace in our hearts, producing love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness and faithfulness and self-control and those glorious characteristics of a believer listed for us in the New Testament, we ought to be aiming for the fruit of the Spirit. We ought to be encouraged not just when we see a gifted belief, but when we see a fruitful belief. And, of course, this passage asks us to self-examination. Are we solely resting in Christ? Are we longing to know Him more? Are we glorifying Him in our lives? What is the fruit of our experience? This is a solemn warning.

Stedman: The unfortunate chapter division at this point tends to minimize the opening *Therefore* of **chapter 6**. Our author does not propose to teach his readers again the elementary truths of God's word though he has told them their dullness seems to require it. They already know the teaching; what they need now is personal commitment to it. This can only be achieved by going on to those actions of faith that produce maturity. For this reason he urges them to leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on from words to applications. Elementary teachings is not a reference to regeneration, but means introductory information that could lead to regeneration... These transitional truths lead from Jewish beliefs and practices to a full sharing in Christ. Though **Bruce** takes them as a Jewish list and others as Christian, the truth is they are both, as Bruce concedes that each "acquires a new significance in a Christian context" (1964:112). The point is that they do not represent anything but the barest beginnings of Christian faith. It is necessary to go from the knowledge of these initial truths to experiences which actually draw upon the priestly ministry of Jesus for this is what would lead them from head knowledge to heart response.

F. B. Hole: "*LET US GO ON,*" is the opening exhortation of our chapter. Movement in the right direction is to mark us. We are to leave "*the word of the beginning of Christ,*" as the marginal reading is, and go on unto "*perfection.*" If we glance back over the last four verses of **Hebrews 5** we shall see that the point here is that we ought to grow in our understanding of the faith of Christ. We ought not to be like children staying year after year in the kindergarten, but advance until we assimilate the instruction provided for the scholars in the sixth form.

John the Baptist had brought "*the word of the beginning of Christ.*" He laid the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." He put baptism in the forefront of His preaching, and spoke plainly as to eternal judgement. But things had moved on since his day. Great light shone when Jesus came forth in His ministry;

and then, just as His earthly service closed, in His discourse in the upper chamber He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. He told His disciples that He had "*yet many things to say*" unto them, but that they could not bear them then. He added, "*Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.*" (**John 16:13**). By the time the Epistle to the Hebrews was written ALL truth had been revealed, for it was given to Paul by his ministry to "*fulfil the Word of God.*" (**Colossians 1:25**). To "*fulfil*" in that verse means to "fill out full," or to "complete."

The whole circle of revealed truth then had been completed. Yet here were these Hebrews still inclined to dwell in their minds amongst these preliminary things, quite ignoring the fuller light which was now shining. Are we at all like them in this? In their case it is not difficult to see where the trouble lay. The special place of privilege, which belonged to the Jew nationally under the Old Covenant, had disappeared under the New. True, it only disappeared because a higher order of blessing had been introduced, so that, when converted, both Jew and Gentile are brought into privileges quite unknown before. Yet their hearts clung to the old and exclusive national position, and consequently they became dull of hearing as regards the fuller truth of Christianity. In our case we have no national position to maintain, but there is many a thing which we naturally love and cling to, which is dispossessed by the light of full and proper Christianity; and there is very real danger that we may close our eyes against that light in order to retain the things we love.

Expositor's Bible Commentary: There has been much discussion of the significance of this passage. Some think that the author is speaking about genuine Christians who fall away and that he denies that they may ever come back. This view sets the writer of the epistle in contradiction with other NT writers for whom it is clear that the perseverance of the saints is something that comes from God and not from their own best efforts (e.g., **John 6:37; 10:27, 28, 29**).

Others think that the case is purely hypothetical. Because the writer does not say that this has ever happened, they infer that it never could really happen and that to put it this way makes the warning more impressive. But unless the writer is speaking of something that could really happen, it is not a warning about anything. Granted, he does not say that anyone has apostatized in this way, nevertheless, he surely means that someone could, and he does not want his readers to do so.

A third possibility is that the writer is talking about what looks very much like the real thing but lacks something. The case of Simon Magus springs to mind. He is said to have believed, to have been baptized, and to have continued with Philip (**Acts 8:13**). Presumably he shared in the laying on of hands and the gift given by it. Yet after all this Peter could say to him, "*Your heart is not right before God...you are full of bitterness and captive to sin*" (**Acts 8:21, 21, 22, 23**). The writer is saying that when people have entered into the Christian experience far enough to know what it is all about and have then turned away, then, as far as they themselves are concerned, they are crucifying Christ. In that state they cannot repent.

TEXT: Hebrews 6:9-20

TITLE: WARNING #3: GUARANTEE OF GOD'S PROMISES – PART 3

BIG IDEA:

KEEP PRESSING TOWARDS THE GOAL BECAUSE THE CERTAIN HOPE OF OBTAINING GOD'S PROMISES IS ANCHORED IN GOD'S OWN GUARANTEE

INTRODUCTION:

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints might be seen as unsettling. How can I really know that my faith is genuine and that I will reach the goal and inherit the promises of God? God does not want us to live in fear and uncertainty. He wants His children to enjoy the security of His love and the sure hope of the realization of all of His precious promises. The writer of Hebrews is building off of the illustration from nature in the previous verses where fruitfulness is the indication of genuine life. He now applies this lesson in a way where he can encourage the Jewish believers in their local assembly that he things well of the majority of them in terms of their genuine spiritual life and therefore their ultimate spiritual destiny.

Deffinbaugh: our text puts the whole issue of perseverance into its proper perspective. Overall, the purpose of the author is to undergird the Hebrew Christians' assurance and confidence in their confession of faith in Christ. **Hebrews 5:11—6:20** is a bit of a digression, and much of this section emphasizes the believers' responsibility to "*be diligent to enter rest*" (**5:11**), to "*hold fast their confession*" (**5:14**), and to "*draw near to Jesus . . . to receive mercy and grace in their time of need*" (**5:16**). And let us not overlook the author's strong warning regarding falling away in **6:4-8**.

One might wrongly conclude that the author is telling the reader that the believer's endurance is totally their own doing. This would be turning from grace to works, the very thing the author strongly opposes. The concluding verses of this section – our text – give us the proper perspective: our security and our endurance are rooted in God's changeless promises (covenants). These promises are fulfilled by the person and work of Jesus as our Great High Priest. It is God's faithfulness that prompts the believer to cling to Him. Our trust is in God, not in our efforts.

Stedman: Having issued this warning, the pastor's heart of the writer expresses reassurance and encouragement in **Hebrews 6:9-12**. Though some among them deserve his sobering caution, nevertheless he does not see them all in this dangerous state. It is clear that he sincerely believes that the larger part of his readers are truly saved and only need exhortation to diligence and patience. Their works of love and support to other believers strongly testify to their genuine faith, for as James declares, a faith that does not result in works is dead! . . . The only reliable sign of regeneration is a faith that does not fail and continues to the end of life.

I. (:9-12) ASSURANCE OF HOPE OF INHERITING THE PROMISES

A. (:9-10) Two Encouragements of Your Assurance of Hope:

1. (:9) Encouragement that God is Working Our Your Salvation in Your Inner Life

“But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.”

“*beloved*” (or “my dear friends”) = tender form of address showing his pastoral concern

The visible fruit is evidence of the power of God operating within the inner spiritual life to perform the work of sanctification.

Richard Phillips: despite the warnings, he tells them he is not without encouragement for their spiritual condition; he is at least persuaded that theirs is a genuine and not a spurious faith. In **verses 9 and 10** he gives two reasons for his confidence: first, what he believes about them, and second, what he knows about God.

John MacArthur: Many things accompany salvation. The entire fifth and six chapters of Romans (see notes **Romans 5:1ff**; **Romans 6:1ff**) are devoted to these accompaniments. But the particular ones mentioned in this section of Hebrews are those that contrast with the accompaniments of unbelief mentioned in **Hebrews 5:11-6:5**. For example, accompanying salvation is not infancy but maturity, not milk but solid food, not inexperience in righteousness but perfect righteousness, not repentance in dead works but repentance toward God unto life. The accompaniments of salvation are primarily positive, not negative. They do not reflect external ceremonial religion but internal regeneration, transformation, new life. Their significance comes not from repeated sacrifices but from the one perfect and complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They do not focus on the elementary truths of resurrection and judgment but on the believer’s blessed hope, not just on being enlightened but on being made new, not just on tasting salvation but feasting on it, not just partaking of the Holy Spirit but having Him indwell, not just getting a taste of God’s good word but of drinking and eating it, not just seeing God’s miracles but being one. These are the things that accompany salvation.

2. (:10) Encouragement that God Will Remember Your Fruitful Ministry Demonstrated in Your Outer Life

“For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.”

This type of fruit would mark them as genuine believers

Kent: the passage does seem to rule out Jerusalem or Judea as the destination of the epistle, inasmuch as their early ministrations (**Acts 6**) was soon curtailed by persecution

and their subsequent poverty made them recipients of aid (**Acts 13; 1 Cor. 16:1-3**) rather than benefactors.

Hewitt: It was the grace and blessing of God which produced the good deeds, and not the good deeds the grace and blessing. Yet the manifestation of the good deeds is the evidence of the grace and blessing. Therefore any idea of merit must be ruled out.

F. F. Bruce: deeds of kindness done to the people of God are reckoned by God as done to Himself, and will surely receive their reward from Him.

Steven Cole: Love for God stemming from His love for us is the primary motive for all Christian service.

C. (:11-12) Two Exhortations to Persevere to the End to Inherit the Promises

1. (:11) Be Diligent

“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,”

Kent: “full assurance” (**Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 1:5; Heb. 6:11; 10:22**) – It is a great aid to spiritual growth when the heart is fully persuaded that the Christian hope is a certainty.

R. Kent Hughes: the great enemy of perseverance is sloth or laziness – one of the seven deadly sins. The word behind “lazy” is an unusual term that means “sluggish” and was used earlier in **5:11** to describe those who were “slow to learn” – literally, “sluggish in the ears.” More often than not, sluggish ears go with a sluggish, lazy life. When the ear becomes dull, everything else follows suit. Spiritual sluggishness is a danger that looms over all of us if we do not work against it, for just as surely as friction will stop a train unless there is a consistent source of power, or as surely as a pendulum will settle to an inert hanging position unless the mainspring urges it on moment by moment, so will each of us wind down without an assertion of the will!

2. (:12) Imitate Good Models

“that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Cf. **Hebrews 11** and the many examples of faith to follow

Morris: Faith has a steadfastness about it that sees it through whatever difficulties present themselves.

II. (:13-20) ANCHOR OF THE SOUL BY VIRTUE OF GOD’S GUARANTEE

A. (:13-18) The Guarantee of Our Hope by the Promise of God

1. (:13-14) God Guaranteed His Promise to Abraham

“For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you.’”

Richard Phillips: God's oath made the promise solemn and inviolable.

F. F. Bruce: To our author Abraham was a significant figure, not only because of his faith in the promise of God, but also because of the part he plays in the story of Melchizedek.

2. (:15) God Obtained the Promise for Us

“And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.”

R. Kent Hughes: they are to imitate the visionary faith and patience of Abraham. The writer knows that a God-dependent imitation will result in a God-aided ability to see the unseen and patiently seek the heavenly city in the sojourn below.

Richard Phillips: The point is that by persevering in the faith, despite great obstacles, and despite many causes for doubt and unbelief, Abraham received God's promise. This is the encouragement the writer of Hebrews wants us to hear, using the example of Abraham.

3. (:16-18) God's Guarantee is Far Greater Than Any Human Guarantee

a. (:16) Human Promises are Binding

“For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.”

b. (:17) God's Promises are Far More Unchangeable and Irrevocable

“In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,”

Richard Phillips: God did not swear an oath to Abraham to make his purpose unchanging, but to let Abraham know with absolute certainty that it was so. This is an astonishing condescension from God.

c. (:18) God Wants Us to Have Sure Hope as our City of Refuge

“in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.”

Kent: The two unchangeable things are the promise and the oath. The Scriptural principle of two witnesses for establishing legality underlies this argument. . . Believers are described under the figure of the Old Testament cities of refuge. Six of these were established in Israel, three on each side of Jordan, to provide protection against revenge for those who had slain someone accidentally (**Num. 35:6, 9-32**). As long as the refugee stayed within the appointed city, he was safe.

Mohler: Because God's Word is true and it is impossible for him to lie, we have all the confidence in the world to take heart and trust God's promises just as Abraham did. The faithfulness of God and the certainty of his promises are not theoretical propositions. They are unchangeable realities. Like Abraham, we can stake our lives on God's promises because God is the One who has promised them. Our God is a promise-keeping God.

Lenski: Any of his readers who would turn away from Christ and revert to Judaism would thereby charge God with a double lie: that his promise does not mean what it says; that his oath is perjury. That very idea would be blasphemy. The matter is put so bluntly because the writer fears lest there remain in any of his readers "*a wicked heart of unbelief*" (3:12).

Piper: What God is saying in swearing by himself is that it is as unlikely that he will break his word of promise to bless us as it is that he will despise himself. God is the greatest value in the universe. There is nothing more valuable or wonderful than God. So God swears by God. And in doing that he says: *I mean for you to have as much confidence in me as it is possible to have*. For if more were possible, it says in **verse 13**, he would have given us that.

Deffinbaugh: [takes a different view] So just what are these "*two unchangeable things*"? Scholars do not all agree on this matter, so I will just tell you my opinion as to what these "*two unchangeable things*" are. I believe these two things are matters in which God has confirmed His promise with an oath, matters which are found nearby in Hebrews. And these would be the two promises which were confirmed by an oath: **Heb. 6:13** and **Heb. 7:20-22**.

Thus, I believe that the two unchangeable things which the author of Hebrews has in mind are the Abrahamic Covenant (**chapter 6**), and His oath by which He appointed the Lord Jesus a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek (**chapter 7**). These two covenant promises are the basis for our salvation, sanctification, and eternal security. How much more secure could our salvation be?

B. (:19-20) The Security of Our Hope by the Advocacy of Jesus

1. (:19) Why Is It So Secure? – The Nature of Our Hope

a. Described as an Anchor of the Soul

"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul,"

Be willing to bet the house on God

J. Ligon Duncan: The author of Hebrews wants this congregation to know that it is not an uncertain thing to bet the bank on God. It is not an uncertain thing to place all your trust in God. It is not an uncertain thing to trust in God your life, the most precious things that you have. There is nothing uncertain about that and God knows how frail we are and so he is ready even to swear those promises to us. And so the author of Hebrews points this to us.

Richard Phillips: Anchors are a clear and familiar image of security, yet there is something special about this anchor in **Hebrews 6:19**. Every other anchor goes down into the sea, but this one goes up into heaven. The anchor on a ship goes down beneath the waves to a place unseen to hold us secure, but this anchor of our hope goes up to a place where by faith we can see “*into the inner place behind the curtain*” (**Heb. 6:19**).

- b. Described as both Sure and Steadfast
“*a hope both sure and steadfast*”

Piper: Recall **Hebrews 3:6**. The writer compared Christ to the maker and master of a house, and compared Christians to the house itself. Then he said, “Christ was faithful as a Son over his house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.” Note, it does not say that we *will* become his house if we hold fast to our hope. No, it says that we *are* (now!) his house if we (in the future) hold fast to our hope.

So holding fast is not the cause of our being Christ’s house, but the proof of it. Belonging to his as his new creation, and being owned by him because of his purchase and being indwelt by him as his home — all this *secures* our perseverance. It is not created by perseverance. The anchor of our souls is not a rope hanging in the air waiting for our weak hands to grasp and hold. That would be no security. The anchor of our soul is as solidly bound to us as it is to heaven.

- c. Described as Grounded in the Very Presence of God
“*and one which enters within the veil,*”

2. (:20) Who Makes It So Secure? – The Focus of Our Hope

- a. Jesus as our Forerunner
“*where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us,*”

Hewitt: He is the Christian’s link between the visible and invisible, and a certain pledge that one day the believer will also enter within the veil to share His eternal glory.

Richard Phillips: “*Forerunner*” is yet another of the nautical terms used in Hebrews. The particular word used here, *prodromos*, is one that appears nowhere else in Scripture, but has to do with a familiar scene in the ancient world. **Louis Talbot** explains:

The Greek harbors were often cut off from the sea by sandbars, over which the larger ships dared not pass till the full tide came in. Therefore, a lighter vessel, a “forerunner,” took the anchor and dropped it in the harbor. From that moment the ship was safe from the storm, although it had to wait for the tide, before it could enter the harbor. . . . The entrance of the small vessel into the harbor, the forerunner, carrying the ship’s anchor, was the pledge that the ship would safely enter the harbor when the tide was full. And because Christ, our “forerunner,”

has entered heaven itself, having torn asunder everything that separates the redeemed sinner from the very presence of God, He Himself is the Pledge that we, too, shall one day enter the harbor of our souls and the very presence of God, in the New Jerusalem.

- b. Jesus as our Great Eternal High Priest
*“having become a high priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

Kent: With the mention of the priestly order of Melchizedek, the author has come back to the point where he interrupted his discussion to begin the warning (5:10). Hoping to have counteracted their problem of sluggish hearing (5:11) by the previous encouragements, he resumes the main discussion.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where are you tempted to be sluggish or lazy in spiritual disciplines?
- 2) How do the metaphors of cities of refuge or an anchor for the soul encourage your own sense of safety and security in Christ?
- 3) Who are some of the examples of faith and patience that you are consciously making an attempt to imitate – whether biblical figures or people in your own life and experience?
- 4) What implications for your own eternal security do you draw from Christ having entered into heaven?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

F. F. Bruce: The particular promise in view here is that made by God to Abraham after his offering up of Isaac: *“By myself have I sworn . . . that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed” (Gen. 22:16f)*. But this was a recapitulation and elaboration of God’s earlier promise to Abraham that He would bless him and make of him a great nation (**Ge. 12:2f**). At the time when that earlier promise was made, Abraham was childless. As time went on, however, it was made clear to him that the promise would be fulfilled through the birth of a son to Sarah and himself when, by all natural reckoning, such a prospect would have been dismissed as impossible. Yet Abraham believed God, and in due course the promised child was born. On Isaac now hung every hope that the further promises of God regarding Abraham’s descendants would be fulfilled; yet it was Isaac whom Abraham was commanded to offer up to God.

When Abraham's faith and obedience were shown in his readiness to do even this, he received Isaac back from the dead "*in a figure*" (**Ch. 11:19**), and received at the same time a reaffirmation of the promises of God, reinforced on this occasion by the divine oath: "*and thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise*". There was much in God's promise to Abraham whose fulfillment lay in the distant future, but in the restoration to Abraham of the son upon whose survival the promise depended Abraham did, in a very substantial sense, "*obtain the promise.*"

Ironside: The two phrases "*within the veil*" (**Heb. 6:19**) and "*without the camp*" (**Heb. 13:13**) summarize the epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus Christ is "*within the veil*" as our High Priest. We can therefore come boldly to His throne and receive all the help that we need. But we must not be "secret saints." We must be willing to identify with Christ in His rejection and go "*without the camp, bearing his reproach*" (**Heb. 13:13**).

Steven Cole: An Anchor for Your Souls

The author of Hebrews was writing to people who were facing hardship and persecution because of their Christian faith. A few were tempted to abandon Christ and return to Judaism. He is urging them to persevere by putting their focus on the superiority of Jesus Christ and the salvation that He has provided. He is trying to instill in them biblical hope—not just a positive, cheerful disposition—but a steady attitude of joy based on the promises of God, who cannot lie.

The certain hope of our future salvation is an anchor to steady our souls while we wait on God in present storms.

The main reason a ship needs an anchor is to ride out storms so that it is not blown off course or into the rocks or reefs nearby. Even in a safe harbor, a ship needs an anchor so that it will not drift, hit something, and sink. Whether in the storms of life or in the harbor during the calm times of life, we all need an anchor for our souls so that we do not destroy our lives.

1. The hope of our future salvation is certain.

The author hammers home the absolute certainty of our salvation. He uses Abraham as an example of one who through faith and patience inherited the promises (**6:12**). He goes back to **Genesis 22:16-17**, where after Abraham displayed his faith in God by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, God swore by Himself surely to bless Abraham and to multiply his descendants. Then the author applies this to the heirs of the promise, namely, believers in Christ. He gives four reasons why our hope of salvation in Christ is certain:

A. OUR HOPE OF FUTURE SALVATION IS CERTAIN BECAUSE GOD'S PROMISES HAVE NEVER FAILED ANY THAT TRUSTED IN THEM.

B. OUR HOPE OF FUTURE SALVATION IS CERTAIN BECAUSE GOD'S PURPOSE IS UNCHANGEABLE.

C. OUR HOPE OF FUTURE SALVATION IS CERTAIN BECAUSE GOD'S PERSON IS INCAPABLE OF LYING.

D. OUR HOPE OF FUTURE SALVATION IS CERTAIN BECAUSE GOD'S PLEDGE BACKS UP HIS PROMISE.

2. The hope of our future salvation is an anchor to steady our souls in present trials.

There is a three-fold progression of thought here:

A. FUTURE SALVATION IS SECURE FOR ALL THAT HAVE TAKEN REFUGE IN CHRIST.

The author identifies those to whom he is writing, along with himself, as "*we who have taken refuge*" (6:18). He does not specify what they have taken refuge from, but his Hebrew readers would have immediately thought of the cities of refuge in the Old Testament, where the man guilty of manslaughter could flee from the avenger of blood (Num. 35:11-12). These cities were a spiritual picture of the refuge that God has provided for sinners to flee for protection from the wrath to come.

In **verse 20** of our text, the author mentions Jesus as our high priest, within the veil, where God's holy presence meant instant death to any sinner who dared to go there. Although people's eyes are blinded so that they do not see their sin and God's holiness, every sinner needs a refuge from God's coming judgment. Jesus Christ is the refuge that God has provided. The question is, *have you fled to that refuge?* Have you trusted in Christ alone to save you from your sins? If your hope is in your good works, you are not saved. Your hope of salvation must be in Christ alone.

B. HAVING TAKEN REFUGE IN CHRIST, WE NOW MUST TAKE HOLD OF THE HOPE OF OUR FUTURE SALVATION.

C. THE HOPE OF OUR FUTURE SALVATION ANCHORS US TO WAIT ON GOD IN PRESENT STORMS.

Deffinbaugh: Conclusion

Our text has been about God's promises, so let's conclude by focusing on some of the truths we have seen and what impact these have on us.

First, we find that God's promises are the basis for our faith.

Second, God's promises are the basis of our hope, and thus the assurance which encourages us to persevere in times of adversity.

Third, promises are given when their fulfillment will come after a period of delay. Promises are given to those who must wait, those who do not expect or demand that God give them freedom from tests and trials, or provide them with prosperity now. A

promise implies a delay; otherwise, a promise is not necessary.

Fourth, God's covenant promises (specifically the Abrahamic Covenant and the covenant regarding a priest after the order of Melchizedek) are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fifth, if God's covenant promises are fulfilled in Christ, and these are the basis for our faith, hope, and endurance, then to reject Christ is to reject faith, hope, and endurance.

Sixth, our confidence and assurance are grounded (anchored) in the promises of God and His faithfulness to fulfill them, not in our performance

Seventh, we can count on God's promises because He can be trusted. His promises are our certain ground for faith and endurance.

Eighth, God's promises are the basis and the incentive for cleansing ourselves from sin and its defilement.

Ninth, the promises of God and the hope they produce are an opportunity for us to proclaim the gospel.

Tenth, Gentiles believers become full heirs of the promises of God.

Eleventh, it is the promises of God which are certain, and it is these promises which will sustain us in the difficult days ahead.

TEXT: Hebrews 7:1-10

TITLE: IDENTIFICATION AND GREATNESS OF MELCHIZEDEK

BIG IDEA:

THE GREATNESS OF MELCHIZEDEK TYPIFIES THE SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST – KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE

INTRODUCTION:

Here we have the extended introduction to the mysterious person of Melchizedek. He has already been mentioned, but now we have the opportunity to meet him and see his interaction with Abraham and his descendants. The fact that the priesthood of Christ has been identified as being after the order of Melchizedek must be explained. In what sense do we say that Melchizedek is a type of Christ?

Richard Phillips: the writer of Hebrews uses one of the most mysterious and obscure figures in all the Old Testament. . . This comparison [to Melchizedek] has been made three times already in the Book of Hebrews. It has been lingering, awaiting explanation, since it first occurred in **5:6**.

Lenski: The writer has used the most effective psychological method of approach. He has first prepared his readers. He has repeatedly presented Jesus as our High Priest, in fact, as our Great High Priest (**4:14**); he has twice quoted God's own statement in the psalm that Jesus was to be Priest and High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (**5:6, 10**). He has delayed until now to reveal in detail what this means. He has injected the strongest warnings against sluggishness of mind and the deadliness of unbelief. The preparation is complete; he now proceeds, and his exposition leaves nothing to be desired. The first step presents the main historical facts about Melchizedek. These are the data embodied in Genesis. *Gar* ["For"] = in order that you may fully understand what God means by saying that Jesus is a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (**6:20**).

I. (:1-3) WHO IS MELCHIZEDEK? THIS MYSTERIOUS KING-PRIEST!

A. (:1a) Identification of Melchizedek – Mutual Roles of King and Priest

1. His Name

"For this Melchizedek,"

2. His Kingly Role

"king of Salem,"

Leon Morris: Salem is another name for Jerusalem in **Ps. 76:2** – but could also be some other location

Lenski: Jerome favors a Salem (Salumias) that was located eight Roman miles from Scythopolis, eighty form Sodom.

John Calvin: It was doubtless no common thing that in a country abounding in the corruptions of so many superstitions, a man was found who preserved the pure worship of God; for on one side he was nigh to Sodom and Gomorrah, and on the other to the Canaanites, so that he was on every side encompassed by ungodly men. Besides, the whole world was so fallen into impiety, that it is very probable that God was nowhere faithfully worshipped except in the family of Abraham; for his father and his grandfather, who ought to have retained true religion, had long before degenerated into idolatry. It was therefore a memorable fact, that there was still a king who not only retained true religion, but also performed himself the office of a priest. And it was doubtless necessary that in him who was to be a type of the Son of God all things excellent should be found: and that Christ was shadowed forth by this type is evident from the Psalm referred to; for David did not say without reason, *“Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek;”* no, but on the contrary, by these words a sublime mystery was recommended to the Church.

3. His Priestly Role

“priest of the Most High God,”

Mohler: Surprisingly, he has a coalesced ministry as a king and priest, which sets him apart from any other priest or king in Israel. While Melchizedek’s kingship is important, the author primarily develops the significance of Melchizedek’s priesthood and how it relates to Jesus.

Hewitt: This title of Jehovah was also used by the Phoenicians, and it is evident that the worship of the one true God was not confined to the family of Abraham.

B. (:1b-2a) Interaction with Abraham – Mutual Respect Shown

1. (:1b) Melchizedek Blessed Abraham

“who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the Kings and blessed him,”

R. Kent Hughes: So when Abraham returned to his home after the slaughter of the kings he was a hero, at the pinnacle of martial success. Can you see him proudly astride his lumbering camel, smeared with the dirt and blood of battle, leading his 318 proud men plus Lot and **all** the captives and **all** the plunder through Jerusalem? If so, you have the “feel” necessary to begin to appreciate Abraham’s strange, mystic encounter with a shadowy figure of immense grandeur – Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem.

2. (:2a) Melchizedek Received Tithes from Abraham

“to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils,”

C. (:2b) Idealization of His Role as King

1. King of Righteousness

“was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness,”

Definition of **Idealization**: to think of or represent someone or something as perfect

Kent: The meaning of Melchizedek is king of righteousness. This is mentioned first, not because of coincidence but because the author deliberately wants to emphasize the typology involved. Righteousness is basic to the priesthood, and peace comes from it. Melchizedek was a king whose name and realm connoted these concepts, at least etymologically, He provided a type of Christ, whose person and work accomplishes true righteousness and peace. It was Christ who was “*the Holy and Righteous One*” (**Acts 3:14**); and by satisfying the righteousness of God as our substitute, He provides peace with God for all believers (**Rom. 5:1; Col. 2:20; Eph. 2:14**).

2. King of Peace

“and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.”

R. Kent Hughes: Significantly here, we should note that both the qualities of righteousness and peace were prophesied of the Messiah in **Isaiah 9:6,7**, where his fourth title is “*Prince of Peace*,” and he goes on to rule with “*righteousness*.” The New Testament identifies Jesus specifically as “*Jesus Christ, the Righteous One*” (**1 John 2:1**) and “*our righteousness*” (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). Jesus is the King of righteousness! Likewise, the New Testament says of Jesus, “*For he himself is our peace*” (**Ephesians 2:14**). Jesus is the king of peace!

So Jesus brings righteousness and peace together in his person. As the Psalmist so magnificently indicates, in the Lord “*righteousness and peace kiss each other*” (**Psalms 85:10**). Righteousness and peace are the telltale kiss of his character.

He is the King, the sovereign, of righteousness and peace. He is the sovereign giver of the kisses of peace and righteousness. As we shall see, he is the only one in whom peace and righteousness can be found. So, as we begin we see that Melchizedek foreshadowed the character of Christ – his kingship, his priesthood, his righteousness, and his peace.

Charles Spurgeon: Note well the order of these two, and the dependence of the one upon the other; for there could be no true peace that was not grounded upon righteousness; and out of righteousness peace is sure to spring up.

David Guzik: As always, righteousness comes before peace. Righteousness is the only true path to peace. People look for that peace in escape, in evasion, or in compromise; but they will only find it in righteousness.

D. (:3) Idealization of His Role as Priest

1. No Recorded Ancestors to Qualify Him

“Without father, without mother, without genealogy,”

Kent: The Levitical system made the priests’ pedigree of utmost importance. Not only the high priest but all the priests had to be able to prove their genealogy or they would

be excluded from the priesthood (**Ezra 2:62**). To be a priest, one's father needed to be a descendant not only of Levi, but of the priestly family of Aaron within that tribe. His mother needed to be an Israelite, but not every Israelite woman was eligible. No woman who was divorced or had an immoral past could be taken as a priest's wife (**Lev. 21:7**), not only because it would be inappropriate for her husband, but it would provide an unworthy mother for the sons who might otherwise qualify as priests.

Mohler: Melchizedek is a priest of God Most High by divine ordination.

2. No Recorded Time Boundaries to Limit Him

"having neither beginning of days nor end of life,"

T. C. Edwards: That Christ is Priest forever can be symbolically taught only by negations, by the absence of a beginning and of an end, in some such way as the hieroglyphics represent eternity by a line turning back upon itself. In this negative fashion, Melchizedek has been assimilated to the Son of God.

3. Type of Christ

"but made like the Son of God,"

4. The Ultimate Perpetual Priest

"he abides a priest perpetually."

Leon Morris: Thus it is not that Melchizedek sets the pattern and Jesus follows it. Rather, the record about Melchizedek is so arranged that it brings out certain truths that apply far more fully to Jesus than they do to Melchizedek. With the latter, these truths are simply a matter of record; but with Jesus they are not only historically true, they also have significant spiritual dimensions.

II. (:4-10) HOW GREAT IS MELCHIZEDEK? GREATER THAN ABRAHAM!

A. (:4a) Focus = the Greatness of Melchizedek

"Now observe how great this man was"

The reason we should concentrate on the greatness of the man is because it is the basis for the greatness of his priesthood and will prove the superiority of the order of Melchizedek over the Levitical order of priests

B. (4b-6) Favored over Abraham

1. (:4b) Superior to Abraham Because He Received Tithes

"to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils."

"patriarch" – term of utmost respect – again elevating the status of Melchizedek

Provides some insight into our giving to the Lord; these tithes came from "the choicest spoils" – literally, "the top of the heap" – not from anything defective or left over

2. (:5) Superior to the Levitical System Which Traces Its Roots to Abraham

“And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.”

R. Kent Hughes: His point is that the Levites' ability to collect tithes came from the provision made by the Law, and not from any natural superiority. But Melchizedek was different. He *“did not trace his descent from Levi,”* and yet, as a figure of immense superiority, he collected tithes not from the people, **but from Abraham!**

Kent: The right to tithe someone involves a certain authority and thus a superiority. In the case of the Levitical priests, their authority stemmed from the Mosaic law. It could be considered only as an official supremacy for this specific purpose, and not some inherent superiority, for actually they were brothers.

Mohler: Since the Levitical priests descend from Abraham and Melchizedek surpasses Abraham, the Melchizedekian priesthood must be superior to the Levitical priesthood.

Leon Morris: He did not trace his descent from Levi. Melchizedek was not simply one among a host of brothers. He was a solitary figure of grandeur. And he exacted tithes not simply from his brothers but from Abraham. His greatness stands out.

3. (:6) Superior to Abraham Because He Both Received Tithes and Blessed Him

a. Received Tithes from Abraham

“But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham,”

Hewitt: Here [vv. 6-7] and in **verse 9** the writer makes use of Greek perfects to suggest that what is written is still speaking and, therefore, is still relevant.

b. Blessed Abraham

“and blessed the one who had the promises.”

Kent: It must be understood that this “blessing” is something different from simply “praising” (as, for example, **James 3:9**, where men bless God, but are certainly not superior to Him). This blessing is an official pronouncement, coming from one properly authorized, which actually bestows something upon its recipient.

“who had the promises” – again elevating the privileged status of Abraham to further elevate the superiority of Melchizedek

C. (:7) Fundamental Principle = the Lesser is Blessed by the Greater

“But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.”

D. (:8-10) Far-Reaching Superiority

1. (:8) Superior Because He Endures

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

Mohler: The author wants the Hebrews to see that the Old Testament itself showed that the Levitical priesthood was always meant to give way to something greater.

Hewitt: Argument from the mortality of the Levitical priests

2. (:9-10) Superior Because Levi Paid Him Tithes

a. (:9) Historical Fact

*“And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi,
who received tithes, paid tithes,”*

b. (:10) Hereditary Implications

*“for he was still in the loins of his father
when Melchizedek met him.”*

F. F. Bruce: an ancestor is regarded in biblical thought as containing within himself all his descendants

Deffinbaugh: our text helps us to understand the concept of federal headship.

Kent: The author may be considering the possible answer some might give that since the Levitical system came after Melchizedek, it was intended as its replacement and thus was superior to it. To this objection a most remarkable explanation is given.

Levi is viewed as being present and implicated in the action of his great-grandfather Abraham, even though he was not yet born. . . The principle involved is that there is a genuine unity in the human family, and that one is affected by the acts of his ancestors. It was not at all unusual for Hebrews to reason this way, viewing heredity in this realistic manner. (cf. Adam – **1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:12**) . . . Thus while all Israelites were subjected under the Mosaic law to the Levitical priesthood and could go to no other priest, yet Levi himself was tithed by Melchizedek in the person of his great-grandfather Abraham. The hereditary implications are seen not only by looking backward from Levi to Abraham, but also by looking forward from Levi to Aaron.

Mohler: Thus, the author of Hebrews closes his argument by using the concept of corporate identity to illustrate that Levi was biologically present when Abraham encountered Melchizedek.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does the OT have so little to say about such an important personage as Melchizedek?
- 2) What are the implications of the combined role of King and Priest – as well as the harmony between righteousness and peace?
- 3) What was so attractive about the Levitical priesthood that would tempt individuals to cling to the religious system of the old covenant?
- 4) How do you explain the federal headship of Adam in terms of the impact of his sin on the entire human race?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. Kent Hughes: That was around 2000 B.C., and for a millennium there is no mention at all of Melchizedek, not even in retrospect. But in the tenth century B.C., when the Psalmist David was King of Israel, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write this prophetic word: “*The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’*” (**Psalm 110:4**). There God declared that he was going to something **new**. His intention was to bring into history one who would be a priest like Melchizedek. In the likeness of Melchizedek he would be both priest and king (cf. **Psalm 110:1**). Also, his priesthood would last forever. And, like Melchizedek, he would be appointed directly by God. It was all divinely guaranteed. . .

And there is even more (though the writer did not mention it because it was not immediately germane to the point he was making), because when the original Melchizedek greeted Abraham, he gave him bread and wine (**Genesis 14:18**). Now, Christ, our eternal Melchizedek, offers the same to his church (**Matthew 26:26-30; John 6:53-58; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34**). His life – his flesh and blood – have secured our righteousness and peace. And by feeding on him as our food and drink, we receive sustenance to live as we ought and to bring his healing kiss to a broken world.

Richard Phillips: As to Melchizedek’s identity there have been various views. Some have said that he was Shem, the son of Noah and Abraham’s ancestor, and others that he was an angelic or otherwise celestial being. The problem with both of these views is that there is nothing in the text to support them.

Still others argue that Melchizedek is the preincarnate Christ. But the description in **Hebrews 7** rules this out. . . how can he be described as “*resembling the Son of God*,” as he is in **verse 3**. Nor would it make sense for Jesus’ priesthood to be described as in the “*order of Melchizedek*.” Melchizedek is set forth as a type of Christ, and a type is some other person who symbolizes and anticipates the one who is to come. . .

One of the great concerns of this letter is that these Hebrew Christians under persecution not renounce Christianity in favor of a return to Judaism. The point, therefore, is that Christ is superior to Judaism. Indeed, the law of Moses with its priesthood stands upon the greater foundation of the gospel of Christ, represented by Melchizedek who blessed Abraham. To renounce Christ, therefore, is to renounce all that the old covenant stood upon, the source from which even Abraham received his blessing.

This helps us to understand the relationship between the old covenant in Moses and the new covenant in Christ. Through Melchizedek, salvation in Christ was made known before the coming of the law and the old covenant. The new covenant in Christ, therefore, is not an innovation. It is not God's reaction to the supposed failure of his first attempt through Moses. It is not different in character from the way of salvation that is described in every period of the Bible after the fall.

The new covenant is called "new" not because it is different but because it brought to fulfillment all that had been represented and anticipated for so long. Indeed, it was in Christ that Abraham saw his hope. . . How glad Abraham must have been to see the one who represented the source of every spiritual blessing, holding forth the bread and wine that spoke of Christ's saving work to come!

T. C. Edwards: The priesthood of Melchizedek sprang from the man's inherent greatness. How much more is it true of Jesus Christ that His greatness is personal! He became what He is, not by force of law, which could create only an external, carnal commandment, but by innate power, in virtue of which He will live on and His life will be indestructible. The commandment that constituted Aaron priest has not indeed been violently abrogated; but it has been thrust aside in consequence of its own inner feebleness and uselessness. That it has been weak and unprofitable to men is evident from the inability of the Law, as a system erected upon that priesthood, to satisfy conscience. Yet this carnal, decayed priesthood was permitted to linger on and work itself out. The better hope, through which we do actually come near unto God, did not forcibly put an end to it, but was super-added. Christ never formally abolished the old covenant. We cannot date its extinction. We must not say that it ceased to exist when the Supper was instituted, or when the true Passover was slain, or when the Spirit descended. The Epistle to the Hebrews is intended to awaken men to the fact that it is gone. They can hardly realise that it is dead. It has been lost, like the light of a star, the spreading "dawn" of day. The sun of that eternal day is the infinitely great personality of Jesus Christ, born a crownless King; crowned at His death, but with thorns. Yet what mighty power He has wielded! The Galilaeen has conquered. . .

The entire system or covenant based on the Aaronic priesthood has passed away and given place to a better covenant – better in proportion to the firmer foundation on which the priesthood of Jesus rests.

Dwight Pentecost: The Oriental view of superiority and subordination is a concept

foreign to our modern Western culture. Therefore it is popular among unbelievers to stand in judgment of God and raise questions like, “How can a loving God allow suffering?” or “How could a God of love send people to hell?” Sometimes this attitude carries over into our Christian lives after we trust Christ as Savior, and we find ourselves questioning His wisdom, His love, or His understanding. Interestingly, the Bible seems to indicate that real understanding of God’s work in our lives begins with our humble acknowledgement that He is superior to us, and based on that alone—whether we understand or not—we submit to His will in our lives. This was the lesson Job had to learn, and it was Abraham’s attitude as well. Shouldn’t it be ours?

J. Ligon Duncan: And now it’s going to be made clear that Jesus is superior to the Old Testament priesthood, the Levitical priesthood. His priesthood is a better priesthood. That’s going to be the whole argument of the next two chapters in the book of Hebrews. But also isn’t it interesting that parenthetically or incidentally it’s going to be shown that Jesus is superior to Abraham in this passage. And surely that would have been a claim that would have hit home to any Jewish Christian hearing this sermon. And so at least those two things are going to be stressed. The superiority of Jesus’ priesthood.

But in addition to that, this passage is also going to go a long way in explaining the change in the ceremonial law because as the old priesthood had been transcended by the new priesthood of Christ. But remember, because that priesthood of Christ was not descended from the old priesthood, so also the law of Christ was not the law of that old priesthood. And so in a flash the author of Hebrews is going to explain to you why all the ceremonial code is no longer relevant to Christians in their day-to-day practice because Jesus isn’t descended from the Levitical priesthood. And it was the Levitical priesthood that implemented the ceremonial law. Jesus is descended from a different priesthood. He is the successor, He is, in fact, the greater of those in the line of the priesthood of Melchizedek. All these things the author of Hebrews is going to teach us in this section.

John Piper: So the reason for all this talk about Christ's relation to Melchizedek in **verses 1-24** is because the eternal, superior priesthood of Jesus is our only hope of eternal salvation. God's wrath never changes. There is only one hope for sinners like us. We must have a faithful high priest, who will intercede for us forever. We need a king of righteousness (**verse 2**). We need a king of peace (**verse 2**). We need someone without beginning and ending (**verse 3**). Someone who has an indestructible life (**verse 16**) and will never die and need to be replaced (**verses 23-24**). We need someone greater than Abraham and greater than Levi—something like Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham, (**verses 6-7**) and who received tithes from Abraham and, in a sense, from Levi in Abraham (**verses 5, 6, 8-10**). We need a new and greater priest—so much greater that verse 11 says there was no perfection through the Levitical priesthood. All the Old Testament priesthood could do was point toward the One superior priest (after the order of Melchizedek, **Psalms 110:4**), whose sacrifice of himself and whose eternal intercession would guarantee eternal salvation for all God's people.

So the first implication of **verse 25** is that all this truth about priesthood is because what we need saving from is the wrath of God. God's way of solving that problem is priesthood. This is not ours to figure out or solve. God has to do it for us. And he has done it. He ordains a Priest, his Son.

Steven Cole: The author of Hebrews is making the point that Jesus is our high priest. But He is not just the fulfillment of the Levitical priesthood. He is something more, a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. To view Him on a par with the Levitical priests would be to make a spiritually fatal mistake. That entire old system was designed to point ahead to Jesus Christ, who superseded and fulfilled it. To go back to the old way would be to abandon God's only way of entrance into His holy presence. It would be to turn from the only One who can save us from our sins and go back to an inferior system. So the author here is saying,

You need to know about Melchizedek because he is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you desperately need to know about Christ.

The author is picking up where he left off in **5:10**, before his exhortation from **5:11-6:20**. He wanted to discuss the significance of Melchizedek, but he could not do so because these people had become dull of hearing. He wants them to understand Melchizedek so that they can gain a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ. But Christ does not reveal Himself to those who are spiritually lazy or apathetic. Have you ever considered why Jesus did not do the Transfiguration in front of the multitudes? In fact, He didn't even do it in front of the Twelve. He only took with Him Peter, James, and John to witness this astounding scene!

But to the multitudes, Jesus concealed His glory and spoke in parables, because they were spiritually dull (see **Matt. 13:12-15**). He only reveals His glory to those with whom He is intimate, and He is only intimate with those whose hearts are humbled before Him. And so as we approach these truths about Melchizedek as a type of Christ, we must make sure that our hearts are right before God.

- 1. Melchizedek is a type of Christ in the dignity of his person.**
- 2. Melchizedek is a type of Christ in the derivation and duration of his priesthood.**
- 3. Melchizedek is a type of Christ in the dimension of his priesthood.**

But the point of the typology between Melchizedek and the Son of God is that since Melchizedek, in receiving tithes from Abraham and Levi, was greater than these great men, Jesus is greater still. As our High Priest, He is worthy not just of a tithe, but of all that we are and have, because He bought us with His blood. No gifts that we give can compare with His matchless worth!

- 4. Melchizedek is a type of Christ in the dispensing of his priesthood.**

If Melchizedek could bless Abraham, how much more is the Son of God ready and able to bless those who draw near to God through Him! If we want God's blessings, we should seek them in Christ, because "*as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes*" (**2 Cor. 1:20**). What do you need from God? Eternal life? Yes! Forgiveness of sins? Yes! Inner peace? Yes! Hope? Yes! Joy in the midst of trials? Yes! Grace to endure? Yes! Victory over sin? Yes! Healing from past wounds? Yes! Jesus is the perfect high priest who dispenses God's blessings to those who have His promises. Draw near to Him!

TEXT: Hebrews 7:11-28

TITLE: *DRAWING NEAR TO GOD VIA THE SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST*

BIG IDEA:

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD BRINGS NEW COVENANT ACCESS TO GOD

INTRODUCTION:

This passage represents a monumental transition in God's dealings with mankind. Because of the intrinsic connection between the priesthood system and the corresponding covenant relationship, the emphasis on the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ takes on even greater significance. We now enjoy a better hope which involves improved access to God through the permanent priesthood of Christ. All is guaranteed by the divine oath which established Jesus Christ as a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. This high priest is the all-sufficient Mediator who can best represent mankind because of His intimate relationship as the unique Son of the Father. His once-for-all sacrifice for sin shows the limitations and weakness of the old covenant. Why would any Jewish convert consider reverting back to the shadows and types of Judaism under the Mosaic law?

Mohler: This passage does not shock us like it should because we are so far removed from its original context. We need to understand what the writer is proclaiming in these verses. The author of Hebrews sets the superiority of Christ as our great high priest over the entire Levitical priesthood. He is proclaiming that Christ brings an end to the Levitical priesthood, the backbone of Jewish society and a major feature of God's covenant with Israel.

Hewitt: The superiority of the former over the latter is brought out in a threefold manner: it introduced a better hope by means of which we can draw near to God (**18, 19**); it rested upon a divine oath, and no such oath is mentioned in connection with the Levitical priesthood (**20-22**); Christ's Priesthood is unchangeable, for He ever liveth (**23-25**).

Richard Phillips: A covenant establishes the terms for a relationship; biblical covenants are established and administered by God to bring mankind into a specified relationship with him. When Christ came, he brought a new covenant – a new administration by which we relate to God. . . . To fall from Christ back into Judaism, therefore, was not merely to regress into former ways, but to fall back into an administration that was no longer valid, having been fulfilled and replaced by the coming of Christ.

J. Ligon Duncan: remember that the theme here in **Hebrews 7** is simply continuing to reinforce the theme that Jesus Christ is superior. You remember the temptation of some or many in this congregation is to think that they can relate to the Lord perhaps by going back to whatever form of Judaism they had professed and again approaching Him

through the rich themes of the ceremonial law. And the author of Hebrews at every point wants to say, “You are underestimating the uniqueness and the sole sufficiency, the supremacy, the superiority of Jesus Christ in every aspect of His work as prophet, priest, and king.” In this passage, especially, he has zeroed in on that idea of Jesus as high priest, as the culmination of everything that had gone on before in the Old Testament and he is trying to bring that practically to bear to pull that congregation back away from trusting anything else than the One whose name they have already professed as their Lord and Savior.

3 ARGUMENTS FOR THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD OVER THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

I. (:11-19) BECAUSE CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD OFFERS A BETTER HOPE – BASED ON THE POWER OF AN INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE

A. (:11-14) Christ’s Priesthood Moves Us Beyond the Law of Moses

1. (:11) Change in Priesthood Comes with the Order of Melchizedek

“Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?”

R. Kent Hughes: “Perfection” = “to put someone in the position in which he can come, or stand, before God” – **access to God** and a right relationship to him.

J. Ligon Duncan: God never intended the Old Covenant priesthood to be permanent and to achieve the things that He did intend for the permanent priest of His Son to achieve.

2. (:12) Change in Priesthood Means a Change in God’s Dealings with Man

“For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.”

Steven Cole: In this verse, the author shows the radical implication of a change in the priesthood: it necessarily also demands a change in the Law. Again, to understand this we must keep in mind that for a conscientious Jew, this was unthinkable! The Law of Moses was the bedrock of the Jewish religion and culture. How could you even *talk* about changing the Law? But the author is arguing that the Law and the Levitical priesthood were so closely linked that you could not change the priesthood without changing the Law.

3. (:13-14) Christ Descended from Judah – not Levi as Moses Prescribed

“For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.”

Kent: The fact that Jesus descended from Judah and yet was called a priest by God is clear demonstration that a change has occurred in the law. The tribal connection of Christ is proof that the Mosaic legislation cannot be applicable if Christ is regarded as priest.

Mohler: The work of Christ in his threefold office – prophet, priest, and king – demonstrates a very different kind of perfection, one completely absent in the old covenant. No category for such a thing in the old covenant exists. In that covenant, different tribes performed the different societal responsibilities, and no tribe performed them eternally. Christ, on the other hand, performs all of these roles and does so singularly, continually, and eternally. The author of Hebrews demonstrates the newness of Christ’s work by showing that even Moses knew nothing about a priest from the tribe of Judah serving at the altar of God. The writer of Hebrews deliberately references Moses because Moses was the final authority in these types of deliberations.

R. Kent Hughes: This careful distancing of the Melchizedekian priesthood from the Levitical system, along with showing the new priest to be Messianic, was meant to be a warning to those in the beleaguered Jewish church to not turn back to Judaism and not mix Old Testament priestly ritual with their Christianity. This may not strike us with the force that it did them, because the age of the Law is ancient history to us. But it is still relevant to evangelicals increasingly lured by the un-Biblical promises of some present-day traditions. God’s Word sets the standard” “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Timothy 2:5, 6). Perfection – access to God – comes only through Christ.

B. (:15-17) Christ’s Priesthood Based on the Power of an Indestructible Life

1. (:15) According to the Order of Melchizedek – In its Character

“And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek,”

2. (:16) Authority for Christ’s Priesthood

a. Not Based on Requirements of Law of Moses

“who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement,”

Kent: The basic difference was the principle which established the priesthood. In the case of Aaron and his Levitical successors, the reference is to the Mosaic law (*nomon*) with its many requirements regarding physical matters. The term *sarkines* refers to that which is made of flesh. It has nothing to do with sinful characteristics. . . In the Levitical system, matters of physical ancestry, marriages, health, diet, and ceremonial performance were prominent. A man’s spiritual fitness was not a vital consideration as a priestly qualification. Examples of wicked priests in the Old Testament (sons of Eli) and in the New Testament (Annas, Caiaphas, Ananias) amply confirm this fact.

Christ, however, possesses His priesthood on a different principle. It was not dependent upon external laws, but upon the power inherent in His life. . . The very nature of His life is different. It is indestructible (*akatalutou*). Not only will it never end in death, but it is not capable of any sort of dissolution from within or without.

b. Based on the Power of an Indestructible Life

“but according to the power of an indestructible life.”

Powerful reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ

3. (:17) According to the Order of Melchizedek – In its Divine Testimony

“For it is witnessed of Him,

‘Thou art a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.’”

Richard Phillips: It was precisely this change of priesthood that David foretold when he wrote of the Messiah . . . Therefore, long before the coming of Christ, the old order was recognized as transitional, temporary, and insufficient.

C. (:18-19) Christ’s Priesthood Offers a Better Hope

1. (:18-19a) Setting Aside of the Law of Moses

“For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect),”

Mohler: The law, therefore, is not unprofitable in the sense that it has no use at all but in the sense that obeying it does not provide any ultimate, eternal rewards. The law is used to condemn, but it can never be used to save. For effecting salvation, the law is unprofitable.

R. Kent Hughes: Clearly, the Old Covenant had profound limitations as to making atonement, imparting life, clearing the conscience, and providing access.

Richard Phillips: An outward code, a system of rules, may point us in the right direction (and the moral law of God certainly does that). However, it offers no power, no change of heart, to motivate us along that change of course, and no impetus to move along the new azimuth. For this we need power, a new disposition or attitude, which the law cannot convey, but which comes only by the Holy Spirit as he is poured out on us by our heavenly high priest.

2. (:19b) Bringing in a Better Hope

“and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”

Hewitt: The great High Priest, who through the sacrifice of Himself dealt with the sin problem, is able, through His ascension, to bring all believers within the veil into God’s holy presence.

Richard Phillips: Paul describes this new hope as “*freedom,*” and the writer of Hebrews speaks of “*drawing near to God.*” This is our freedom as Christians – not to presume upon God’s grace through loose living or by flirting with sin, but the freedom to draw near to God by his Spirit. It is the freedom to fellowship with God himself, which was always the goal of the priesthood, but is accomplished only by the heavenly ministry of our great high priest, Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. This is a much better way, a much better hope, than any Old Testament saint ever knew.

Deffinbaugh: the law and the Aaronic priesthood needed to be replaced because the law failed to draw men near to God, and the new priesthood would do so. The Old is inferior and inadequate; the new is better because it does perfect (draw men near to God).

II. (:20-25) BECAUSE CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD IS PERMANENT – GUARANTEEING OF A BETTER COVENANT

A. (:20-21) Priesthood of Promise

*“And inasmuch as it was not without an oath
(for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, ‘The Lord has sworn And will not change His mind, Thou art a priest forever’);”*

B. (:22) Priesthood of Preeminence = a Better Covenant

“so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.”

F. F. Bruce: Jesus guarantees the perpetual fulfilment of the covenant which He mediates, on the manward side as well as on the Godward side. As the Son of God, He confirms God’s eternal covenant with people; as His people’s representative, He satisfies its terms with perfect acceptance in God’s sight.

Hewitt: The greatness of His Person, the sufficiency of His sacrifice, the authority behind His resurrection, the superiority of His priesthood and His ascension to the throne of God are a complete pledge of the validity of the better covenant.

C. (:23-25) Priesthood of Permanence

1. (:23) Levitical Priesthood Limited by Death

“And the former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing,”

R. Kent Hughes: There is no unevenness in the quality of his priesthood, as there would be in a human succession of priests.

2. (:24) Christ Not Limited by Death

“but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently.”

3. (:25) Application: Priesthood of Christ is More Effective

“Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Richard Phillips: The first great issue in life [guilt] – the problem of sins we have committed – deals with the past. The second great issue of life [weakness] deals with the present and the future. It is the problem of our weakness and inward corruption. This is not just the outward reality of sin but the inward problem that is its source. . . The reason for the success of his salvation – his ability to deal with both our outward sins and our inward condition – is that he lives forever with power to save. Because he lives, he has a permanent priesthood, always interceding for his own, and thus he is able completely to save those who trust in him. The writer of Hebrews declares the total sufficiency of salvation in Christ by noting that the permanence of Jesus’ priestly ministry guarantees our relationship to God.

Steven Cole: Have you ever gotten a promotional letter that said in fine print, “Actual results may vary”? Or, “Amounts used in this letter are for illustration purposes only; actual earnings may be less”? Those statements greatly limit the promises of the offer! But God promises that because Jesus is our superior high priest, salvation is guaranteed for all who draw near to God through Him. There is no fine print stating, “Sinner must clean up his life first.” It does not say, “Offer does not apply to really bad sinners.” Jesus promises, *“The one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37)*. He guarantees salvation for all eternity if you will come to Him!

Provides a transition to the final point of the passage in vv. 26-28

III. (:26-28) BECAUSE CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD IS MORE EFFECTIVE – BASED ON HIS PERFECTION

A. (:26) More Effective Because of His Perfect, Sinless Character

1. Appropriate -- Necessary to Have Such a High Priest

“For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest,”

Richard Phillips: As we conclude the seventh chapter of Hebrews, we come to one of several crescendos in this majestic epistle. “Crescendo” is a musical notation calling for a gradual increase in power until a climax is reached. In this chapter the writer of Hebrews has been building his argument up to the point of summation and integration that we find in the last three verses.

Hebrews 7 begins with Melchizedek as a type of Jesus Christ. Melchizedek shows us the excellency of Jesus – he is both king and priest, a bearer of righteousness and peace, and one who reigns and serves forever. . .

The exposition moves forward in **verses 11-19** to show that Jesus is a better hope than that offered in the old covenant. When he appears as a new priest, he also brings a new

and better administration of salvation. Possessing an indestructible life, he is able to give life, so that we might have a better and firmer hope.

Then in **verses 20-25** the writer of Hebrews informs us of the implications of Jesus' eternal and permanent priesthood. Because he lives forever, he is the guarantee of God's covenant. . .

This is all wonderfully thorough Christology, but now we reach the climax, the summation of this exposition that is one of the high points of the entire epistle. . . Such a high priest meets our need. He is perfectly fitting for us, in terms of both his person and his work, perfectly suited for our predicament and perfectly able to save us to the uttermost.

2. Approved -- No Defilement by Sin

a. "holy,"

Constable: In view of His superior ministry it is only fitting that our High Priest should be a superior Person. "Holy" (Gr. *hosios*) stresses blamelessness. (Another word translated "holy," *hagios*, stresses separateness.) "Innocent" means without guile or malice. "Undefiled" looks at His absolute purity. "Separated from sinners" probably refers to His being in a different class from sinful people. [Note: **Manson**, pp116-17.] Jesus was not only inherently pure, but He remains pure in all His contacts with sinners.

b. "innocent,"

c. "undefiled,"

d. "separated from sinners"

Kent: describing Christ's permanent state throughout His incarnation (and continuing, of course, today). Though He entered true human life, He was always separated from sinners as far as contracting defilement was concerned. He mingled freely with publicans and sinners but never partook of their sin nor was ever honestly suspected of doing so.

e. "and exalted above the heavens;"

B. (:27) More Effective Because of His Perfect, Once-for-all Sacrifice

1. Limitation of the Sacrifices Offered Under the Levitical System

a. Daily Sacrifices Under the Levitical System

*"who does not need daily, like those high priests,
to offer up sacrifices,"*

Kent: [Problem of "daily" when the Day of Atonement which seems primarily to be in view was celebrated annually] The best explanation notes that the position of daily in

the sentence is connected solely to Christ. It is He who does not have this daily need. The point is that every time the high priest interceded for his people (which in the Levitical system was yearly), he first had to make a sin offering for himself (see **Lev. 16** for the Old Testament illustration). In the case of Christ, however, every time He intercedes for believers (which is not one day a year but every day, i.e., continually, always, **7:25**), He has no such need.

Hewitt: The writer has simply blended together the yearly sacrifice of the high priest and the daily sacrifices of the priests. These subordinate priests were merely substitutes for the high priest who was head of all.

- b. Personal Cleansing Needed for the Levitical Priests
“first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people,”

- 2. Perfection of the Once-for-all Sacrifice of the Sinless Priest Himself
“because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”

C. (:28) More Effective Because of His Perfect Intercession as Son of God

1. Limited Intercession of the Levitical Priests

- a. Limited by the Weakness of the Mosaic Law
“For the Law”
- b. Limited by Multiple Succession of Mere Men
“appoints men as high priests”
- c. Limited by Personal Weakness of the Priests
“who are weak,”

2. Unlimited Intercession of Christ as Priest

- a. Unlimited by God’s Promise Which Superseded the Law
“but the word of the oath, which came after the Law,”
- b. Unlimited by His Uniqueness as the Son of God
“appoints a Son,”
- c. Unlimited by His Personal Perfection Which Endures Forever
“made perfect forever.”

Kent: The once-for-all nature of His sacrifice coupled with the personal qualifications of the priest Himself as God’s own Son make the eternal character of His priesthood a certainty, immeasurably superior to the Aaronic order.

Mohler: The old covenant was not an initial plan that failed. It succeeded gloriously. Its purpose was never to save; it was to demonstrate man’s need for a Savior. . . Christ fulfills the expectations in the old covenant by being for us the great high priest of the new and better covenant.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the implications for you of Christ's power of an indestructible life?
- 2) If the Mosaic Law has been superseded by the New Covenant and the new priestly administration of Jesus Christ, what are the implications for our responsibility to obey laws such as the keeping of the Sabbath?
- 3) Do you feel that your eternal salvation is guaranteed? Why and How/
- 4) How does the sufficiency of the priestly ministry of Jesus Christ impact your life today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Hampton Keathley: After showing that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham and Levi, the author springs from his mention of Levi to the inadequacy of the Levitical priesthood. His argument is that the Levitical priesthood could not bring perfection and another priest was needed. The change in priesthood (**vs. 11**) equals a change in law (**vs. 12**) and demonstrates that Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood and that a new economy is in place.

Christ is the ultimate priest because God swore He would be a priest forever (**vs. 20**), because Christ lives forever (**vs. 21**) and because He will always be there to make intercession for us (**vs. 25**). He is sinless and therefore a better mediator than sinful priests (**vs. 26-27**).

Kent: Perfection (*teleiosis*) is used in the sense of completeness. In this context it refers to the making of men acceptable to God, which was the function of the priesthood. Something may be termed perfect or complete when it fulfills the purpose for which it was designed. Priesthood is designed to establish relations between God and sinful men. Yet the Levitical priesthood could accomplish this only within limits. It made possible an atonement which needed to be repeated. It could not provide complete expiation (for, as our author explains in **10:1-3**, the sacrifices then would not have needed repetition). The condition (if) is assumed to be true for the sake of argument, but then the impossibility is shown.

It was on the basis of the Levitical priesthood that Israel received the Mosaic Law. . . In the basic relationship of Israel and Jehovah, the priesthood stood at the heart. Both Moses and Aaron were chosen by God before the law was given. It was on the basis of the priestly function which God wanted performed that He issued the law at Sinai, giving the regulations for its operation.

Now if everything God required by way of making men acceptable to Him could be provided by the Levitical system, then why was Messiah not a Levitical priest? One might be disposed to argue that since the Levitical priesthood came later than Melchizedek, God must have intended it as the permanent replacement. Yet it is clear from the Old Testament that God Himself said that Messiah would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (**Ps. 110:4**).

Deffinbaugh: So here the author summarizes just what it is that makes the Son vastly superior to the Aaronic priests.

The Son	Aaronic Priests
Is undefiled by sin and thus has no need to offer sacrifices for His sin	Were obligated to offer sacrifices for their own sins (7:27; see also 5:1-3)
Has a heavenly ministry (7:26)	Had an earthly ministry (7:27-28)
Offered one sacrifice, once for all (7:27)	Offered daily sacrifices (7:27)
Offered Himself as the sacrifice (7:27)	Offered animal and other sacrifices (7:27)
Appointed by divine oath (7:28)	Appointed on basis of ancestry (7:28)
Has been made perfect forever (7:28)	Were far from perfect, and could not lead men to perfection (7:11, 27-28)

R. Kent Hughes: Though all Jews knew God's presence was everywhere, they also understood that the Temple's Holy of Holies was the locus of his special earthly presence, and just the thought of being near the Temple filled them with delight. Oh, to be close to his presence! Access to God was seen as the *summum bonum*, the highest good. And certainly they were right, because access presupposes a right relationship. Access would mean acceptance before God and the forgiveness of sins. And beyond that, access would also involve an exposure to the glory of his holiness. . .

Despite their longings, all Jews lived with limited access to God, regardless of their godliness. The Old Covenant's Aaronic priesthood, with its sacrificial system and the

veil over the Holy of Holies, institutionalize that limited access. Official access was granted only once a year to the high priest . . .

But in grand distinction the New Covenant began with the rending in two of the veil at the very moment Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for sin (**Matthew 27:50, 51**). A new priesthood in the order of Melchizedek “institutionalized” access for every true believer. Unrequited longings for God’s presence became a thing of the past for all Christians.

Access is the heart application in this text.

J. Ligon Duncan: A High Priest of Judah

Let’s say that this argument is a **five-point argument**. He has already introduced the idea of Melchizedek. Now he is wanting to show you the significance of that.

In **verse 11**, you get the first plank of his argument. In **verse 11**, he basically tells us that the Old Covenant was not the culmination of God’s plan, not the final part of God’s plan, not the ultimate aspect of God’s plan. His argument in **verse 11** is that the fact that Jesus was sent as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek reveals the inherent limitations of the old priesthood. If the old priesthood was sufficient in design and in result, why would we have needed to have a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek? That’s the argument, very simply. Why would we need Jesus as a great high priest, if the old priesthood did the job. So he draws our attention to the limitations of that old priesthood.

Then the second plank of the argument, you’ll see in **verses 12, 13, and 14**, which goes on to basically say this: Indeed, not only was that old priesthood inherently limited, but a new and distinctly non-Levitical priesthood requires a different divine law for its basis. In other words, you know that the law of Moses established the priesthood of the sons of Levi. When you come along and say that Jesus’ priesthood was according to the order of Melchizedek, you immediately have to ask, “Well, what was the basis of that priesthood? I know the basis of the Levitical priesthood. It was very explicit. It was in the law of Moses. But there is no Melchizedek priesthood spoken of in the law of Moses.” And the author of Hebrews says, “That’s right.” And therefore you know that it must be based on a different ground than the priesthood of the Old Testament, a different law for this new priesthood.

And he goes on to say in **verses 13 and 14** that this is very apparent because Christ is from the tribe of Judah. He is speaking to Jewish Christians. They know there was no priest from the tribe of Judah. If a man from the tribe of Judah had showed up at the temple to offer sacrifices, he would have been turned away; because only those in the line of Levi were qualified to do that kind of priestly work. So he says, “Look, all you have to do is know that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah to know that he could not be a priest according to the old system.” He had to be a priest on another basis.

Furthermore, he says in **verses 15-17**, that this is evident when you consider the basis of the priesthood of Melchizedek. What was that basis? He summarizes it in that gorgeous phrase, *“the power of an indestructible life.”* You remember we commented about the fact that in the Old Testament story of Melchizedek, there is not mention of his birth or of his death, no mention of his lineage, no mention of his end. The author of Hebrews takes that as a hint to remind us of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the eternality of Him. He is not thwarted from going on and fulfilling His priestly function by death. Death could not hold Him. He was raised from the dead. He ascended on high and He now ever lives to intercede. And so His priesthood, unlike the Old Covenant priesthood, is permanent. And so for all these reasons, the author reminds us that Jesus’ priesthood was of an entirely different nature than the priesthood than the sons of Levi. Therefore it was based on a different ground or foundation and that foundation was seen in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and, of course, in His ongoing session at the right hand of God.

So the law which undergirded that priesthood is the oath which the Lord declared, *“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek,”* and Christ’s perfect fulfillment of the Covenant of Works. Christ earned His right to be a priest forever in His fulfillment of the Covenant of Works. . .

The third plank in the argument of this passage is that the former priestly system that God had set up in the Old Testament was imperfect and impermanent by design. In other words, God never intended that priesthood to stand on its own. It was never designed to accomplish the salvation of God’s people on its own. Its benefit, its efficaciousness, its effectiveness, were entirely tied to the real priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ’s priesthood had not been done, the Old Testament priesthood would have been nothing. It would have had no benefit. That’s an amazing thing about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our great theologians in the Reformed tradition remind us that the benefits of Christ’s work on the cross flow both directions. They flow back and cover the Old Testament saints and they flow forward in covering all those who come after Christ believing in His name. And so the benefits of the Old Testament priesthood are only beneficial insofar as they forecast the perfect priesthood which came and insofar in which they benefitted from the effect of the Lord Jesus Christ’s death on the cross, out of time, as it were. And so He argues that that priesthood by design was never designed to stand on its own and it was by definition impermanent. It always looked forward to a day when it would be replaced by the priesthood of Christ.

The fourth argument, and I think you can see by now why I’m walking you through the argument. It can get confusing as you work through this glorious chapter. If you will look down at **verses 23-26**, the argument is this. In the previous system, under the priesthood of the Old Testament, men ministered who died; and they had to be replaced in order for the Old Testament sacrificial system to go on. But Jesus’ priesthood is eternal. He never has to be replaced. His sacrifice was once for all. His intercession, His mediation goes on forever.

Then finally, in the last verses of the chapter, **verses 27 and 28**, you see him press home one last point of his argument — the fifth point of his argument that Jesus is a perfect and sinless high priest in contrast to the priests of the Old Testament. They had to offer sacrifices even for themselves, because they were weak and sinful just like we are. But the Lord Jesus Christ was perfect, separated from sinners in the sense that He did not share in our propensity for sin, in the natural condemnation for sin which rests upon us as children of wrath; and in the actual living out of sin. He was sinless; He was unfallen; He was perfect in His humanity. And that's his five-point argument for the superiority of Christ.

TEXT: Hebrews 8:1-6

TITLE: *SUPERIORITY OF THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST*

BIG IDEA:

CHRIST'S MINISTRY IS SUPERIOR BECAUSE HE MINISTERS IN A BETTER SANCTUARY AND MEDIATES A BETTER COVENANT

INTRODUCTION:

This section provides a transition from focusing on the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ to the superiority of His New Covenant ministry. Before we dive deeper into the particulars of the New Covenant, we need to follow the author's argument in developing some of the major implications of Jesus' current ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, His completed once-for-all sacrifice, and His mediation of a better covenant based on better promises.

Hewitt: It has been shown that Christ has the true qualifications of priesthood and that His priesthood is superior to the Levitical because He Himself is superior to the Levitical priests. The writer now discusses the ministry of the great High Priest and the place in which this ministry is performed. He finds a proof that Christ's ministry is superior because He ministers in a superior place (**viii. 1-6**). Further aspects of superiority are seen in the threefold pre-eminence of the new covenant over the old (**viii. 7-13**). A more detailed description is then given of the earthly and heavenly tabernacles (**ix. 1-10**) and of the better ministry (**ix. 11-28**).

Kent: Christ's ministry operates from a better covenant, in a superior sanctuary, and with an offering whose efficacy is beyond question.

F. F. Bruce: Having established the superiority of the high priesthood of Christ, our author now proceeds to relate His high priesthood to the themes of covenant, sanctuary and sacrifice, with which the Aaronic priesthood was closely bound up.

Constable: In this section the writer first stated (**Hebrews 8:1-2**) and then explained (**Hebrews 8:3-5**) Jesus Christ's better ministry. It is superior in three respects.

- He serves as a seated priest, having finished His work of offering a final sacrifice for sins (**Hebrews 8:1**).

- He is an enthroned priest, having taken His place at the right hand of God the Father (**Hebrews 8:1**).

- And He is a heavenly priest, having entered the true sanctuary where He now ministers (**Hebrews 8:1-2**).

I. (:1-5) CHRIST'S MINISTRY IS SUPERIOR BECAUSE HE MINISTERS IN A BETTER SANCTUARY

A. (:1-2) Three Superlatives Regarding the Ministry of Christ

1. (:1a) Superior Priest

*“Now the main point in what has been said is this:
we have such a high priest,”*

not so much a summary of what has gone before as instead highlighting the chief point the author wants to make at this point in his argument

Lenski: The main point is not the exaltation of Jesus; this is subsidiary. The main point is his exalted ministration in the heavenly Holy of Holies. For this High-priestly work of his *“he sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens as a ministrant of the Holy Place,”* etc.

2. (:1b) Enthroned Priest

*“who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne
of the Majesty in the heavens,”*

sitting down emphasizes the finished work of the offering of the once-for-all sacrifice but does not mean inactivity – for His intercessory work continues; in addition He is reigning from a position of power

Hewitt: Christ has consummated His great sacrificial work on the cross by taking the seat *on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*. . . the kingly power and dominion of the great High Priest of the Christian Church has crowned the office of priesthood with supreme excellence and dignity.

3. (:2) Heavenly Priest

*“a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle,
which the Lord pitched, not man.”*

Kent: The sanctuary looks at the priest's ministry as in the holy presence of God, and the further description as the true tabernacle regards this priest as ministering in the actual dwelling place of God, not the representational one of Old Testament days.

T. C. Edwards: The Jewish priesthood itself teaches the existence of a heavenly sanctuary. All the arrangements of tabernacle and ritual were made after a pattern shown to Moses on Mount Sinai. The priests, in the tabernacle and through their ritual, ministered to the holiest place, as the visible image and outline of the real holiest place – that is, heaven – which the Lord pitched, not man.

B. (:3-5) Three Contrasts Between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant

1. (:3) Contrast in Sacrifices

*“For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices;
hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer.”*

Kent: A similar description was given in **5:1**. The two terms apparently denote the categories of voluntary thank offerings and required sacrifices for sin.

J. Ligon Duncan: We're reminded that the very essence of the function of the priesthood is mediation, offering up sacrifices for sins of God's people unto God, standing in between and offering up prayers and supplications and intercessions and sacrifices to God, Most High, that He would deal graciously and mercifully to His people. That's the essence of priesthood, to offer that sacrifice, to intercede, to mediate. The author of Hebrews is saying, "Look here, Jesus' mediation, Jesus' sacrifice, was not of something else. It was of Himself. It was the perfect sacrifice, the sacrifice of sacrifices, the sacrifice to end all sacrifices." And again he says, "Show me the sacrifice in the Old Testament that ended all sacrifices."

2. (:4) Contrast in Service

"Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law;"

Kent: the Levitical system was already established, and it left no room for a non-Levite

Mohler: **Verses 3 to 5** detail the priest's duties in the tabernacle. . . Christ is not an earthly priest from the line of Levi that brings his offering to an earthly tabernacle. He ministers in the heavenly tabernacle, so Jesus brings a superior offering.

3. (:5) Contrast in Sanctuary

"who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, 'See,' He says, 'that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.'"

Kent: If (incredible as it seems) service in the heavenly sanctuary be regarded by the readers as something less significant or of less practical relevance than earthly priests, then let them know that the Levitical system was only a reflection of the heavenly reality. It had no real validity of its own. It was merely a copy.

Lane: The contrast developed is not simply between an earthly copy and a heavenly archetype but between a historical situation in the past and one that succeeded it in time. During the former situation, marked by the ministry of the Levitical priests, there was no entrance into the real, heavenly presence of God; full entrance into the eternal presence of God was made possible only with the life and redemptive accomplishment of Jesus. . .

In **Hebrews 8:1-5** the primitive Christian confession of Jesus as the one who has taken his seat at God's right hand is reinterpreted in the light of the theme of heavenly sanctuary and liturgy. The development of this theme, which dominates the argument in **Hebrews 8:1** to **Hebrews 9:28**, is clearly the central and most distinctive aspect of

the writer's interpretation of the saving work of Christ.... By means of a typological interpretation of the OT, the writer asserts that Christ has achieved what the sacrificial action of the high priest on the great Day of Atonement only foreshadowed. His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, which is the true tabernacle where he has unrestricted access to the eternal presence of God, demonstrates the eschatological superiority of his priestly service to the ministry of the Levitical high priests. The priestly ministry of Christ in the celestial sanctuary is of capital importance in the thought of Hebrews.

John Piper: In the New Testament, all the focus is on the reality of the glory of Christ, not the shadow and copy of religious objects and forms. It is stunning how indifferent the New Testament is to such things: there is no authorization in the New Testament for worship buildings, or worship dress, or worship times, or worship music, or worship liturgy or worship size or thirty-five-minute sermons, or Advent poems or choirs or instruments or candles. In fact, the act of getting together as Christians in the New Testament to sing or pray or hear the word of God is never even called worship. I wonder if we do not distort the Biblical meaning of "worship" by using the word almost entirely for an event for which the New Testament never uses the word.

But all of this makes us very free and, perhaps, very frightened. Free to find place and time and dress and size and music and elements and objects that help us orient radically toward the supremacy of God in Christ. And frightened, perhaps, because almost every worship tradition we have is culturally shaped rather than Biblically commanded. The command is a radical connection of love and trust and obedience to Jesus Christ in all of life.

There's a reason for this radical spirituality of worship in the New Testament. And the reason is this. The New Testament is a missionary document. The message of this book is meant to be carried to every people on earth and incarnated in every culture in the world. And that is why our High Priest came and ended tabernacle, and sacrifices and feasts and vestments and dietary laws and circumcision and priesthood. The Old Testament was mainly a come-and-see religion. The New Testament is mainly a go-and-tell religion. And to make that possible, the Son of God has not abolished worship, but made it the kind of radically spiritual engagement with God in Christ that can and must happen in every culture on the earth. Worship is not trivialized in the New Testament, but intensified, deepened, and made the radical fuel and goal of all missions.

The frightening freedom of worship in the New Testament is a missionary mandate. We must not lock this gospel treasure in any cultural straitjacket. Rather let us find the place, the time, the dress, the forms, the music that kindles and carries a passion for the supremacy of God in all things. And may our communion with the living God be so real and the Spirit of God so powerfully present that the heart of what we do becomes the joy of all the peoples we are called to reach."

II. (:6) CHRIST'S MINISTRY IS SUPERIOR BECAUSE HE MEDIATES A BETTER COVENANT

A. Better Ministry

"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry,"

R. Kent Hughes: To possess the benefits of a perfect sacrifice, administered by a perfect priest serving in perfect session, in the perfect substantiality of the ultimate real sanctuary built not by man but by God, was, and is, a grace that came for the first time through the New Covenant in Christ. It is no mere shadow. It is the real thing – *"the true tabernacle set up by the Lord"* (v. 2) – eternally substantial. And it is ours!

Leon Morris: The ministry of priests in a sanctuary made according to the heavenly pattern is obviously one of great dignity. But the author's point is that Jesus' ministry in the heavenly archetype is of incomparably greater dignity and worth.

Lenski: Why should any of the readers turn from Jesus for the mere reason that he is not and can never be a high priest like those of their nation who served only in the sketch and shadow of the true Tabernacle and not perceive that this inability means that *"he has obtained a more excellent ministrations."*

Better Ministry is proved by:

B. Better Covenant

"by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant,"

Mohler: Because Christ has fulfilled the tabernacle's purpose, we can draw near to the very throne of God. Heaven is God's true tabernacle. This great truth permeates the pages of the Old Testament. The King who ransoms his people from their iniquities and brings them peace with God has ushered in the new covenant by his blood. And that covenant is of far greater excellence than the first.

Better Covenant is proved by:

C. Better Promises

"which has been enacted on better promises."

Hewitt: The Mosaic covenant was a covenant of law, but the new is a covenant of promise and the Son of God is the surety that the promises will be fulfilled. The old covenant though educative was impotent and temporary, the new covenant is redemptive, dynamic and eternal.

F. F. Bruce: What the better promises are on which this better covenant is established will appear in the quotation from **Jer. 31:3ff.** which follows in **verses 8-12.** For the better covenant of which our Lord is Mediator is the new covenant foretold by Jeremiah.

Leon Morris: the better promises may be held to refer to the concentration on spiritual things in the new covenant (there is a good deal about possessing the land and the like in the old covenant) and in its unconditional nature.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does our union with Christ impact your understanding of Christ's present ministry at the right hand of God?
- 2) Why is the work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary superior to the ministry of the Levitical priests in the earthly tabernacle?
- 3) What are some of the types or shadows that people have a difficult time moving beyond in today's Christianity?
- 4) How are the New Covenant promises recorded in **Jeremiah 31:31-34** superior to the promises under the Old Covenant?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: A Better Priest for a Better Covenant

1. Jesus is the better priest who ministers in the true tabernacle (8:1-6a). There are three points:

A. OUR HIGH PRIEST IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF THE MAJESTY IN THE HEAVENS (8:1).

B. JESUS MINISTERS IN THE TRUE, HEAVENLY SANCTUARY (8:2-5).

Thus far the author has argued that our high priest has taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. So, rather than ministering in an earthly tabernacle that is only a shadow, Jesus ministers in the true, heavenly tabernacle. **Verse 6** serves as both a conclusion to what he has said and an introduction to the next section. The conclusion is:

C. SINCE JESUS MINISTERS IN HEAVEN RATHER THAN ON EARTH, HE HAS OBTAINED A MORE EXCELLENT MINISTRY (8:6A).

2. Jesus mediates a better covenant (8:6b-13).

Deffinbaugh: From Shadows to Substance

Notice how the author reiterates what he has just said in **verse 26**. In **8:1**, he takes up the expression, “such a high priest,” which he used in **7:26**. Rather than repeating all the particulars of His superiority that we find in **7:26-28**, he sums them all up in what becomes his main point: “*We have such a high priest, one who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up*” (**8:1b-2**). In contrast to Aaron and his descendants, who were earthly priests with all of the limitations that implies, the Son is our heavenly High Priest, with all the advantages that brings. In **chapter 8**, this will be spelled out both in terms of His place of ministry (“*the true tabernacle*” – **verses 1-5**) and the basis of His ministry (“*the New Covenant*” – **verses 6-13**).

The main emphasis of this message will be the “*true tabernacle*,” a topic that will be expanded as the argument of Hebrews continues to unfold. . .

So we can see from Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel that certain Old Testament people, things, or rituals serve as a prototype of an ultimate reality which is to be found only in Christ:

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or Sabbath days – 17 these are only the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ! (Colossians 2:16-17)

Beyond those instances where the term “*true*” is employed, there are many other references to our Lord as the ultimate fulfillment of some earlier event, item, or ritual. As a prophet, Moses was a prototype of the Messiah (**Deuteronomy 18:15**). The exodus was a prototype of the salvation which God would bring about through Jesus (see **Isaiah 43:2, 66; Luke 9:31**). In **John 1:29, 36** and also in **1 Corinthians 5:7**, our Lord is the “*true*” Passover lamb. In **John 3:14-15**, our Lord’s death is likened to the lifting up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness. In **1 Corinthians 10:4**, our Lord is identified as “*the rock*” which followed the Israelites in the wilderness.

All of this is to say that we should not be surprised to find our Lord as the “*true tabernacle*” in the Book of Hebrews. The author is about to prove this connection by citing **Exodus 25:40** in **Hebrews 8:5**. . .

Every high priest must offer gifts and sacrifices of some kind. Thus, this High Priest – our Lord Jesus – must also have something to offer. If He were merely an earthly priest, He would be redundant, for the Aaronic priests function in an earthy tabernacle, offering the sacrifices prescribed by the law. They serve in a tabernacle that is a kind of prototype, representing something vastly superior which exists in heaven. This is why God warned Moses to construct the earthly tabernacle so that it would reflect the greater, heavenly reality, a reality of which he was given a preview on Mount Sinai. The earthly tabernacle is thus the sketch, the shadow; the heavenly reality is the substance. And this heavenly reality is our Lord’s base of operations. Thus, His priestly

ministry overshadows the ministry of the Aaronic priesthood, just as the reality surpasses the replica. . .

What does all this mean? It means that Christ is the fulfillment of every prototype of God's future blessings. We need no one else but Christ. We need preach none other than Christ. And if we reject Christ, we reject the One who is the ultimate provision of God for man. No wonder it is such a fearful thing to turn away from Christ and to turn back to that which was inferior and anticipatory of Him. . .

these heavenly realities put their earthly counterparts into proper perspective. God graciously gave the earthly shadows to meet man's needs for the moment and to prepare the way for the vastly greater heavenly realities which would be realized in Christ. Hebrew Christians would not do well to return to the inferior prototypes, since these could never make one perfect – that is, they could never draw one into an intimate and lasting relationship with God. That could only be done in the person and work of Christ. His work of making atonement for our sins, once for all, was accomplished at Calvary. His work of continually interceding on our behalf as our Great High Priest continues until we have been perfected by our resurrection and transformation when He returns to earth to establish His kingdom. To return to Judaism is to embrace the symbols, but to reject the substance. What a terrible mistake this would be.

John MacArthur: the primary issue and the key to the covenant – the old covenant – is the priesthood. What dominates the Old Testament is the priesthood. That was the agency by which God and man were brought together. And so, the priesthood becomes the key. And if Jesus is to introduce a new covenant, and if He is to be superior to all of those connected with the old, then He must be a superior priest as well. . .

He is still talking about the priesthood of Jesus Christ. This becomes then the great crux of the book of Hebrews. For the – really the old covenant was based upon a functioning priesthood. And so, the new covenant must be based on a functioning priesthood, and if it's better, then He must be a better priest. And so, the writer belabors His point to render the fact that Jesus is a superior priest.

Now, His priesthood is superior primarily, as we have studied, because it is a priesthood after a different order: the order of Melchizedek, which was introduced to us at the beginning of **chapter 5** and **verse 6**.

Now, the priesthood of Melchizedek, being a superior priesthood, and having been prophesied to occur from the Psalms, really indicates that the old priesthood would pass away and be replaced. If there is a superior priesthood, certainly it'll come into view at some time, and David directly prophesied that indeed it would.

So, the writer uses the argument of prophecy to prove that the old priesthood would be set aside and a new one instituted. And the new one is after the order of Melchizedek. . .

We saw that the Melchizedek priesthood was superior, first of all, because it was a priesthood forever. There was no beginning or end, but Aaron's was bounded by time. The Levitical priesthood was only involved with time.

Secondly, the priesthood of which Jesus Christ is a priest is better because it was confirmed by an oath. And we studied the fact that when God makes an oath, that is a permanent confirmation, an eternal confirmation. God never made an oath with the Aaronic priesthood; it was always intended to be temporary.

Thirdly, we saw the priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior because it is a priesthood founded on personal greatness, whereas the Levitical priesthood was founded upon racial heredity. Then we saw that the priesthood of Christ is better because death can't interrupt it. Jesus Christ lives forever, whereas death kept continually interrupting the Levitical priesthood, those priests kept on dying all the time.

We saw not only that, but that Jesus priesthood is better because it offers one sacrifice only, not an endless repetition of sacrifices. Next we saw that Jesus' priesthood is better because it was so pure that He needed to offer no sacrifice for His own sins, and thus it was a holy priest in a way that the Levitical priesthood was not since they had to offer a sacrifice for their own sins before they could do it for anybody else.

Next we saw that it's a superior priesthood because it can take men into God's presence and anchor them there forever, something the old priesthood could not. There was always a veil, but in Christ there is full access.

And then we saw lastly, as closing out **chapter 7**, that it is a priesthood that saves to the uttermost, totally and forever, something also Levitical priests could not do. . .

Now, first of all, He is a superior priest because of His seat. I just love this. "*Now, of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum. We have such an High Priest who is seated*" – now stop right there – "*who is seated.*" Now, your Bible might say "set," but the word means to sit down. He is seated. Now, that's a fantastic statement. And just to make that statement to a Jew, a Jew would go, "Oh. He must get up, quick." You see? "He can't sit down. No priest, no time, ever sat down."

Christ has been presented as our great priest, and now He comes to the sum. Now, I want you to watch this. "*Of all we have spoken, this is the sum.*" The Greek word means the chief point. This is the apex. We've said a lot of great things; here's the most important of all. The most important feature about our Priest is that He's sitting down. . .

It is saying that Jesus Christ has been given the place of honor. He has been ushered into the Holy of Holies. He has been seated with God on God's throne. . .

Now, that leads us to the second feature of the chapter. Not only is He superior because of His seat, but secondly because of His sanctuary. Since He is a superior Priest who has ascended to heaven, He ministers in a superior sanctuary. He doesn't fool around in

a skin tent like the tabernacles, nor does he minister in a physical building on earth. Those temples have all crumbled long ago. His temple is in heaven. He ministers in the real Holy of Holies. . .

Even Moses must have known that this was not the real thing but only the shadow because he saw the pattern that was heavenly. So, Christ must be a priest of a superior sanctuary. He cannot be one in the earthly priesthood; he's in the wrong tribe. And there doesn't need to be a confusion because there are already earthly priests doing what they've been set up to do, but they are only examples; they are only shadows of the heavenly priesthood and the heavenly temple, the heavenly Holy Place. It was first. It was the pattern on which the other was built. And the Jew always thought that the Aaronic priesthood was the first thing. Not so. It was only a pattern of the true priesthood which existed in heaven. . .

The shadow has no independent existence at all. And that is true of the Aaronic priesthood; it has not independent existence in itself; it is merely a shadow of the real, which is heavenly. . .

Then He moves in **verse 6** to make a transition to His final point, *“But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.”*

God makes the covenant on His terms. And a man either takes it as is or rejects it. There are no arguments. In the first place, God knows exactly what is right and exactly and exactly what is best, and any concession God made would be to that which was wrong. So, first of all, God is the author.

Second thing about the new covenant is it is different. It's different than the old. It's not just an attachment to the old covenant. And I see that in the word “new.”

So, God is the author of the new covenant. It is different. It is made with the Jews.

Lenski: Outlining 8:1 – 10:18

- 1) The two Ministries Compared
- 2) The two Testaments Compared
- 3) The two Tabernacles Compared
- 4) The two Kinds of Blood Compared
- 5) The two Kinds of Sacrifice Compared
- 6) The Final Comparison regarding the Removal of Sins

Brooke Westcott: By His offering of Himself He has made purification of sins (see **Hebrews 1:3**); He has applied the virtue of His Blood, to speak in earthly language, to the scene of the worship of redeemed humanity (see **Hebrews 9:23**); He has taken His seat upon the throne, entering in His humanity upon the full enjoyment of every privilege won by His perfect fulfilment of the will of God. Henceforth He applies for the benefit of men the fruits of the Atonement which He has completed.

This work is shown to us in the Epistle in three distinct forms, and we have no authority to go beyond its teaching.

i. Christ intercedes for men as their present representative before God: **Hebrews 7:25, 7:27; 9:24.**

ii. Christ brings the prayers and praises of His people to God, embodying their true spiritual desires, so that at each moment they become articulate through His Spirit and are brought through Him to the Throne: **Hebrews 13:15.**

iii. Christ secures access for His people in their present state to ‘*the holy place,*’ where He Himself is, in His Blood—the virtue of His earthly life lived and offered: **Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 10:19; 20; 21; 22.**

These three forms of Christ's work show under the conditions of human experience what He does for humanity eternally. Our fellowship with God will grow closer, more perfect, more conscious, but still our approach to God, our worship, our spiritual harmony, must always be ‘in Him’ in Whom we have been incorporated.

Spurgeon: The sanctuary was a place in which only one person ever dwelt, and that was God Himself. The mysterious light that they called the Shekinah shone from between the wings of the cherubim; there were the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night—the symbols of the divine presence. It was God's house. No man lived with Him; no man could. The high priest went in but once a year, and out he went again to the solemn assembly. But now, in Christ Jesus, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, we find a sanctuary to reside in, for we dwell in Him; we are one with Him. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and as God was in Christ, so is it written, “*You in me, and I in you*” (**John 17:23**). Such is the union between Christ and His people. Every believer is in Christ, even as God is in Christ. When a Christian loses the realization of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the “*minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle that the Lord set up, not man,*” then it is, above all other seasons, that he sighs and cries for a renewal of communion with Christ. We would envy any, however poor and insignificant they may be, who can maintain unbroken fellowship with their Lord.

TEXT: Hebrews 8:6-13

TITLE: *OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW*

BIG IDEA:

THE NEW COVENANT WITH ITS BETTER PROMISES NECESSITATES THE ABANDONMENT OF THE INADEQUATE OLD COVENANT

INTRODUCTION:

[We covered **verse 6** in the last section ... but it is the perfect **transition** and must be included in this second half of the chapter as well.]

As we progress from the discarding of the obsolete Old Covenant to the embracing of the New Covenant, we need to investigate the advantages and superiority of the New Covenant. Just because something is new does not necessarily make it better. The author wants us to especially focus on four very special promises embodied in the New Covenant that make it superior and more desirable. There is no way that Jewish converts should be tempted to revert back to the religious system of the Old Covenant.

Kent: This is the same sort of argument as pursued in **7:11**. There the author argued that the Levitical system must have been envisioned by God as inadequate, inasmuch as He announced a replacement with a different kind of priest. Here the reasoning is that the Mosaic covenant must not have been able to accomplish all that was needed, since God saw fit to plan another covenant.

Constable: The writer proceeded to explain the superiority of the New Covenant that Jesus Christ ratified with His blood (death) that is better than the Old Mosaic Covenant that He terminated when He died. He first explained the reason for the change in covenants (**Hebrews 8:6-9**), then he quoted the four superior promises of the New Covenant (**Hebrews 8:10-12**), and finally he underlined the certainty of the change (**Hebrews 8:13**).

(:6) TRANSITION: THE NEW COVENANT IS SUPERIOR

A. Better Ministry

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry,”

Better Ministry is proved by:

B. Better Covenant

“by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant,”

Better Covenant is proved by:

C. Better Promises

“which has been enacted on better promises.”

This is the heart of this particular section

Hewitt: The weakness of the Israelites and the imperfection of the old covenant are the reasons given for the inauguration of the better covenant which is established upon **better promises**.

- By the promise of forgiveness of sins man’s deepest spiritual need is met (**12**)
- By the promise of an inward power man’s weakness is overcome (**10**)
- By the promise of possession security is assured (**10**)
- By the promise of a fuller and deeper revelation direct fellowship with God is guaranteed (**11**)

I. (:7-9) THE OLD COVENANT HAD LIMITATIONS WHICH REQUIRED A NEW COVENANT

A. (:7-8a) Negation of the Limited Old Covenant

1. (:7) Introduction of New Covenant Proof of Limitations of Old Covenant

*“For if that first covenant had been faultless,
there would have been no occasion sought for a second.”*

Kent: Although the first covenant was inferred to be faulty in **verse 7**, the actual fault lay not in the covenant itself but in the people who did not keep their part of the agreement. The inadequacy of the covenant was its inability to insure that the people could live up to it.

F. F. Bruce: The new one must be better, for there would have been no point in replacing the old covenant by another no better than itself.

2. (:8a) Limitations of the Old Covenant Rooted in the Inability of Obedience

“For finding fault with them,”

B. (:8-9) Need for a Superior New Covenant

1. (:8) Announcement of Coming New Covenant with United Nation of Israel

“He says, ‘Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;”

Clear indication that despite the divided kingdom at the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy (with Judah’s captivity just beginning), the two kingdoms would be united in the future since the new covenant applies to both.

Kent: It would be accomplished when the people were regathered to their land (**Jer. 30:1-3**), after the time their greatest suffering known as “*Jacob’s trouble*” (**30:7**). All their enemies would be destroyed (**30:16**), and their ancient homeland would be rebuilt

(30:17, 18). The new covenant would bring about a spiritual transformation individually as well as nationally. The prophecy was thus a ray of hope for a downtrodden people.

Zane Hodges: It is clear that Christians of the present time also stand under its blessings (cf. **Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6**). This perception does not lead to an inappropriate confusion between Israel and the church. The New Covenant is God's appointed vehicle for fulfilling the Abrahamic blessings to Israel. But the Abrahamic Covenant also promised universal blessing, so the New Covenant becomes as well God's vehicle of salvation for believers since the Cross.

2. (:9) Admission of the Failure of the Old Covenant Based on Historical Testimony

“Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers On the day when I took them by the hand To lead them out of the land of Egypt; For they did not continue in My covenant, And I did not care for them, says the Lord.”

Richard Phillips: the chilling cause-and-effect relationship so well displayed in the Old Testament . . . That is what happens when people reject God – he turns away from them. The result for Old Testament Israel was military defeat, the vast destruction of their society, and national enslavement. If salvation meant deliverance from slavery in Egypt, rejection of God meant a return to bondage in the form of the Babylonian captivity.

II. (:10-12) THE NEW COVENANT PROVIDES BETTER PROMISES THAT ARE INWARDLY AND SPIRITUALLY FOCUSED – 4 BETTER PROMISES:

A. (:10a) Superior Power -- Promise of Regeneration and Inward Transformation

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, And I will write them upon their hearts.”

Kent: Compliance would thus be by inner desire, not by outward compulsion.

Hewitt: This dynamic was lacking in the old covenant, for though the law could reveal with vivid clearness the ways of good and evil, it failed to give to the Israelites the power which would have enabled them to do the good and resist the evil. On the contrary, as the forbidden fruit held real attractions for Eve, so the forbidden ways of the law held similar attractions. **Romans vii** shows that it is possible to delight in the law of God with the inward man yet at the same time submit to another law which makes war against the law of the mind. A new power was needed and is supplied under the new covenant. This power is not impersonal, but is in fact the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who enables the believer to resist the attractions and overcome

the power of evil. It is the authority of the Spirit of life who through union with Christ Jesus makes us free from the power of sin which ends in death (**Rom. viii. 2, 3**). It is possible that the mind covers the intellect, and the heart the will and affections, for the new law of God was to be effective in the whole spiritual life of the Christian.

F. F. Bruce: What was needed was a new nature, a heart liberated from its bondage to sin, a heart which not only spontaneously knew and loved the will of God but had the power to do it.

B. (:10b) Superior Relationship -- Promise of Secure Relationship with God with No More Apostasy

*“And I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.”*

R. Kent Hughes: This was one of the formula expressions of the goal of the Old Covenant.

Ex. 19:5; Ex. 6:7

Leon Morris: The God who saves people in Christ is the God of His redeemed in a new and definitive way. And when people have been saved at the awful cost of Calvary, they are the people of God in a way never before known.

C. (:11) Superior Knowledge -- Promise of Universal Revelation and Knowledge of God based on Personal Experience

“And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, And everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' For all shall know Me, From the least to the greatest of them.”

Phil. 3:10

No class system with God; the blessing of a personal relationship with God and intimate knowledge of Him is not limited by education or race or social status

F. F. Bruce: Such knowledge of Him by whom they are known, increasing until it attains its consummation in knowing even as they are known, is of the essence of that “*perfection*” to which our author invites his readers to press forward.

Peter O'Brien: At one level the people of Israel knew their God, because he had revealed himself to them, in contrast with the surrounding nations, which did not know him. But Hebrews recalls that the works God performed for Moses' generation (**Heb. 3:9; Ps. 95**), which displayed his power, did not result in the people knowing his ways (**Heb. 3:10**). After the generation that entered Canaan under Joshua died out, the following generation ‘*did not know the LORD*’ (**Jdg 2:10**). Later Hosea complained that there was no ‘*knowledge of God in the land*’ of Israel (**Hos. 4:1, 6**). Jeremiah's prophecy envisages not simply a national knowledge of God. Rather, it is a personal

knowledge of him that is in view, such as Jeremiah himself possessed. God promised that every member of the new covenant community would know him directly and personally, from the least of them to the greatest. This is the result of his writing his laws on each heart or, in the words of Ezekiel, because each would be given a new heart and spirit by God. The expression, no longer will they teach their neighbors, is not a rejection of leadership or teaching as such. It is a powerful rhetorical device that underscores ‘the universality of this unmediated knowledge’. The emphatic words, ‘*all of them*’ will know me, demonstrate this. To know God is to recognize him, to trust him, and to obey him. Every believer is able to approach God in a personal and direct way ‘with confidence’ because Jesus has made this possible through his high-priestly work (**Heb 4:16; 7:25; 10:19–22; 12:22–24**). Such intimate knowledge increases until it reaches its consummation, when all of us will know fully as we are fully known.

D. (:12) Superior Forgiveness -- Promise of Permanent Forgiveness of Sins Based on Finality of Sacrifice of Christ

*“For I will be merciful to their iniquities,
And I will remember their sins no more.”*

R. Kent Hughes: This is precisely what the Old Covenant could not do. Under the Old Covenant, sins were never completely forgiven because they were never truly forgotten. They were covered, awaiting and pointing to the true forgiveness through Christ’s death.

A. M. Stibbs: The foundation act of divine mercy on which all else is built is therefore the priestly work of putting away sin. The High Priest who does this, and makes it possible for men to draw near to God, thus becomes the one who mediates this new covenant.

Hewitt: By the use of “*for*” the suggestion is made that the promise of forgiveness is the foundation of all the other promises. The words *I will be merciful to their unrighteousness* show that the source of forgiveness is not human merit but God’s mercy and grace. The ground of forgiveness is not man’s repentance but the sacrifice of Christ. It is the new covenant which gives full and complete assurance that God will remember our *sins and . . . iniquities . . . no more*.

F. F. Bruce: Under the old sacrificial system, there was “*a remembrance made of sins year by year*” (**Ch. 10:3**); if no such remembrance of sins is made under the new covenant, it is because of a sacrifice offered up once for all (**Ch. 7:27**).

Warren Wiersbe: What does it mean that God remembers our sins and iniquities no more? (**Heb. 8:12**) This important statement is quoted again in **Hebrews 10:16–17**. Does it mean that our all-knowing God can actually forget what we have done? If God forgot anything, He would cease to be God! The phrase “*remember no more*” means “hold against us no more.” God recalls what we have done, but He does not hold it against us. He deals with us on the basis of grace and mercy, not law and merit. Once sin has been forgiven, it is never brought before us again. The matter is settled eternally.

Craig A. Blaising: new covenant promises are not yet fully realized. The promises in Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel describe a people who have the law written in their hearts, who walk in the way of the Lord, fully under the control of the Holy Spirit. These same promises look to a people who are raised from the dead [cf. **Ezekiel 37**], enjoying the blessings of an eternal inheritance with God dwelling with them and in them forever.

III. (:13) THE OLD COVENANT HAS BECOME OBSOLETE

A. Obsolete by Pronouncement of Replacement

“When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete.”

B. Obsolete by Historical Transition

“But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”

At the time of the writing before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the old covenant was winding down and becoming obsolete. By now it is totally obsolete.

Leon Morris: the old one is obsolete. And that in turn means that it is close to disappearing. It is not something people should go back to with nostalgia. The words used of it emphasize that it is ineffective, unable to meet people’s need, outworn. . .

[The New Covenant] also points to continuity. The new arrangement retains the term “*covenant*” and it is established on the basis of sacrifice. It refers to the fulfillment of what is superseded rather than outright opposition to it.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) If OT Jews were judged for not continuing in their covenant relationship with God, why should we not live in fear of the New Covenant not guaranteeing us future blessing?
- 2) What are the ways in which the new covenant is superior to the old covenant?
- 3) What is the difference between forgiveness under the Old Covenant and under the new Covenant?
- 4) How is evangelism impacted (in terms of our motivation, our methodology, etc.) by the truths of the New Covenant?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: Four views are current today regarding the relation of the **church** to the new covenant:

View 1: The church has replaced Israel as the participant in the new covenant. This is the viewpoint of amillennialists, who see the nation of Israel as permanently displaced and all the blessings promised to here now fulfilled by the church. (**Lenski**)

View 2: The new covenant is with the nation of Israel only. This is one of several views suggested by various dispensational premillennialist. It interprets the words of Jeremiah literally and sees no warrant for inclusion of the New Testament church. (**J. N. Darby**)

View 3: There are two new covenants, one with Israel and one with the New Testament church. By this view one is required to differentiate among the New Testament references those referring to the new covenant promised to Israel from those describing the new covenant with the church. (**Chafer, Ryrie, Walvoord**)

View 4: There is one covenant to be fulfilled eschatologically with Israel, but participated in soteriologically by the church today. This view recognizes that Christ's death provided the basis for instituting the new covenant, and also accepts the unconditional character of Jeremiah's prophecy which leaves not room for Israel's forfeiture. At the same time it also notes that the New Testament passages definitely relate New Testament Christians to this covenant. (**Scofield**)

Bruce Hurt: WITH WHOM IS THE NEW COVENANT MADE?

With the house of Israel and the house of Judah - Note carefully that because two divisions of the kingdom are distinguished, this is clearly a literal promise, and should silence the false teaching that the church has replaced Israel. In other words, it would be ridiculous to teach that the church was "*the house of Israel and the house of Judah*". To repeat, the New Covenant is made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not with the Church. Why would the writer of Hebrews emphasize the two houses? Remember that the letter is addressed to Hebrew professing believers and he is seeking to deliver them from the danger that they would depart from the faith that they had professed. What better way to jolt them back to reality, then to remind the Hebrew professing believers of the great covenant that was given to Jeremiah to the Jewish people.

This distinction is vitally important because most of us are of neither Jewish house. The question arises then "How did we Gentiles "get in" if this New Covenant was not given to us?" How do we qualify? As explained elsewhere in these notes, the New Covenant is essentially a repetition or extension of the Abrahamic promises, then we can understand how Gentile believers might be the recipients of those promises. Stated another way, one can understand the New Covenant as the grounds of fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. And if you look at the Abrahamic covenant, you will note that

even in this covenant, provision was made for Gentile believers...

*And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:3)*

All the families would include Jews and Gentiles and so provision was made for Gentiles even in the Abrahamic Covenant. The New Covenant provides for and explains the redemptive grounds for the Abrahamic Covenant (which is an "everlasting covenant", e.g., see **Genesis 17:7,8**, cp the unconditional Davidic covenant which is also "an everlasting covenant" - see **2 Sa 23:5**). And so we see that these unconditional covenants while distinct are not wholly separate covenants but are related as part of God's so-called "covenantal program" (the everlasting Davidic covenant is also part of this "program"). And in this covenantal program, the gracious God has made provision for both Jews and Gentiles to enter into the covenant promises. Without going into great detail at this time, it should be added that Paul further explains how Gentiles ("*wild olive branches*") are grafted in to the rich root of the natural olive tree, this rich root representing the Abrahamic covenant that promised blessing to both Jew and Gentile through the coming Redeemer, Jesus Christ. (See **Romans 11:17** note, cp **Galatians 3:7** "*be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham*" where Paul speaks of Abraham's spiritual descendants as those who believe in Christ for salvation.)

At risk of becoming too detailed, the Gentile believer who carefully reads these notes and studies the Abrahamic covenant, will conclude that although Gentile believers are spiritual descendants of Abraham, we do not inherit the specific promises of the Land (**Ge 15:18ff**) that God made to Abraham that were passed on to Abraham's son Isaac and then to Isaac's son Jacob (God later changed his name to Israel), and in turn passed through Jacob (Israel – e.g., read **Ge 35:9, 10, 11, 12** esp the phrase "*to your descendants after you*" - Gentiles are not the descendants of Jacob) to the physical Israelites who would come to believe in their Jewish Messiah . . .

The promises of the Land of Israel will be fulfilled to those believing physical/biological Jews at the return of Messiah to set up His 1000 year kingdom (see Millennium). Stated another way, believing Gentiles do not inherit the promises made to physical/biological Jews who become believers, as is often taught by those who hold to Amillennialism and believe the phrase the Israel of God (**Galatians 6:16**) refers to the church. . . Believing Gentiles do not become Jews and the believing church does not become Israel. When Messiah returns at the end of the Great Tribulation to defeat the antichrist and the world forces arrayed against Him (and against the nation of Israel), He will establish His kingdom and bring about the final fulfillment of the covenant promises of "*the Land*" (of Israel - first promised in **Genesis 15:18ff**).

Deffinbaugh: What's New About the New Covenant?

The New Covenant is a series of promises that God made to Israel and Judah, promises which are unchangeable and irreversible, since they are sealed by God's oath. These promises make the New Covenant vastly superior to the Old Covenant, so much so that the New Covenant replaces the Old, making it obsolete. . .

The Old Covenant will not save the Israelites, no matter how great their determination to keep it. It will only condemn them. What, then, was wrong with the Old Covenant? The New Testament tells us. The problem with the Old Testament law is not with the law itself, for it sets forth a standard of righteousness that is holy, righteous, and good: So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good (**Romans 7:12**).

The problem with the law is that, in my flesh, I am powerless to resist sin and to achieve the kind of righteousness God requires.

The problem with the law is that it cannot deliver me from the power of sin and from the guilt of my sin.

In Galatians 3, Paul puts the law in its proper place, showing us how it fits into God's purpose of providing salvation for lost sinners. Allow me to emphasize just the main points of what Paul is saying here in **Galatians 3**.

1. God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled in Christ (**3:16**). Christ is the promised "seed" through whom God's blessings would come.
2. The Law came after the Abrahamic Covenant and did not nullify or change it (**3:17**).
3. Inheritance of God's blessings was based upon God's promise (to Abraham) and not the Law (**3:18**).
4. The Law was a temporary measure to lead us to Christ (3:19f.). The Law was our tutor, to lead us to Christ.
5. Now that Christ has come, we are no longer under a tutor - the Law (**3:25**).

This brings us to the New Covenant, which is the focus of our author's attention in this chapter of Hebrews. From early on, it was not only clear that the Israelites would fail to keep the Mosaic Covenant, but that God would save His people, based on His covenant with Abraham. [**Deut. 4:25-31**]

These words in Deuteronomy come into clearer focus in the light of what our author has written in **Hebrews 6:13-20**.

The covenant to which Moses refers in **Deuteronomy 4** is a covenant that God confirmed with an oath. And according to **Hebrews 6**, this covenant is the covenant God made with Abraham. Thus, while the Mosaic Covenant would be broken by Israel and could never save anyone, the Israelites' hope was to be in God, based upon His covenant with Abraham.

Now, when we come to the New Testament, we find that God's salvation in Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of both the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant, as the result of our Lord's work at Calvary. Put differently, it is by means of the New Covenant that God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled.

Bruce Hurt: The table below is based on **Pastor Cole's** sermon The Better Covenant in which he discusses 12 distinctions between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, basing his discussion in turn on **John Owen's** original discussion of 17 distinctions.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE OLD COVENANT & THE NEW COVENANT	
OLD COVENANT	NEW COVENANT
Does not offer Justification by faith Brings condemnation Gal 3:10, 11, 12, Hebrews 7:19	Offers Justification by faith Brings "Acquittal"
Does not impart spiritual life Galatians 3:21	Offers spiritual life 2 Corinthians 3:6
Given to define our sinfulness To drive us to faith in Christ Galatians 3:19-24, Romans 5:20	God "forgets" our sins Hebrews 8:12
Led to Bondage Galatians 4:21-31, Acts 15:10	Offers Freedom Galatians 5:1, 1John 5:3
Law was external Offers no power to meet demands Dt 29:4,	Law is internal Provides power to obey Ezek. 36:26, 27, Romans 8:3, 4
Conditional Covenant Severe penalties for disobedience Failure because fault in hearers Deut 28:15-68, Hebrews 8:8	Unconditional Covenant God Initiates Success depends on God's I will's Heb 8:10, 11, 12
Covered over Sin No full, complete forgiveness Hebrews 9:9, 10:1, 2, 3, 4	Removes Sin Offers full, complete forgiveness Hebrews 9:14, 10:10, 14
Based on inferior priesthood Hebrews 7:11	Based on superior priesthood of Jesus Hebrews 7:24-8:6
Only some know God (believers thru Abrahamic Covenant)	All shall know God Hebrews 8:10b, 1Cor 12:13
Worshippers kept at a Distance Exodus 19:12, 13, 21, 22, 24	Worshippers Invited to Draw Near Hebrews 4:16, 7:19, 10:22
Temporary Gal. 3:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25; Heb 8:13, 9:9, 10	Everlasting Hebrews 9:12, 13:20

TEXT: Hebrews 9:1-10

TITLE: *WORSHIP UNDER THE OLD COVENANT SYSTEM*

BIG IDEA:

THE OLD COVENANT WORSHIP SYSTEM WITH ITS EXTERNAL FOCUS ON THE EARTHLY SANCTUARY AND PRIESTLY SERVICE MUST BE VIEWED AS INADEQUATE AND TEMPORARY

INTRODUCTION:

Since the Old Covenant system had become obsolete and was now replaced with the New Covenant, how should the former system of worship be viewed in light of Christ? Certainly the author is by no means out to disparage the Levitical system despite its inadequacies and temporary role. God had designed it to serve a purpose. But that purpose was temporary and preparatory to the fulfillment in Christ when full access to God would be provided and a sacrifice that could deal with the inner effects of sin.

Richard Phillips: The Old Testament tabernacle contained items that symbolized great redemptive truths. It showed what must be done for sinners to approach God, and typified the blessings of our relationship with God.

F. F. Bruce: The inadequacy of the old order as compared with the new is now set forth with reference first to the arrangements of the sanctuary under the old covenant and then to the sacrificial ritual associated with that sanctuary.

Guthrie: In case any of the readers should think that the writer was underestimating the old, he now outlines some of the glories of the old tabernacle. He is impressed by the orderliness of the arrangements within the Levitical cultus, and aims to present this in order to demonstrate the greater glory of the new.

Deffinbaugh: In our text, the author is reminding his readers that it is not possible to “*draw near*” to God in intimate fellowship by means of the Old Covenant, the tabernacle, and the Levitical priesthood.

MacArthur: In the illustration of the old sanctuary and its services, the Holy Spirit is teaching at least three things.

- No Access (Limited Cleansing)
- Imperfect Cleansing
- Temporary Cleansing

The old sanctuary and services and significance were meaningful and purposeful, very purposeful. But they were limited, imperfect, and temporary, and therefore ultimately unsatisfactory. They pictured Christ, but they could not do the work of Christ. Part of their purpose, in fact, was to show Israel that they **were** only pictures of better things to come. They not only pictured Christ but also their own built-in inadequacies.

I. (:1-5) OVERVIEW OF THE SANCTUARY AND ITS CONTENTS – POINTING TOWARDS FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

A. (:1) Old Covenant Worship System

1. Regulations for Priestly Service

“Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship”

The details of how to approach God in worship under the Old Covenant were clearly revealed to God’s people. It was not a matter of individual preference where every person could set up their own approach to worship. Therefore, this system cannot be discarded lightly. It must be viewed as preparatory and typical of the new reality of worship based on the sacrifice provided by Christ.

Hewitt: the old had this in common with the new, viz. worship and a sanctuary (cf. **Moffatt**)

Constable: In this pericope the writer concentrated on the tabernacle and its provisions for cultic worship. "Cultic" refers to the rituals involved in religious service. The word "*first*" (Gr. *prōte*) links this section with the former one (cf. **Hebrews 8:13**). The writer introduced two subjects in the first verse: regulations of divine worship, and the earthly sanctuary. He then proceeded to expound them in reverse order, as he often did in this homily (**Hebrews 9:2-10**).

2. Sanctuary

“and the earthly sanctuary.”

Kent: “*belonging to the world*” – identifies the tabernacle as mundane, being part of this world’s scene and built by man (**8:2; 9:11, 24**). There is no implication of evil in the expression here.

Hewitt: belonging to the visible world, i.e. earthly, material, and thus indicating something imperfect and temporary.

Mohler: The tabernacle stood as the epicenter of old covenant worship. This is why the author refers to it with the phrase “*earthly sanctuary*.” The tabernacle was the place where Israel offered sacrifices and where the priests interceded on behalf of the people. Because the tabernacle was so central to the old covenant, Israel was intensely focused on what happened inside it. The new covenant, however, shift our focus away from the tabernacle. Under the new covenant, a central location of worship required by God no longer exists. Since the Spirit unites us to Christ by faith, Christians now worship the Father “*in Spirit and in truth*,” not in a tabernacle (**John 4:24**). Furthermore, Christ now dwells in the midst of his people (**Matt 18:20**). John even describes Christ’s incarnation in language similar to that applied to the tabernacle: “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (**John 1:14**). The epicenter of new covenant worship is not in a place, it’s in a person: Jesus Christ.

B. (:2) Outer Chamber = The Holy Place

1. Location of the Outer Tabernacle

“For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one,”

Kent: It should be noted that the tabernacle is in view here, not any of the succeeding temples.

2. Contents of the Outer Tabernacle

a. Lampstand

“in which were the lampstand”

b. Table

“and the table”

Kent: The table was made of acacia wood covered with gold (**Exod. 25:23-30; 37:10-16**). On it were placed weekly the twelve cakes of bread (**Lev. 24:5-9**).

c. Sacred Bread

“and the sacred bread;”

3. Name of the Outer Tabernacle

“this is called the holy place.”

Mohler: The tent reflected the holiness of God. It communicated his transcendence, perfection, and righteousness.

C. (:3-5) Inner Chamber = Holy of Holies

1. (:3a) Location of the Inner Tabernacle

“And behind the second veil,

Hewitt: The veil typified and represented the barrier between the holy God and sinful man, and revealed that the ritualism of the old covenant could not provide for the people a permanent way into God’s presence. **Matthew xxvii. 51** tells us that at Christ’s death the veil of the temple was rent *“from the top to the bottom.”*

2. (:3b) Name of the Inner Tabernacle

*“there was a tabernacle
which is called the Holy of Holies,”*

3. (:4-5a) Contents of the Inner Tabernacle

a. (:4a) Golden Altar of Incense

“having a golden altar of incense”

Richard Phillips: The golden altar of incense rested immediately in front of the veil separating the outer room from the inner sanctum (see **Ex. 30:1-6**). Every morning and

evening, when the priests came into the holy place to keep the lampstand burning, they also refreshed the incense for this altar. The Old Testament makes it clear that this item was located in the outer room and not the holy of holies, as the writer of Hebrews must have known. In verse 4, however, he associates it with the inner sanctum because of the vital role the cloud of incense played in covering the high priest's approach as he passed through the curtain on the day of atonement.

b. (:4b) Ark of the Covenant

1) Description of the Ark of the Covenant

*“and the ark of the covenant
covered on all sides with gold,”*

Mohler: the ark attested to God's covenant love for Israel and his steadfast faithfulness toward them.

2) Contents of the Ark of the Covenant

a) *“in which was a golden jar holding the manna,”*

Mohler: The golden urn holding manna served as a constant testimony to God's sustaining care of Israel for forty years in the wilderness (Exod 16:31-34).

b) *“and Aaron's rod which budded,”*

Mohler: served as a reminder of how God kept his people alive in the wilderness and of how God chose Aaron for the priesthood (Num. 17:1-13).

c) *“and the tables of the covenant.”*

Mohler: The tablets reminded the people of God's covenant with them and of their responsibility to uphold that covenant by obeying the law.

c. (:5a) Cherubim of Glory Over the Mercy Seat

*“And above it were the cherubim of glory
overshadowing the mercy seat;”*

(:5b) Summary

“but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.”

Kent: The author did not wish to discuss the above individual terms in greater detail because he desired to emphasize Christ's superior ministry, not the types that foreshadowed Christ. Thus he proceeds after the briefest mention to the service which was carried on in the tabernacle.

II. (:6-10) OVERVIEW OF THE SERVICE BY THE PRIESTS – POINTING TOWARDS FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

A. (:6) Priestly Service in the Outer Tabernacle

1. Preparation for Worship

“Now when these things have been thus prepared,”

Deffinbaugh: So now the tabernacle has been set up, and the furnishings are in place so that worship can commence. Just how did worship work under the Old Covenant, implemented by means of the tabernacle? We are told how it worked in **verses 6 and 7**. **Verse 6** describes the daily worship that took place in the holy place, the outer portion of the tabernacle. **Verse 7** contrasts the daily workings of the priests in the outer chamber of the tabernacle with the once-a-year ministry of the high priest on the Day of Atonement which took place in the holy of holies.

2. Participation in Worship

“the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle,”

3. Performance of Worship

“performing the divine worship,”

Hewitt: In their daily service the priests would light the lamps every evening and trim them every morning (**Ex. xxvii. 20, 21, xxx. 7 ff.**). They would renew the twelve loaves of bread every sabbath (**Lv. xxiv. 5 ff.**) and burn incense on the golden altar at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice (**Ex. xxx. 7, 8**).

B. (:7) Priestly Service in the Inner Tabernacle

1. Access Restricted to the High Priest

“but into the second only the high priest enters,”

2. Access Restricted to Once Per Year

“once a year,”

3. Atonement for Sin by Blood Sacrifice Required

“not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.”

R. Kent Hughes: The old system was inadequate for two encompassing reasons – its limited access and its limited efficacy. . . There was no provision in the Old Covenant’s sacrificial system for forgiveness of premeditated sins! Premeditated, willful sins were called sins of the “high hand,” and for such there was no remedy. **Numbers 15:30, 31** is unequivocal: *“But anyone who sins defiantly [literally, with a high hand], whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord, and that person must be cut off from his people. Because he has despised the Lord’s word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him.”*

What could he do? Only one thing – come to God with a contrite heart and throw himself on God’s mercy (**Psalm 51**). . .

A clear conscience in the absolute sense of the word was beyond their reach. The old system was deficient. It was external and superficial.

C. (:8-10) Symbolic and Temporary Nature of This Worship

1. (:8-9a) Symbolic Nature of This Worship

a. Signified by the Holy Spirit

“The Holy Spirit is signifying this,”

Richard Phillips: On a first reading we might think that this simply refers to the Spirit’s role in inspiring Scripture. The writer of Hebrews speaks this way on two other occasions (**3:7; 10:15**). However, that is not what is being said in this case. For one thing, there is no citation from the Old Testament found here. For another, the verb is not past tense but present tense. We see, therefore, a deliberate contrast. On the one hand, the old tabernacle **was showing** that the way was barred, because the curtain kept the priests from the holy of holies. Now the Holy Spirit **is showing** the opposite, that the way to God is finally open. . .

The point of **verse 8** is that the Holy Spirit’s work proves we have access to God in the new covenant. . . The Spirit’s work within us reminds us that we are now in fellowship with God and imparts to us the knowledge of his grace (**Gal. 3:13-14; 1 John 1:3; Rom. 8:14-16**).

b. Significance

“that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing,”

Kent: The Old Testament tabernacle was the visible demonstration by the Holy Spirit (viewed here as the Father’s agent in revealing these truths to men) that perfect access to God by all people did not yet exist.

F. F. Bruce: What he means is that unimpeded access to the presence of God was not granted until Christ came to accomplish His sacrificial ministry.

c. Symbolism

“which is a symbol for the present time.”

2. (:9b-10) Temporary Nature of This Worship

a. (:9b) Lack of Permanent Efficacy – Imperfect Offerings

“Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience,”

Mohler: The author of Hebrews shows that not even the highest of all sacrifices – the sacrifice made by the high priest on the Day of Atonement in the most holy place – could cleanse the conscience of the worshiper. Even it couldn’t bring about newness of life. This is why gifts and sacrifices continued to be offered in Israel. They had to be offered because there was never final purification from sin. As soon as an Israelite

finished offering one sacrifice for sin, he needed to offer another.

The contrast could not be clearer. While the old covenant required incessant and imperfect offerings that could not purify the depths of the human heart, Christ accomplished final and full purification. Jesus is the hope of the new covenant. When he appeared as high priest (**Heb 9:11**), everything changed.

Constable: This comparison helps us keep externals in their proper perspective as secondary to inward reality with God. Relationship with God purifies the conscience. It is possible to fulfill all the outward obligations of religion and still have a conscience that is not right with God (**Hebrews 9:9**). This is one of the tragic inadequacies of religion that does not involve relationship with God.

- b. (:10) Lack of Permanent Application – Temporary Regulations
“since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.”

Leon Morris: The externality of the old way is brought out from another viewpoint. It concerned only matters like *“food and drink and various ceremonial washings.”*

Deffinbaugh: We know that the source of our sin is not from outward contamination, but from a heart that is in rebellion against God. For sin to be dealt with there must be an adequate sacrifice, and it must cleanse the heart. This is precisely what was promised in the New Covenant, as we have read in **chapter 8.24**. The tabernacle system dealt with matters like food and drink and outward impurities. It could not solve man’s sin problem, and thus its worship would always be less than ideal. No wonder the Pharisees were always concerned about external matters: **Matthew 23:25-28**.

Kent: The Old Testament tabernacle and its ministry was intended only as a type. It was temporary, an external figure dealing with material matters to represent basic spiritual truths. The value lasted only until the time of a new order. That new order had its inauguration when Christ offered Himself as the perfect and final sacrifice for sin. He fulfilled the previous types and shadows, and in this new order the Spirit brings about an inward change, far more basic than ceremonial cleansing. This new order has as its basis the new covenant discussed in chapter 8. Now that Christ has died, there is no cause for anyone to be occupied with the ceremonial cleansing embodied in Judaism.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What symbolism of the person and work of Christ do you see in the furnishings of the tabernacle?
- 2) How would you respond to people who claim that we can each determine for ourselves how to approach God in worship?

3) How has the sacrifice of Christ adequately addressed your own conscience in terms of sin and guilt and fear and shame?

4) How will worship in eternity be consistent with the permanent form of worship instituted under the New Covenant?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. Kent Hughes: What sumptuous ritual! This was the Old Covenant at its apex. Everything was there – the Tabernacle so rich in ornament and meaning, which bore in its *sanctus sanctorum* God’s presence – and a ritual that taught both the holiness of God and the depth of man’s sin, in that no one could enter God’s presence without the shedding of blood. It was *sui generis*, one of a kind. It stood alone in the world’s religions. There has been nothing that comes close.

But with all of this, it was nevertheless inadequate. And this is what the friends of the writer of Hebrews must see.

Andrew Murray: The veil was the symbol of separation between a holy God and sinful man: they cannot dwell together. The tabernacle thus expressed the union of two apparently conflicting truths. God called man to come and worship and serve Him, and yet he might not come too near; the veil kept him at a distance . . . Love calls the sinner near; righteousness keeps him back. The Holy One bids Israel build Him a house in which He will dwell, but forbids them entering His presence there.

Wiersbe: The Old Covenant sanctuary was inferior for five reasons.

- It was an earthly sanctuary (**Hebrews 9:1**),
- it was a type of something greater (its antitype; **Hebrews 9:2-5**),
- and it was inaccessible to the people (**Hebrews 9:6-7**).
- Furthermore it was only temporary (**Hebrews 9:8**)
- and its ministry was external rather than internal (**Hebrews 9:9-10**).

Steven Cole: God’s Remedy for Guilt

Our society has thrown out guilt as a bad carryover from our Puritan past. Movie stars and celebrities not only cast off their guilt, but also go on TV to boast about their shameful deeds. Even Christians who have fallen into sin explain how they have come to feel good about themselves in spite of their failures. They complain about self-righteous, judgmental Christians who won’t accept their “shortcomings.”

God’s remedy for guilt is the blood of Christ.

We will examine the text under three points: the imperfection of the old sacrificial system (**9:1-10**); what Christ’s sacrifice of Himself accomplished (**9:11-14**); and, the

practical result, that we now can serve the living God (9:14).

1. God designed the old sacrificial system as a temporary, imperfect way of pointing ahead to Christ (9:1-10).

These verses fall into two sections:

A. GOD DESIGNED THE EARTHLY TABERNACLE AS A PICTURE OF CHRIST (9:1-5).

The author does not explain the symbolic meaning of any of these things, but hurries on to his point, that these things were temporary and looked ahead to Christ. But let me comment briefly. The lampstand pictures Christ, not here as the light of the world (because the world was not allowed into the holy place), but as the one who illumines the things of God through the Holy Spirit (the oil) to those who draw near. The table of sacred bread pictures Christ as the sustenance of His chosen people and their communion with Him. The altar of incense shows Christ interceding for His people in God's presence.

The ark pictured the very presence of God. The golden jar of manna shows Christ as the daily bread of His people. Aaron's rod that budded shows Christ, the branch, chosen above others because He alone is life-giving. The tables of the covenant reveal God's holy standards. Neither the pot of manna nor Aaron's rod existed in Solomon's time, but the two stone tables were still there (1 Kings 8:9). The ark itself apparently disappeared when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in 586 B.C. The later temple only contained a stone slab in the Holy of Holies.

The author moves on to describe the familiar tabernacle ritual:

B. GOD DESIGNED THE MINISTRY OF THE PRIESTS IN THE TABERNACLE AS A PICTURE OF THE WORK OF CHRIST (9:6-10).

1). THE OLD SYSTEM PROVIDED LIMITED ACCESS TO GOD.

2). THE OLD SYSTEM PROVIDED LIMITED EFFICACY OF THE SACRIFICES. Up to this point, the author is arguing that the Old Testament sacrificial system was not God's complete and final provision for the guilt of our sins. It all pointed ahead to Christ.

2. The blood of Christ obtained eternal redemption and a clean conscience for us (9:11-14).

TEXT: Hebrews 9:11-14

TITLE: *ADVANTAGES OF THE NEW COVENANT WORSHIP SYSTEM*

BIG IDEA:

ONLY THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST UNDER THE NEW COVENANT CAN CLEANSE THE CONSCIENCE AND OBTAIN ETERNAL REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION:

Having clearly set forth the limitations of the Old Covenant, the author of Hebrews is now prepared to turn our attention back to the great high priest of the New Covenant who serves after the order of Melchizedek. Only Christ serves in the heavenly tabernacle. Only Christ has offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice so that the shedding of His blood can address our sin and guilt problem once-for-all to obtain for us eternal salvation. Only Christ can cleanse our inner man and so transform us that we have the privilege of serving and worshiping the true God instead of continuing on in the futility of our dead works.

Derek Thomas: This passage is describing for us a “how much more” argument. It’s drawing a contrast (actually several contrasts) between worship under the old covenant and worship under the new covenant; worship that involved tents, tabernacles, temples, outer courts, inner courts, the sacrifice of animals, the shedding of blood, ritual cleansing....and the blood of Jesus.

Robert Haldane: In all respects the ministry of our great High Priest is superior to the service of the Mosaic high priest. Jesus is a High Priest of good things to come, not of things present which are seen and temporal, but of those which are unseen and eternal. He ministers in a greater and more perfect tabernacle, **Hebrews 8:2**; He entered once for all into the most holy place, even heaven itself, having obtained eternal redemption for us. So glorious is His sacrifice that it neither requires nor admits of being repeated. It secures eternal redemption for all for whom it was offered. The Jewish sacrifices could only remove ceremonial uncleanness. The most solemn sacrifice, that on the great day of atonement, had only respect to sins committed during the preceding year; but the sacrifice of Christ hath removed all our sin from us as far as East is distant from the West. When the sins of those for whom the sacrifice of our great High Priest was offered are sought for, they shall not be found. He offered one sacrifice which never can be repeated, because it hath fully satisfied justice, answering all the demands of the law, so that Jesus proclaimed on the Cross, "*It is finished*" —eternal redemption is now secured to all the Israel of God. As the Jewish high priest bore the names of all the tribes on his shoulders and breastplate when he entered with the blood of the sin offering into the holiest of all, the names of the true Israel are engraved on His heart, and His intercession for them is founded on His having magnified and made honorable the law which they had broken. Such is the unity between Him and them that they all died in His death, rose in His resurrection, and are seated with Him in heavenly places.

I. (:11a) BETTER HIGH PRIEST USHERING IN BETTER TIMES

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come,”

F. F. Bruce: But now the time of reformation has arrived; what used to be “*the good things to come*” (ARV) are now “*the good things that have come*” (RSV). For Christ has appeared, and in Him the shadows have given way to the perfect and abiding reality. And His appearance is properly announced with a triumphant trumpet flourish; His entrance into the presence of God is not a day of soul-affliction and fasting, like the Day of Atonement under the old legislation, but a day of gladness and song, the day when Christians celebrate the accession of their Priest-King.

Albert Barnes: The apostle having described the tabernacle, and shown wherein it was defective in regard to the real wants of sinners, proceeds now to describe the Christian system, and to show how that met the real condition of man, and especially how it was adapted to remove sin from the soul. The phrase “high priest of good things to come,” seems to refer to those “good things” which belonged to the dispensation that was to come; that is, the dispensation under the Messiah. The Jews anticipated great blessings in that time. They looked forward to better things than they enjoyed under the old dispensation. They expected more signal proofs of the divine favor; a clearer knowledge of the way of pardon; and more eminent spiritual enjoyments. Of these, the apostle says that Christ, who had come, was now the high priest. It was he by whom they were procured; and the time had actually arrived when they might enjoy the long-anticipated good things under the Messiah.

II. (:11b) BETTER TABERNACLE

A. Superior

“He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle,”

Operating in the very presence of God – in the heavenly reality of which the earthly tabernacle was a type

B. Heavenly – Not Earthly

“not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;”

III. (:12-14) BETTER SACRIFICE

A. (:12a) Perfect Human Sacrifice vs. Animal Sacrifice

*“and not through the blood of goats and calves,
but through His own blood,”*

Albert Barnes: That is, by his own blood shed for the remission of sins. The meaning is, that it was in virtue of his own blood, or “by means” of that, that he sought the pardon of his people. That blood was not shed for himself - for he had no sin - and

consequently there was a material difference between his offering and that of the Jewish high priest. The difference related to such points as these.

- (1) the offering which Christ made was wholly for others; that of the Jewish priest for himself as well as for them.
- (2) the blood offered by the Jewish priest was that of animals; that offered by the Saviour was his own.
- (3) that offered by the Jewish priest was only an emblem or type - for it could not take away sin; that offered by Christ had a real efficacy, and removes transgression from the soul.

B. (:12b) Once-for-all Sacrifice Gaining Acceptance in the Presence of God vs. Annual Sacrifice

“He entered the holy place once for all,”

C. (:12c) Completed Sacrifice Obtaining Eternal Redemption vs. Temporary Covering

“having obtained eternal redemption.”

D. (:13-14) Effective Sacrifice to Cleanse the Conscience vs. External Cleansing

1. (:13) External Cleansing Accomplished by Old Covenant Animal Sacrifices

a. Merely Animal Blood

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer”

b. Merely Sprinkling Externally rather than Cleansing Internally

*“sprinkling those who have been defiled,
sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,”*

F. F. Bruce: The blood of slaughtered animals under the old order did possess a certain efficacy, but it was an outward efficacy for the removal of ceremonial pollution.

2. (:14) Internal Cleansing Accomplished by the Blood of Christ

a. Superior Blood of Christ

“how much more will the blood of Christ,”

Hewitt: Three reasons are given why the blood of Christ has such unique significance:

First, Christ offered Himself *through the eternal Spirit*. This translation of the AV suggests a reference to the third Person of the Trinity, but the more probably meaning of the Greek is *“through (His) eternal spirit.”* Spirit here is used in opposition to *“flesh”* which is outward, material and transitory. Christ offered Himself through the virtue of His eternal spiritual nature, which made the offering of infinite value, and accomplished eternal redemption. “Christ offered Himself once, and the single sacrifice needed no repetition, since it possess absolute eternal value as the action of One who belonged to the eternal order” (**Moffat**).

Second, the sacrifice of Christ was rational and voluntary. *He offered himself*. It was not the slaughter of an unconscious, reluctant victim but an intelligent act of the highest spiritual obedience towards God (**Phil. ii. 8**), and an act of the highest spiritual love towards man (**2 Cor. v. 14, 15**).

Third, He *offered himself without spot to God*. The author has already discussed the perfect High Priest; he now presents the spotless victim. The spotlessness is not outward, as in the Levitical sacrifices, but inward and ethical; for Christ's character was blameless throughout His earthly life.

b. Superior Agency
“who through the eternal Spirit”

Leon Morris: despite the modern disinclination to see a Trinitarian reference here, it does seem as though something of the kind is needed if we are to do justice to the writer's thought. While Christ's own spirit is involved in his sacrifice, the divine Spirit is involved, too. It seems that the writer has chosen this unusual way of referring to the Holy Spirit to bring out the truth that there is an eternal aspect to Christ's saving work.

c. Superior Sacrificial Lamb
*“offered Himself
without blemish to God,”*

d. Superior Inward Cleansing and Empowerment
*“cleanse your conscience from dead works
to serve the living God?”*

MacArthur: Salvation is not an end in itself. The believer has been freed from sin to serve God, saved to serve (cf. **Ro 6:16-18; 1 Th 1:9**). The contrast between dead works and the living God (cf. **3:12; 10:31; 12:22**) is basic. Cf. **Jas 2:14-26**.

F. F. Bruce: It is an inward and spiritual purification that is required if heart-communion with God is to be enjoyed. And therefore the “*dead works*” from which the conscience must be cleansed cannot be, as commentators have held, the unavailing ceremonial of Judaism; they must be things which convey inward and spiritual defilement . . . they are those practices and attitudes which belong to the way of death, which pollute the soul and erect a barrier between it and God. But their pollution is removed from the conscience by the work of Christ, so that men and women, emancipated from inward bondage, can worship God in spirit and in truth. This is the “*perfection*” which the ancient ceremonial was unable to achieve.

CONCLUSION:

Oh! Precious is the flow
that makes me white as snow;
no other fount I know,
nothing but the blood of Jesus.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the significance of Christ **entering** the holy place?
- 2) Why does the author specifically point to the **blood** of Jesus Christ instead of simply to His death on the cross?
- 3) Are you so hard on yourself when you sin that you fail to experience the grace of forgiveness and of a **cleansed conscience**?
- 4) What is meant by the “*dead works*” referred to in vs. 14?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Phillips: The writer has three things to tell us about the blood of Christ:

1) The Superiority of Christ’s Blood

The blood of bulls and goats succeeded in restoring the unclean to ceremonial cleanliness and therefore to the religious life of the nation. But there was a better blood to which they pointed, a blood that in its shedding would actually cleanse the inner man, and therefore restore people to real fellowship with the holy God.

- The first reason is that Christ’s blood represents a better sacrifice.
- The second reason Christ’s blood is superior is that it is God’s appointed means of our salvation.
- Third, Jesus offered his sacrifice “*through the eternal Spirit*” . . . it was the spirit of Christ, not just the body of Christ, that drank up the penalty for sin; his infinite and divine spirit absorbed all the wrath of an infinitely holy God.

2) The Power of Christ’s Blood

- There is no greater burden in this world than the guilt of our sin.
- The second problem of the conscience = the awareness of sinful desires and thoughts, the knowledge not merely of our sinful deeds but also of our sinful nature – this, too, is cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

- Finally, our conscience recoils as we walk through this world, brushing against all kinds of sin and evil, which bring defilement as contact with death did to the Israelites of old. Just as Israel's priests sprinkled the blood of bulls and goats upon the skin, we have in Christ a ready cleansing.

3) The Purpose of Christ's blood, shed for us

We were made and redeemed to serve God, and it is in the service of him that we discover our true freedom. **Spurgeon** says: "To serve the living God is necessary to the happiness of a living man; for this end we were made, and we miss the design of our making if we do not honor our Maker. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.' If we miss that end we are ourselves terrible losers. The service of God is the element in which alone we can fully live."

Derek Thomas: There are four contrasts established in this passage.

I. A contrast in time.

There's the present age, and there's the time of reformation. The time of reformation is the time when all of these Old Testament things get reformed, get changed. We understand what the time of reformation means. It's the new covenant. It's New Testament worship. It's worship as you and I know it, coming in the name of Jesus Christ into the presence of our Father clutching only the name of Christ, believing solely in Him. No ritual sacrifices. . .

Turn back again to that closing verse of chapter 8. You see the clue?

"In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

It hasn't quite vanished away yet. In theory it has; there should have been no need to go to the temple once Jesus had died and had risen again. But some of them are still going there, and until the temple actually got destroyed when Emperor Titus would come and destroy Jerusalem and destroy the temple along with it, it is ready to vanish away but it is not yet. . .

II. A contrast about blood.

What did the shedding of the blood of these animals signify? Well, it signified many things. It signified that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. It signified what the curse of the covenant actually meant: that the soul that sins shall die; that in order for atonement to be made, in order for sinners to be reconciled to God, in order for sinners to be redeemed and set free from their bondage, a price has to be made and that price is the death of a sacrificial victim.

But these animals could never atone for sin. They could not do that. They were wholly incapable of doing that despite the fact that they were carefully chosen. They were unable to forgive sins, and God sends His own Son, of which these were just types and foreshadowings. And He sent His Son into this world to die for us, to shed His blood for us, to be our substitute, to be our sin-bearer, to take upon himself our sins, to receive the judgment that our sins deserved; that *"He was made sin for us, who knew no sin that we might be reckoned the righteousness of God in Him."*

III. A contrast about conscience.

What these constant sacrifices of animals seemed to portray was that they could never cleanse the conscience. All they could do was purify to the sanctifying of the flesh. . .

They couldn't take away guilt. . .

And do you see what the writer of Hebrews is saying to these Jewish Christians? The blood of bulls and goats and the ashes, the sprinkling of the ashes of an heifer, all that did was purify to the sanctifying of the flesh. It was all external. But the blood of Christ can cleanse our conscience. It can do what nothing else can do: enable me, a guilty sinner, to come before God—the only God there is, a holy, righteous God, and I can call Him “Abba!” I can call Him “Father!” I can come where no priest could go. I come beyond the veil, the veil that was rent at the death of Jesus, because I can come into God's presence.

IV. A contrast about life and death.

There's a sense in which the unbeliever, the unregenerate person, for all the works that he does...and some of those works are good in themselves, but all they do is lead to death. Dead works is what he calls them.

In Greek, and also in Hebrew, the word *to serve*...the verb *to serve* belongs to the same family as the verb *to worship*. To serve, to worship; to worship is to serve; to serve is to worship. I've been set free by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, who shed His blood for me...who died for me...that I might worship Him...that I might serve Him...

Stephen Cole: The blood of Christ obtained eternal redemption and a clean conscience for us (9:11-14).

A. CHRIST'S BLOOD PROVIDES COMPLETE ACCESS INTO THE HEAVENLY HOLY OF HOLIES (9:11-12).

There is a textual variant in **9:11**. Probably the best reading is, “*the good things that have come.*” The “*greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands,*” refers to the “*true tabernacle*” in heaven (**8:2**), which is God's very presence. The point is, Christ didn't just go into an earthly Holy of Holies. He went into heaven itself, of which the earthly tabernacle was only a picture.

Furthermore, Christ didn't take the blood of goats and calves to sprinkle on the altar. Rather, He went there “*through His own blood.*” Some have erroneously taught that Jesus had to carry His blood into heaven to secure our redemption. But He didn't go there *with* His blood, but *through* His blood. He secured our redemption on the cross. In contrast to going back every year, Christ “*entered the holy place **once for all**, having obtained eternal redemption.*” The author is showing the complete supremacy and finality of the blood of Christ over the old system. Through His death, our guilt is atoned for once and for all, for all eternity! The penalty has been paid. There is nothing that we can add to what Christ did. Through Him we have direct access to God!

B. CHRIST'S BLOOD PROVIDES COMPLETE EFFICACY THAT CLEANSSES OUR CONSCIENCES (9:13-14).

The blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer “*sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh.*” In addition to the Day of Atonement ritual, the author adds the red heifer ritual (**Num. 19:1-13**). This was a ritual for purification, especially if someone had been defiled by touching a dead body. The author argues from the lesser to the greater. If these rituals could cleanse the flesh, “*how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” Jesus Christ is the only one who could atone for man’s sin, because He alone was a man without blemish in all that He did. Thus His blood can act as the substitute for the penalty that we deserve.

Scholars debate whether “*eternal Spirit*” refers to the Holy Spirit or to Jesus’ eternal divine spirit (there were no capital letters in the original Greek). We cannot be dogmatic on this. If it refers to the Holy Spirit, then it means that Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit when He went to the cross, which is certainly true. If it refers to Jesus’ eternal divine nature, the emphasis would be on the fact that Jesus’ sacrifice was uniquely efficacious to redeem His people, because He is not only a man, but also is eternal God (**7:3, 16**). The point is, “the difference between the levitical offerings and Christ’s self-offering was infinite rather than relative” (P. Hughes, p. 360). This infinitely efficacious sacrifice satisfied God in a way that the blood of bulls and goats never could. Through Christ’s blood, we can have a clean conscience.

The Bible teaches that the conscience alone is not an infallible guide. Through repeated sin, the conscience can be defiled (**Titus 1:15**) and seared (**1 Tim. 4:2**). . . our consciences need to be informed and trained through Scripture. As we learn who God is and what His holy standards are, our consciences accuse us of how sinful we are. God’s commandments, applied as Jesus did to the heart level, convict and condemn us all! None of us come close to loving God with our entire being, or to loving our fellow human beings as we love ourselves. Part of God’s work in regeneration is to bring His holy Law to bear on our hearts, so that we despair of any way of trying to justify ourselves. We stand truly guilty

So how can our guilt be removed and our consciences be cleansed? Only through the sacrifice of an acceptable substitute. As **1 Peter 3: 18** puts it, “*For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God. . .*” Or, as Paul put it (**Rom. 3:24-25**), “*being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.*” Our guilt is not removed by doing penance or good works. Our guilt is totally removed by God’s free gift through the blood of Christ. We receive this gift through faith.

“But,” you may wonder, “if it is totally by God’s grace apart from anything that we do, won’t people take advantage of His grace by living in sin?” Paul deals extensively with this objection in **Romans 6**. But here our author counters it with a single phrase at the

end of verse 14:

Christ redeems and cleanses us from dead works to serve the living God (9:14).

Some Christians serve God in an attempt to pacify a guilty conscience. They erroneously think, “If I do enough for Him, maybe He will forgive me.” That is a wrong motive! Others mistakenly think that God forgives them so that they can feel good. Their focus is on themselves, not on God and others. Again, that is a wrong focus. The proper order is, “God has forgiven me by His grace through the precious blood of His Son. Now I am free to serve Him!”

There are three senses in which the works of those who have not trusted in the blood of Christ are dead works (from P. Hughes, pp. 360-361): First, they are dead works because the one doing them is dead in his sins, separated from the life of God. Second, they are dead works because they “are essentially sterile and unproductive.” They cannot communicate spiritual life to others because they stem from a person who is spiritually dead. Third, they are dead works because they end in spiritual death. A person does them thinking that they will earn him eternal life. But if eternal life could come through our good works, then Christ died needlessly! No amount of good works can qualify a person for heaven.

But once we are born again by God’s grace, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices (**Rom. 12:1-2**), so that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do it to God’s glory (**1 Cor. 10:31**). Our daily lives become an act of worship and praise to the living God out of gratitude (**Heb. 13:15-16**).

Parunak: (9:11-12)

Correct understanding of these two verses requires recognizing their grammatical structure. The core sentence is “*Christ ... entered in.*” Everything else modifies this core. The modifiers include adverbial modifiers of time (“*once*”) and place (“*into the holies*”), two aorist participles (“*being come*” and “*having obtained*”) and three prepositional phrases in *διά* with the genitive (“*by a greater ...*,” “*neither by ...*,” and “*by his own blood ...*”) (Figure 9, chart).

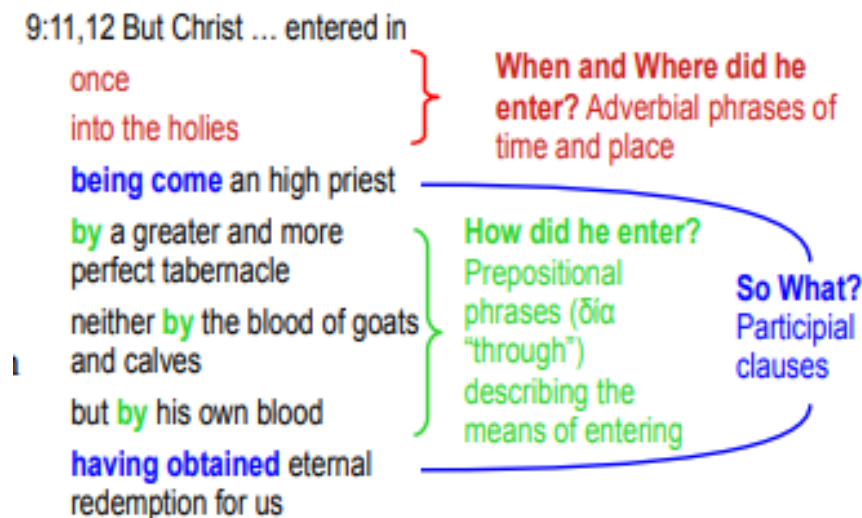


Figure 9: Grammar of 9:11-12

The reference is to our Savior's exaltation to the Father's right hand, the focal point of the book since **1:3**. "Enter in" comes from **Ps 95:11**, quoted in 3:11. 4:10 tells us that one has in fact entered into the rest, one who is identified in **ch. 6**,

Heb. 6:20 *Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*

The sitting in **Ps 110:1** has two facets. In his role as king, the Lord Jesus has sat down at the Father's right hand. In his role as priest, he has entered into the heavenly sanctuary.

once—ἐφ' ἅπασι (G2178, once for all, introduced in **7:27**) stands in contrast with **9:6** "always" and **9:7** "once every year." Here is the second part of the amplification of **7:27**, begun in **vv. 1-10**. The OT priests were involved in daily sacrifice, but our Lord offered once.

Heb. 7:27 *Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself into the holy place,*—The Father's presence is described as "the holy places." There is no longer any distinction between the holy place and the holy of holies. The noun is simply the plural, used in **v. 2** of the holy place. The distinction between the two compartments has been done away.

Next consider the participles. One introduces the sequence, the other concludes it, and the sequence is suggestive. First he has come as a high priest. Then we have details of his entering in, and finally we are told of what he has achieved.

MacArthur: Evangelist Wooten tells a story. He used to hold tent meetings long ago. He was outside one day and he was pulling up the stakes of his tent, one-man operation. Pulling up the stakes of his tent, and the young man came up behind him and said, "Mr. Wooten, sir, can I ask you a question?" He was bending over and he said, "Yes, sir, go right ahead." He said, "Uh, well, what do I have to do to be saved?" Mr. Wooten turned around and said, "Sorry, it's too late." He said, "Oh no." He said, "Yes, it's too late." He said, "You mean it's too late because the service is over?" He said, "No, it's too late because it's already all been done." And then he proceeded to tell him that he didn't have to do anything; Jesus did it all. All you do is believe it. And he turned to the boy and he said, "Only believe what he has done." Our salvation, dear ones, is based on a covenant that is final, a sacrifice that is once and for all, and a priesthood that is eternal. And everything in the Old Testament is only a shadow when Jesus is the substance.

TEXT: Hebrews 9:15-28

TITLE: *SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE IN RATIFYING THE NEW COVENANT*

BIG IDEA:

AS THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT, CHRIST'S SACRIFICE IS CLEARLY SUPERIOR

INTRODUCTION:

By this point the subject matter becomes repetitive as the author hammers home his indisputable arguments regarding the superiority of the New Covenant. His focus is on the sacrificial death of Christ and the shedding of His blood to provide final atonement for our sins and to secure our salvation on a once-for-all basis. There is also an emphasis on future blessing as we look forward to the full realization of our eternal inheritance and anticipate Jesus returning to bring us our consummated salvation. Why would anyone want to revert back to the Old Testament sacrificial system where the sin problem is temporarily covered but not finally resolved? Don't be put off by the necessary death of the mediator of the covenant.

MacArthur: Hebrews does, in fact, teach us about the superiority of Jesus Christ. The writer of the book of Hebrews is, in writing to this Jewish community, endeavoring to show them that they can leave Judaism, that they can abandon all the sacrifices, the priesthood, and all of those rituals that went along with the covenant and they can come to Christ – order for them to do that, he must prove to them that Christ is superior to Judaism, that Christ's covenant is better than the old covenant, that Christ's priesthood is superior to the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, which constituted the Judaistic priesthood, and he must prove to them that Christ's sacrifice was superior to all of the others.

T. C. Edwards: The Apostle has proved that a new covenant was promised through the prophet and prefigured in the tabernacle. Christ is come to earth and entered into the holiest place of God, as High-priest. The inference is that His high-priesthood has abolished the old covenant and ratified the new. The priesthood has been changed, and change of the priesthood implies change of the covenant. . . The blood of Christ may be shown to have ratified a covenant from the use of blood by Moses to inaugurate the former covenant. . . The two notions of ratifying the covenant and atoning for sin cannot be separated.

I. (:15-22) COVENANT MUST BE RATIFIED BY SACRIFICIAL DEATH – COMPARISON OF NEW COVENANT AND OLD COVENANT

A. (:15-17) New Covenant Inaugurated with Death of Christ

1. (:15) Value of Christ's Death

a. Christ Death Makes Him the Mediator of a New Covenant

“And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant,”

Kent: that is, on account of the fact that Christ by His blood accomplished what the former covenant issued at Sinai could not, a new covenant was in order. This has been discussed already in **8:6-13**.

Mohler: Christ, as mediator, doesn't find a compromise between the two because God's holiness cannot be compromised. Far from suggesting a compromise between two opposing positions, Christ agrees with the Father that we deserve the infinite outpouring of his wrath. He agrees with the Father about the ugliness of ours. He agrees with the Father about the necessity of a sacrifice. And as our mediator, he agrees to be that sacrifice even as the Father sends him for that task. In this mediatory work, Christ procures an eternal inheritance for his church (i.e., the “called”), an inheritance simply synonymous with all of the present and future benefits of Christ's salvific work.

b. Christ's Death Accomplished Redemption

“in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant,”

Kent: Transgressions committed at the time of the first covenant were “covered” (i.e., “atoned”) by animal sacrifices, but this provided not true expiation. Old Testament atonement by animal blood depended for its value upon the death of Christ to come.

c. Christ's Death Secured the Eternal Inheritance

“those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

Kent: The mention of the provisions of the new covenant as an inheritance stresses the **testamentary** aspect of the covenant and paves the way for the statement which follows.

MacArthur: Summary of **vs. 15** -- He promised them eternal inheritance. The obstacle in the way was sin. The obstacle must be removed. The old covenant couldn't remove it. There must be a new covenant to remove the obstacle. Christ comes, provides a new covenant, removes the obstacle. The promise is fulfilled to those who believe. . .

And now he goes further yet to bring you three great reasons why His death was required. Why did it have to be death that got the eternal inheritance? Why not something else? Why did He have to die? Three reasons.

- Number one, a testament demands death.
- Number two, forgiveness demands blood.
- Number three, salvation demands a victim. And that can be stated several ways. Judgment demands a substitute might be better.

2. (:16-17) Validity of the New Covenant (Testament)

“For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one

who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.”

Kent: This is a general proposition that is true to this day. No provisions of will are effective prior to the **death** of the one whose testament it is. A person may periodically change his will as his circumstances alter, and this is entirely legitimate because the will is not in force as long as the testator is still alive.

B. (:18-22) Old Covenant Inaugurated with Death of Animals

1. (:18) Integral Role of Sacrificial Blood under the Old Covenant

“Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood.”

Kent: To any who may have been finding fault with the idea of Christ’s death as a necessary feature of the new covenant, the reminder is given that not even the Mosaic covenant was **inaugurated without blood**. If some of these were actually contemplating a return to Judaism, let them remember that the use of sacrificial blood was involved in that covenant as well. . . The blood inaugurated the Mosaic covenant and put its various provisions in force, both in precept and in ceremony.

2. (:19-21) Illustrations of the Application of the Sacrificial Blood under the Old Covenant

a. (:19-20) Sprinkling the Book and the People

“For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.’”

b. (:21) Sprinkling the Tabernacles and its Vessels

“And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood.”

3. (:22) Integral Connection Between Sacrificial Blood and Cleansing and Forgiveness

“And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

Kent: the author is therefore making the point that the principle of sacrificial death was clearly established even in Old Testament practice, and it would be folly to turn from Christ on account of His dying.

II. (:23-28) SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT WITH ITS BETTER SACRIFICE – CONFIRMED IN 4 KEY AREAS

A. (:23) Superiority of New Covenant Sacrifice and Cleansing

1. Old Covenant

“Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these,”

Kent: The heavenly things themselves surely must be interpreted as the spiritual realities in heaven to which the tabernacle and its ritual gave visible representation. . . In what sense did the heavenly things need cleansing? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that heaven was the scene of Satan’s rebellion, and thus needed cleansing from the defiling effects of that sin. . . What animal sacrifices accomplished ceremonially and typically, Christ’s sacrifice achieved actually. Christ’s blood fully satisfied God’s wrath against sin, and thus His presence in heaven provided an incalculable advance over the ministrations of any earthly priest.

2. New Covenant

“but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.”

B. (:24) Superiority of New Covenant Sanctuaries

1. Old Covenant

“For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one,”

2. New Covenant

“but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;”

C. (:25-26) Superiority of New Covenant Atonement

1. (:25-26a) Old Covenant

“nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world;”

Kent: To conclude that repeated offerings were still necessary denies the abiding efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice. . . The reason why Christ’s sacrifice does not need frequent repetition as was true of animals in Old Testament times is because Christ’s sacrifice consisted of Himself (v. 25). It was a human sacrifice, and men die but once and then must face the results of their lives. Inasmuch as this particular human was the God-Man, the analogy is all the more forceful.

2. (:26b) New Covenant

“but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

D. (:27-28) Superiority of New Covenant Efficacy

1. Universal Connection between Death and Eternal Judgment

“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,”

2. Particular Connection between Death of Christ and Future Salvation of the Elect

“so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”

MacArthur: We’ve got a problem, **verse 27**, we’re going to die and get judged. But He made three appearances take care of it.

- Appearing number one is in **verse 26**. Look at it. *“But now once in the end of the ages hath He appeared to put away sin.”* That’s the first appearing on the cross.
- The second appearing’s in **verse 24**, the end of the verse, *“now to appear in the presence of God for us.”* He’s interceding for us.
- The third appearing’s in **verse 28**. One of these days, *“unto them that look for him shall He appear.”*

Three appearances of Christ give us the account of His work on the cross, ministering for us now, and in His return. And so He’s a perfect sacrifice.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What function does Christ perform as **mediator** of the New Covenant?
- 2) What comfort do you take from the designation of the participants in the New Covenant as the **“called”** ones?
- 3) Do you consider yourself to be living in the time period that encompasses the **“consummation of the ages”**?
- 4) How can we intensify the level of our **eagerness** and **anticipation** in looking for Jesus to return?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: Implications of Christ’s presence in heaven:

- 1) He appears in our behalf in the very presence of God, the only place where final priestly representation can be made.
- 2) Second, Christ’s presence in heaven indicates that sin has been put away forever (**vv. 25, 26**).
- 3) The third significance of Christ’s presence in heaven is that it insures God’s favorable verdict, and Christ’s reappearance will confirm it.

Mohler: If we think theologically about the sacrificial system, we can see the connection between blood, death, covenant, and atonement. The act of sin brings about the covenantal consequence of death. The demand for the transgressor's death is essentially the same thing as the demand for the transgressor's blood. The substitutionary animal sacrifices in the old covenant were vivid reminders that transgressors deserved death. Yet, through these substitutionary blood sacrifices, God made a way to atone for sin. Therefore, blood is symbolic in the sacrificial system under the old covenant because it demonstrates the costliness of sin. It graphically illustrates that with sin comes death.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Work of the Mediator

Let's pull back and remember something we have said over and over in our studies. He is writing to people who are apparently being tugged with the possibility that they are entertaining in their own hearts of going back to some form of Judaism. They have made Christian professions, but they are toying with the idea of going back to some reformed form of Judaism, maybe the Essenes near the Dead Sea had influenced them. And the author of Hebrews is bringing to bear every theological argument that he can dig up from his understanding of the superiority of Jesus Christ and he is contrasting the outmoded forms of the Old Covenant with the new light of the New Covenant. He is laying out his argument in light of that temptation which this congregation is experiencing. And by definition if they are tempted to going back to older forms, they are tempted to think that Jesus is not solely sufficient in His finished work and they are tempted to think in terms of doing things themselves apart from Christ which gets them into fellowship with God. And the author of Hebrew's whole argument is to absolutely trash that kind of thinking. That's what we have before us here in Hebrews 9, beginning in **verse 15**. . .

In this passage the author continues to pile on arguments for Jesus' primacy and for the sufficiency of His work on our behalf and to draw implementations from His completed work that radically impacts our understanding of how we relate to Him, how we are saved, and how we are to live as Christians.

I would like for you to look in outline at the argument of this passage tonight. First in **verse 15**, we have a summarization of the argument of the whole chapter. In that verse we are taught that Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant. Again, the idea of mediator is one that is very familiar to us. The mediator comes between estranged parties and works to effect their reconciliation. That is what a mediator does. So the very presence of a mediator implies that there is estrangement, that there is need for reconciliation. So throughout this passage, throughout all of Hebrews, the underlying assumption is that we are estranged from God because of sin and there needs to be mediation.

But the author of Hebrews is specifically arguing, having laid that as the foundation, that there is only mediator who can do that task and that we cannot look to anything else. We cannot look to our own works. We cannot even look to the shadows of the

work of mediation which existed in the Old Covenant because we now live in the time post-Pentecost, in the time of the New Covenant where the one, true mediator has been revealed. He was the reality to which all those Old Testament types were pointing and to go back to the types is to reject the reality. So over and over the author of Hebrews is stressing that you must not run from Christ, you must not wander from Christ, you must not go from Christ to anyone else. Because if you leave Christ to go back to the old shadows, you are rejecting the reality in favor of the things which were simply pointers to the reality. And so you are rejecting Christ totally by doing that and you are rejecting the only way back into fellowship and reconciliation to God.

So here in this passage it is stressed that Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant and we have already seen the author of Hebrews quoting from **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, which in the only passage in the whole of the Old Testament prophecies which explicitly speaks of a New Covenant. We have the author of Hebrews applying the fulfillment of that passage to the work of Christ and saying, “Look Jesus Christ is the one who brought about those things which were prophesied by Jeremiah and there is no one else but Him who fulfills that reality. He is the reconciler in the New Covenant. He is the One who brings together a strange man with his God. And so in this passage you see for this reason the author arguing this point and I have just written it out for you that Christ’s effective atoning death manifests Him to be the mediator. It is Christ’s death that shows Him to be the mediator of the New Covenant. In fact it is the basis of Him being called the mediator. In other words, His work of dying on our behalf is at the very heart of what it means for Him to be the mediator. Now that is very pregnant concept. It is full of mercy and blessing and truth. And so the author is going to spend a whole chapter simply explaining what that means.

I. Christ’s effective, atoning death manifests Him as mediator. (:15)

The author tells that them that going back to that old covenant form of religion will do you absolutely no good because its effectiveness is completely tied to the work of Christ. Take Christ away and it means nothing. So if you turn your back on Christ, the old covenant ritual does not even mean what it meant when it was originally given. The old covenant ritual becomes meaningless. . .

This is the great argument for salvation alone in Christ, because if His work was to pay the penalty for the sins of those who believe on Him, is there any other way for that sin to be paid for? The author of Hebrews says no, there is only one way for that sin to be paid for and you can’t do it. Only the Son can do it. . .

II. Why did the covenant mediator have to die? (:16-18)

I died in your place to fulfill the curses that should have fallen on your head. I died the death of a covenant-breaker, even though I was the one who was faithful to the covenant so that all you covenant-breakers who believe on Me, who trust in Me, who have faith in Me alone for your salvation, might come back into fellowship reconciled to God. . .

III. Blood was the cleansing agent in old covenant ritual. (:19-23)

Now verses **19** through **23** simply expand on that argument. Verses **19** through **23** rehearse the way that blood was used in the old covenant ritual. Again, the stress is that those old covenant sacrifices could not by themselves bring about the cleansing of conscience and forgiveness of sins that God intends for His people. Better sacrifices were in store.

IV. The finality and efficacy of Christ's atonement shows its primacy. (:24-28)

And then in **verses 24-28**, the superiority of Jesus' blood sacrifice is stressed. His death is final and efficacious. Let's look at it briefly together. He didn't enter an earthly temple but into the presence of God, **verse 24**. He didn't offer Himself yearly, but once for all time, **verses 25 and 26**. His death in contrast to the old covenant shadows actually did away with sin, **verse 26**. And in **verses 27 and 28** we are told that when He appears again to us, it will not be to do another work of atonement. That work has been done once for all. It will be to bring judgment. But the judgment that He brings will mean salvation for all who trust in Him.

Now the author of Hebrews has laid out for us here the groundwork for the doctrine of grace. And the fundamental point of it is no one can come back into fellowship with God except in Christ. Because only Christ paid and was able to pay the penalty that we deserved for our violation of the covenant. And the author of Hebrews is saying to these people not to look back to the old covenant rituals as their way into fellowship with God. They mean nothing apart from Jesus. And he is saying to us, "Don't look at your works, your service, your status, your reputation, don't look at anything but Christ for your reconciliation with God, for the basis of your fellowship with God. For apart from Him, there is no reconciliation; and in Him there is complete reconciliation and nothing needs to be added to it.

Steven Cole: Forgiveness Through Christ's Blood (:15-22)

Liberal theologians hate the idea of Christ's blood paying for our sins. They have called such views "slaughterhouse religion." They ridicule Christians who believe in a God who would be petty enough to be angry over our sins, and pagan enough to be appeased by blood. The playwright, George Bernard Shaw, bitterly attacked the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, saying, "It is saturated with the ancient—and to me quite infernal—superstition of atonement by blood sacrifice, which I believe Christianity must completely get rid of, if it is to survive among thoughtful people" (cited in "Our Daily Bread," 8/79). . .

Perhaps some in the Hebrew church had unbelieving Jewish friends who ridiculed them because they believed in a crucified Messiah. But the author is pointing out that the entire Jewish system of worship was based on blood sacrifices, and that God instituted that system to point ahead to the one all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To go back to the old system would be to return to a system that never could cleanse their

consciences and to abandon the eternal redemption that God provided in Christ (9:12-14). In our text, he hammers home the point that...

Forgiveness of sins comes only through the blood of Christ.

1. Everyone needs forgiveness of sins because our sins have alienated us from God.

2. God's uniform method for the forgiveness of sins has been the shedding of blood.

A. SIN LEADS TO PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL DEATH.

B. BLOOD GRAPHICALLY PICTURES THE COSTLINESS OF SIN.

C. THE OLD COVENANT WAS INAUGURATED WITH BLOOD, BECAUSE DEATH IS GOD'S DECREED PENALTY FOR SIN.

3. The death of Jesus inaugurated the new covenant with blood.

A. FORGIVENESS COMES TO US AS HEIRS OF CHRIST.

B. FORGIVENESS COMES ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

Steven Cole: Judgment or Salvation (:23-28)

So the issues at stake here are of eternal significance. If the repetition seems tedious, bear with it. If God uses it to open the eyes of one soul to the impossibility of salvation by human works or worth, and to the cross of Christ as God's only provision, it is well worth repeating again. So, the author reviews. **Verse 24** reviews what he has stated in **9:11**, as well as in **8:1-5**. **Verses 25-26** review **9:12**. **Verses 27 & 28** draw both a comparison and a contrast that present the only options in the future: judgment or salvation. He wants us to understand that...

Because of Christ's once for all sacrifice for our sins, we can look forward to salvation when He returns, not to judgment.

These verses fall into two sections. In the first, the point is:

1. Christ's once for all sacrifice of Himself for our sins far exceeds the Old Testament sacrifices (9:23-26).

2. When Christ comes again, we can look forward to salvation, not to judgment (9:27-28).

There are four important, practical truths here:

A. GOD HAS APPOINTED DEATH FOR ALL PEOPLE.

B. APART FROM CHRIST, PEOPLE DIE AND FACE JUDGMENT.

C. CHRIST DIED ONCE TO BEAR OUR SINS, BUT IS COMING AGAIN TO FINALIZE OUR SALVATION.

D. THOSE WHOM CHRIST HAS SAVED EAGERLY AWAIT HIS COMING.

Conclusion:

Today, Jesus Christ offers salvation to all who will trust in Him. But if we refuse to turn to Him in faith, one day we will stand before Him as our righteous Judge. Will you die and face judgment? Or, will you trust in Christ's supreme sacrifice of Himself for your sins and receive His salvation?

Deffinbaugh: Dealing with Death or the World's Greatest Bailout

In one sense, the Bible is a very "bloody" book. Think of all the sacrificial animals whose blood was shed under the Old Covenant. Think of the importance that is placed on the "blood" of our Lord Jesus that was shed at Calvary. The shedding of animal blood did not seem to trouble those who lived in Old Testament times, but we cannot assume the same response today. Can you imagine the outcry of the animal rights activists if they had lived in Israel in days gone by? . . .

Well aware that the subject matter of our text may not be popular, it is nonetheless important. Indeed, it is a matter of life and death, eternal life or death. As our author says, "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (**Hebrews 9:22**). So let us pursue the subject of shedding blood (death) carefully, realizing how important this is to God, and to men. . .

The Necessity of Death (:15-22)

There is good reason for our author to establish the need for our Lord's death.

Beforehand, no devout Jew was eager to hear about the death of Messiah. This was true of the Old Testament prophets, who spoke of our Lord's suffering and His glory. They struggled with their own prophecies in which they wrote of Messiah's suffering and death (texts like **Isaiah 52:13—53:12**). They could not see how these prophecies could be compatible with those that promised triumph over His enemies and the forces of evil:

John the Baptist (**Matthew 11:1-3**) was not alone in his confusion about Jesus. The Lord's disciples were not eager to hear their Master speak of His suffering and death at Calvary. Just after Peter's great confession in Matthew 16, our Lord disclosed to His disciples that He was soon going to die. Peter's reaction reveals his failure to grasp this aspect of our Lord's messianic mission: **Matthew 16:21-25**.

Unbelieving Jews also had great difficulty with Jesus' talk of death. It seems to be one of the reasons why they would not embrace Him as the Messiah: **John 12:30-34**.

Nobody wanted to hear of Jesus' death as Israel's Messiah, which may help to explain why the author of Hebrews felt it was so important to deal extensively with the necessity of Messiah's death.

The World's Greatest Bailout (:15)

Just who are the recipients of this massive bailout? The saving work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary applies to the sins of those who lived under the Old Covenant as well as to those living since the first coming of our Lord. In other words, anyone whose sins are forgiven and who inherits eternal life does so because of Christ's saving death and resurrection. But this is not to say that everyone, past, present, or future will benefit from Christ's saving work. Our author is very clear on this point: those who receive the promised inheritance are only those who are called. Paul put it this way in **Romans 9**.

The Necessity of Death for the Execution of a Will (:16-17)

We have just seen that the redemption of lost sinners required the sacrificial death of the Messiah. Now the author is going to buttress this declaration by showing that the death is required in everyday life as well. The case in point is the execution of a will. With rare exceptions, a will does not go into effect until after the death of the one who made it (the testator). Just as our author has stated, a death certificate is required before any will is executed. Death is a prerequisite for the execution of a will.

The Necessity of a Sacrificial Death to Execute the Mosaic Covenant (:18-22)

What we are to glean from this reference to the inauguration of the Old Covenant is that even this covenant was commenced by the shedding and application of sacrificial blood. No wonder the New Covenant was inaugurated by the blood which our Lord Jesus shed for the redemption of lost sinners.

From these specific examples, the author reaches a general conclusion: "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (**Hebrews 9:22b**). Under the Old Covenant, sins were reckoned with (temporarily) by the shedding of the blood of sacrificial animals. Our Lord's death is entirely consistent with God's way of dealing with sin. The shedding of sacrificial blood may offend the sensibilities of some, but this was the way God had appointed to reckon with man's sin. If we are appalled by the severity of God's solution for sin, then surely we must begin to understand how appalled God is by our sin. We dare not take sin – or its consequences – lightly.

The Death of Christ and the New Covenant (:23-28)

It is easy to see why the earthly copies of heavenly things needed to be cleansed. It is not so easy to understand why the heavenly realities needed to be cleansed. Several explanations have been offered:

- The heavens need to be cleansed because Satan has been there (see **Job 1** and **2; Revelation 12:10**).
- Cleansing is necessary because the fallen angels were there (**Ephesians 6:12**).
- Cleansing is required of the saints, who will ultimately be there in the presence of God.

The first two options just don't satisfy many students of Scripture, and they don't really satisfy me, either. For one thing, the cleansing to which the author refers seems to refer more to those things that pertain to the New Covenant and to the ongoing high priestly ministry of our Lord. For another, the cleansing of which our author speaks is viewed as something accomplished in the past – at Calvary – rather than as something future. If I read the Scriptures correctly, Satan and his fallen angels are still in heaven and are yet to be cast down.

The third option seems to be the most popular among the commentators that I consulted. As much as I respect these men, I just can't see how this explanation fits our text. Let me mention several problems I have with this view.

- First, it seems clear to me that our author is speaking about the cleansing of a place and of heavenly things more than he is of people.
- Second, from **1 Corinthians 15:50-55**, we know that "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*" (**15:50**). As Paul goes on to explain (and as we see in 1 Thessalonians 4), we will leave these corrupted bodies behind and will enter heaven in new, transformed, bodies.

So why do these bodies need to be purified?

I would be inclined to suggest a fourth explanation for the purification of the heavenly things. I look at the purification of the tabernacle, its furnishings, the high priest, and the people as an initiation or inauguration. In just a few days, Barak Obama will be officially installed as the president of the United States by means of an inauguration ceremony. It is the beginning of a new regime, a new administration. Just as the Old Covenant was inaugurated by the sprinkling of blood, so too it was fitting for the New Covenant (and all its associated elements) to be inaugurated with blood as well. The shedding of Christ's blood on the cross of Calvary was the inauguration of the New Covenant ministry of our Lord. It redeemed men from the penalty of their sins, but it did more. It commenced a whole new ministry in the heavenlies, at the right hand of God, and blood shedding was an essential requirement for its inauguration.

TEXT: Hebrews 10:19-25

TITLE: PRACTICAL OUTWORKING OF THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

BIG IDEA:

THE REALITY OF THE SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST IMPACTS BOTH OUR STANDING BEFORE GOD AND OUR STEADFASTNESS IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

Here we begin the final section of the Book of Hebrews. The great lofty truths of the superiority of Jesus Christ and of the New Covenant and of His atoning sacrifice for sins and of His high priestly ministry are all brought to bear now on our practical conduct. Doctrine is essential for life and must lead to the proper response. The author provides us with two encouragements based on our precious possession of bold access to God and of the high priestly ministry of Christ. Then he drives home three practical exhortations to persevere in faith, hope and love – the famous Christian triad. Take advantage of our privileged standing before God and remain steadfast as we draw near in faith, confess our hope and love the brethren.

Kent: This section of Hebrews consists of a series of exhortations based upon the great doctrinal truths set forth previously. The superiorities of Jesus Christ as sacrifice and as priest should have been fully apparent to every reader. These truths, however, must not remain as abstractions, but must issue in appropriate conduct. These exhortations to Christian practice are not mere moralizing, or admonitions to follow some new external code. They are the believer's logical and appropriate response to the benefits secured for him by his Lord and priest, Jesus Christ.

Mohler: We have confidence to approach God through Jesus Christ's priestly work. Because of this confidence, we can encourage one another to grow in assurance as we anticipate Christ's return.

I. (:19-21) OUR STANDING BEFORE GOD -- TWO ENCOURAGEMENTS FROM THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

A. (:19-20) We Enjoy Great Access to the Presence of God by Christ's Sacrifice

1. (:19) Entrance into the Heavenly Sanctuary

"Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,"

Bruce Hurt: "brethren" -- In context it probably refers to the entire group of Jews among whom are some who are truly regenerate, others who are interested seekers, and finally those who profess faith (intellectual assent to the truth of Messiah) but have yet entered into salvation rest (absence of genuine saving faith effecting circumcision of their heart).

Mohler: The blood of Christ is integral to Christian theology. . . Hebrews shows that Christians have access to God precisely because the blood of Jesus Christ has made it possible. Without Christ's blood there is no access to God. There is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. Just as the old covenant required blood sacrifices, so too does the new covenant require a blood sacrifice. The final and effective blood sacrifice, however, came not through the blood of an animal shed on an altar, but through the blood of God's own Son shed on the cross. In his perfect and sinless blood, we have boldness to enter the sanctuary.

F. F. Bruce: The "*boldness*" which believers in Christ have to enter the heavenly sanctuary through Him is set in contrast with the restrictions which hedged about the privilege of symbolic entry into the presence of God in Israel's earthly sanctuary.

2. (:20) Embracing the New Pathway of Life

"by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,"

Spurgeon: There was under the (Old Testament) Law this ordinance—that no man should ever go into the holiest of all, with the **one exception of the high priest**, and he but **once in the year**, and **not without blood**. If any man had attempted to enter there he must have died, as guilty of great presumption and of profane intrusion into the secret place of the Most High. Who could stand in the presence of Him who is a consuming fire? This ordinance of distance runs all through the law; for even the holy place, which was the vestibule of the holy of holies, was for the priests alone. Those who refuse Jesus refuse the only way of access to God. God is not approachable except through the rending of the veil by the death of Jesus. **There was one typical way to the mercy seat of old, and that was through the turning aside of the veil; there was no other. And there is now no other way for any of you to come into fellowship with God except through the rent veil, even the death of Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin.** Come this way, and you may come freely. Refuse to come this way, and there hangs between you and God an impassable veil. Without Christ you are without God, and without hope.

Hewitt: Here it has the meaning of a way newly opened which before was inaccessible, for even the believer of the Old Testament could not enter God's presence freely and openly, nor with the joyful confidence and intimacy suggested in this passage. This newly opened way is *living*, or effective, for the living Lord is Himself the way (**Jn. xiv. 6**). Unlike the ineffective way of senseless animals and dead works of the old covenant. . .

Albert Barnes: Through the veil, that is to say, his flesh - The Jewish high priest entered into the most holy place through the veil that divided the holy from the most holy place. That entrance was made by his drawing the veil aside, and thus the interior sanctuary was laid open. But there has been much difficulty felt in regard to the sense of the expression used here. The plain meaning of the expression is, that the way to heaven

was opened by means, or through the medium of the flesh of Jesus; that is, of his body sacrificed for sin, as the most holy place in the temple was entered by means or through the medium of the veil. We are not to suppose, however, that the apostle meant to say that there was in all respects a resemblance between the veil and the flesh of Jesus, nor that the veil was in any manner typical of his body, but there was a resemblance in the respect under consideration - to wit, in the fact that the holy place was rendered accessible by withdrawing the veil, and that heaven was rendered accessible through the slain body of Jesus. The idea is, that there is by means both of the veil of the temple, and of the body of Jesus, a medium of access to God. God dwelt in the most holy place in the temple behind the veil by visible symbols, and was to be approached by removing the veil; and God dwells in heaven, in the most holy place there, and is to be approached only through the offering of the body of Christ.

B. (:21) We Enjoy Great Representation by Christ's Priestly Ministry

"and since we have a great priest over the house of God,"

Kent: Believers not only have the benefits of a matchless sacrifice, but they also have the services of an incomparable priest. He is a great Priest (cf. **4:14**) because of His own person as the Son of God, as well as because of His position within the heavenly sanctuary. He is over the house of God, as the sovereign of God's household of faith (cf. **3:6**). Even though He has opened the way for our direct approach to God, Christ does not cease His ministrations on our behalf. He continues as our great priest, guiding, strengthening, encouraging, and interceding.

These two advantages (access to God, and a great priest) should give constant encouragement for a continual approach to God.

Richard Phillips: Verses 19-21 summarize all that has been taught in the great doctrinal sections of Hebrews by identifying two definitive possessions. There are two things we have, the writer says, because of Christ's person and work.

The first of these possessions has to do with access to God through Jesus Christ. . . People who trust in Jesus Christ stand before an open door, with free and open access to God, and with their sins atoned for by his blood. . .

Our second great possession is directly linked to the first: "*we have a great priest over the house of God*" (**Heb. 10:21**). We have two things: confidence to enter and a great high priest. The point is that the one who opened and secured the way for us into God's presence is there himself. He is there as our priest, representing us and pleading effectually for our acceptance, securing and sending to us the Holy Spirit so that we are fitted and empowered to be worshipers and priests before his throne. Because our high priest is there, we can know that we belong there, too, and can thus approach with confidence.

II. (:22-25) OUR STEADFASTNESS IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE – THREE EXHORTATIONS FROM THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

A. (:22) Draw Near to God in Confident FAITH

“let us draw near” -- 4 Conditions specified:

G Campbell Morgan: In a previous note (**Hebrews 7.25**) we considered the fact that the intercessory work of our High Priest is only operative on behalf of those who draw near to God through Him. In these words we are called upon to avail ourselves of the privilege He has created of access to God. It is that possibility of approach and access which is the supreme and glorious fact resulting from the work of our Priest. The very nature of this appeal emphasizes this. The one thing we are called upon to do is to draw near. In God, and the eternal order, there is no reason why we should not do so. Everything which excluded men from God has been put away. The rending of the Temple veil at the death of Jesus was symbolic. That which, in its wholeness, had been the symbol of man's exclusion from God through sin, in its rent condition was the symbol of the open way to God. The life of Jesus in its final perfection was a perpetual message to men concerning their unfitness to enter the Divine Presence. Because He lived a life of unbroken fellowship with God, I know that I cannot do so; His fellowship resulted from His being well-pleasing to God. Nothing ever has separated between man and God, save sin. He was sinless, and so lived with God. But the death of Jesus has dealt with my sin, and so has made possible my return to God, my access to Him at all times and under all circumstances. Therefore the appeal to me is not a call to prepare myself, or to make a way for myself to God. It is simply to come, to draw near, to enter in. This I do only through my great High Priest, but this I may do through Him without faltering and without fear

1. Authenticity / Sincerity

“with a sincere heart

James Coffman: With a true heart shows that no insincere person or hypocrite can ever really draw near to God. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* (**Matthew 5:8**). The Holy Spirit says, *“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life”* (**Proverbs 4:23**). Success is promised the obedient. *“And thou shalt find him, when thou searchest after him with all thy heart and with all thy soul”* (**Deuteronomy 4:29**). In the parable of the sower, the seed which produced the good fruit was that which fell upon the good ground, the honest and good heart. Only the honest and good heart without deceit or hypocrisy can approach God; none others need apply.

2. Confidence

“in full assurance of faith,”

Mohler: Many Christians struggle with the certainty of their salvation. But the New Testament exhorts Christians to know they are saved. God grants assurance, not on the basis of man's faith, but on the basis of Christ's faithfulness.

Hewitt: in fullness of faith in Christ and in the perfection of His sacrificial work on the cross in virtue of which access is made possible. This faith must not be divided between Christianity and Judaism, or between Christ and the Church, or between our great High Priest, the only and all-sufficient Mediator, and a human priesthood.

3. Good Conscience

“having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience”

4. Cleansed / Purified

“and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Leon Morris: Baptism is the outward sign of an inward cleansing, and it was the latter that was the more important. So here it is mentioned first. The sprinkling of the hearts signifies the effect of the blood of Christ on the inmost being. Christians are cleansed within by his shed blood (cf. the sprinkling of the priests, **Exod 29:21; Lev 8:30**).

B. (:23) Hold Fast the Confession of Our HOPE

1. Our Responsibility = Perseverance

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,”

MacArthur: Hope is simply the trust that God will keep His promise and do what He said in the end, that’s what it is. Hold fast to your guarantee.

Wiersbe: We have noted in our study of Hebrews that there is an emphasis on the glorious hope of the believer. God is *“bringing many sons unto glory”* (**Heb. 2:10**). Believers are *“partakers of the heavenly calling”* (**Heb. 3:1**) and therefore can rejoice in hope (**Heb. 3:6**). *Hope* is one of the main themes of **Hebrews 6 (vv. 11-12, 18-20)**. We are looking for Christ to return (**Heb. 9:28**), and we are seeking that city that is yet to come (**Heb. 13:14**).

2. God’s Enablement

“for He who promised is faithful;”

Hewitt: The second exhortation is to persevere, and so hope is introduced. . . The simplicity and spirituality of Christianity no doubt gave rise to much criticism and placed the readers in danger of drifting back to ritualistic and other outward attractions of Judaism. They may have been strongly provoked to let go by the pressing difficulties and urgency of the times. A powerful persuasive encouragement to Christian fidelity is added, *for he is faithful that promised*. Mastery of the true significance of the faithfulness of God to His glorious promises should strengthen the Christian’s faithfulness to his confession of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. (:24-25) Encourage One Another in LOVE

1. (:24) Stated Positively

“and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,”

Richard Phillips: There is a progression at work here. First is faith, which unites us to Christ and brings us to God. The result of that faith is hope, which secures our hearts in the storms of this life. With hope we no longer fear for ourselves but are able to give loving encouragement to others. Hope therefore springs forth in love, the love of God that fills the hearts of all who hope in him. John rightly tells us, “*We love because he first loved us.*” But he adds, “*Whoever loves God must also love his brother*” (1 Joh 4:19, 21).

Kent: Positively, each reader was to promote spiritual growth in the church by encouraging (*parakalountes*). This encouragement might take the form of exhorting those who wavered, urging them to steadfastness, comforting those whose Christian commitment had brought trouble and distress, or by lending a strengthening hand to whoever needed it. How much better is this positive attitude of helpfulness toward others than the abandonment of the assembly that some had done. It also would serve to prevent such defection, for one who is genuinely involved in assisting others usually has little time to indulge his fears or nurse resentments which might cause him to forsake the fellowship of the saints.

2. (:25a) Stated Negatively

“not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some,”

3. (:25b) Stated Intensively in Light of Coming Salvation and Accountability

*“but encouraging one another;
and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”*

F. F. Bruce: Before A.D. 70 those Christians who remembered and took seriously Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of the temple were scarcely in a position to keep it distinct in their minds from the final coming of the Son of Man and the ingathering of His elect, which He also foretold. Only after the events of A.D. 70 was it possible to appreciate clearly that two separate epochs were involved in the twofold question of the disciples in the form given to it in **Matt. 24:3**. . . Each successive Christian generation is called upon to live as the generation of the end-time.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we be too casual and flippant in our approach to God – not fully appreciating the holiness of his heavenly sanctuary?
- 2) What is the connection between the veil that was torn in the temple and the body of Christ?
- 3) How can we combat the temptation to live as an isolated believer?

4) Why do we need one another in the body of Christ and what role should we play in the encouragement of our fellow believers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: Putting Your Position Into Practice

The New Testament never divorces doctrine from deeds. What we believe impacts how we behave. Paul spends the **first three chapters of Ephesians** laying out many glorious theological truths before he applies it in **chapters 4-6**. He does the same thing in **Romans 1-11**, before the practical instruction in **chapter 12**. It is vitally important that we understand who God is, who we are, and what God has done for us in Christ as the foundation for how we live as Christians. Understanding our position in Christ is the basis for our practice in daily life.

The author of Hebrews follows the same pattern. Although a few times he has interrupted his doctrinal themes to apply it, most of the book to this point has been doctrinal. In the **first four chapters**, he demonstrated how Jesus Christ is superior to all in His *person*. From **chapter 5 through 10:18**, he shows how Christ is superior to all in His *priesthood*. But beginning at **10:19** and running to the end of the book, based on the truths that he has presented, he shows how Christ's superiority should spur us on to enduring faith, even in the face of trials. He shows us here how to put our new position in Christ into practice.

Because of our new position in Christ, we should draw near to God in faith, hold fast the confession of our hope, and consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

1. Our Position: We have a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ (10:19-21).

He presents two vital truths, both introduced with "*since*":

A. WE HAVE CONFIDENCE TO ENTER THE HOLY PLACE BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS (10:19-20).

B. WE HAVE A GREAT PRIEST OVER THE HOUSE OF GOD (10:21).

2. Our Practice: We should draw near to God in faith, hold fast the confession of our hope, and consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (10:22-25).

As we saw in **6:9-12**, the author brought together the three Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love. He does that again here.

A. WE SHOULD DRAW NEAR TO GOD IN FAITH (10:22).

B. LET US HOLD FAST THE CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE WITHOUT WAVERING (10:23).

C. LET US CONSIDER HOW TO STIMULATE ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS (10:24-25).

MacArthur: Responding to the New Covenant

[Continues with his evangelism emphasis – believing that the passage is mainly directed towards Jews who have come to the point of intellectual understanding but need to decide whether they will move forward into genuine faith or turn back to Judaism.]

When a man hears the Gospel, the good news of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ, and when that man understands the Gospel, and when that man believes that the Gospel is true, and when he, to some extent, commits himself to that understanding, then he will from that point either **go on to be a true believer or fall back to be an apostate**. You see, there are only two possible responses to the knowledge of the Gospel. When an individual knows the truth of the Gospel, he either goes on to believe or he falls back into apostasy, and an apostate is one who rejects the truth, having known it. That's different from somebody who maybe rejects only knowing a portion of it. There are only two possible responses to the individual who intellectually understands the truth of the Gospel, and that is to go on to faith or to fall back into a state of apostasy, which deserves the severest kind of punishment. Now, tonight we're going to consider the first of those two possibilities, and that is **the positive response to the new covenant**, or salvation. A man knows the truth. He understands the truth. To a certain measure he acquiesces to the truth. And at that point, if he goes forward and commits his life to Christ, he has taken a positive response to the truth. If he falls back, it's a negative response.... We will consider the negative response, the horrible tragedy, beginning in **Hebrews 10:26**, of willful apostasy and what happens when a man willingly has a negative response to the Gospel. But tonight it's going to be positive (**Hebrews 10:19-25**).

So warning has interspersed these presentations of the superiority of Christ. But now he's going to ask for a full response, beginning in **verse 19**.

And you'll notice that **19** begins, "*Having therefore,*" and the therefores are always there for a good reason. They always point backwards. "On the basis of what I've said for 10 chapters and 18 verses, you must respond." If you know the gospel of Jesus Christ, you either then take a positive response and boldly, **verse 19**, "*enter into the holiest,*" or you take a negative response, **verse 26**, you sin willfully after you knew the truth, and you fall away, and judgment comes about. Only two responses. And that's what He's asking for beginning in **chapter 10, verse 19**, in response to all of the presentation of Christ up through **verse 18 of chapter 10**. . .

On the basis of all that you've learned, therefore, on the basis of everything I've said in **chapter 7, 8, 9, and 10** about the openness, about the fact that Jesus made the perfect sacrifice, that Jesus provided access, that Jesus provided entrance, on the fact of all of that, you have boldness to go on in and meet God person-to-person. The blood of Jesus has opened the way. . .

The word "new" is a very rare word in the New Testament. It is not the typical word for "new," *neos, kainos*, none of those words. It is this word: *prospheuton*. You know what it means? Freshly slaughtered. That's the literal meaning. What it says is we have boldness to enter into the holiness by the blood of Jesus by a freshly slaughtered and living way. How vivid. How vivid. Who was it that was freshly slaughtered that opened the way? Jesus Christ, a freshly slain road to God. All the old sacrifices didn't make it.

The old road was a dead road. It wasn't a new and living way. It was an old, dead one. There wasn't any life there. The old way was only an index finger pointing to the new road – in Christ. And I love the fact that it's been at least 30 years since Jesus died when this was written, but it's still fresh. It's still a freshly slaughtered way. Isn't that terrific? You know, under the old economy, you had to sacrifice an animal all the time, every day, every day, every day, every day, and every year through the Yom Kippur ceremony, all the time, over and over and over and over. Jesus Christ was slain once, and His slaying is fresh, and still just as fresh today, 2,000 years later, as it was the day it happened. . .

And so it's a living way because it makes us alive. The day I met Jesus Christ, I came alive – in the truest sense. John said in **John chapter 1**, "*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.*" In Him was life. Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth and*" – what? - "*the life.*" He said to Martha, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he*" – what? - "*live. And he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*" . . .

The writer says the veil is Christ's flesh. Fantastic thought. What's he saying? He's saying this: As long as Christ stayed alive, and as long as He was living, the way to God was barred, even though He was telling us about God. Christ came into the world and said this and this and so about God, and if He remained alive, and if His flesh was never torn on the cross, then the way was never open. But when the flesh of Jesus Christ was ripped asunder at the cross, the way to God was open. And so Christ's flesh, in a very real sense, veiled off God until it was rent. Do you see? Until Christ's flesh was split, the way to God was barred, even though He was here.

An uncrucified Savior is no savior at all. If Jesus just came into the world, talked a lot, said what He wanted us to do and left, the way would still be barred, wouldn't it? He had to die and rise again, so that we could die to sin and live to God. So as long as in the flesh He was alive, it was a veil. When He died, the veil of His flesh was rent, and the way to God was opened. And it was symbolized as the veil in the temple was split and access to God was provided.

And so the Messiah had provided actual entrance into the presence of God. The reality had come. And all the Old Testament things could fall away. They were no longer needed. He opened the way. But not only did He open it. Look at verse 21. “Having a high priest over the house of God.” He not only opened it up, but He became the high priest in the presence of God. He not only showed us the way, He took us in there with Him. It’s a fabulous thought. . .

They were all having a hard time making the break, those who were intellectually convinced and those who were really saved. They were all in danger of falling back, and He’s saying, “Keep that fellowship going. Don’t go back. You need each other. You need to love each other. You need to kind of irritate” – the word “provoke” literally is “irritate,” it’s a negative word. “Irritate each other into good works.” *Paroxusmos*. Stimulate good works and stimulate love. These are the things that go together in the Christian experience, love and good works.

J. Ligon Duncan: Let Us Draw Near to God

Several compact applications of all the theology that the author of Hebrews has been piling up for 10 chapters, several compact applications of that theology are made directly to us as believers. Really, the rest of the Book of Hebrews after **verse 25** is simply a more detailed expansion of the applications set forth in these **verses 19-25**.

I. Christians must take care that their relationship to God reflects Christ’s work.

First, he wants you to do what he wants you to do because of the shed sacrifice of Christ and the confidence you have because of it. Secondly, He has inaugurated a new and living way for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. Thirdly, in **verse 21**, he says, “*Since we have a great high priest over God’s house of God.*”

II. Christians must consider the consequence of Christ’s work for our assurance.

But now that we live in the time of the New Covenant and Jesus’ finished sacrifice has been offered, you are now invited by God the Father Himself to come into His presence without human mediation.

By the way, he does give four conditions.

- Draw near with a true heart. What is he saying? Come with sincerity. Come with genuineness.

- Secondly: Draw near in full assurance of faith. Have a godly faith confidence as you come to the Lord. A confidence that is based upon your apprehension of the significance of what Jesus has done for you on the cross. You come with a confidence based on what Jesus has done.

- Thirdly, you come with a clean heart. That is, you come with a conscience which realizes that you have been declared not guilty by God because of what Jesus has done on the cross. Come with a conscience that understands what justification by grace through faith means. Come with a conscience that knows

what it means that God has pronounced over you and over all your sins:
“Therefore, there is now no condemnation.”

- And then he says fourthly, “*You come with washed bodies.*” He is not just talking about baptism there, although outward baptism is certainly a sign of this. He is talking about the purification of life that is accomplished by the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit that is symbolized in the washing of baptism.

III. Christians must consider the consequence of Christ's work for our hope.

This hope is based upon an apprehension of our understanding of the promises that God has made to Jesus in the covenant of redemption. . .

So the author of Hebrews says, “I want you to hold fast to your confession and to your hope because your hope depends ultimately on what God promised His son and don’t ever think the Father will not fulfill His word to His son. Even if in the weakness of your faith and doubt, you wonder whether He is going to fulfill His promise to you, don’t ever think that He is not going to fulfill His promise to His son.” And His promise to His son is to give you into His hands. The Son is not going to let you go. So the author of Hebrews says, “You draw near and you hang on, because God has made promises to His son.”

IV. Christians must consider the consequence of Christ's work for our fellowship.

He is reminding us of the resultant responsibility that we have to one another as brothers and sisters, because we have been made brothers and sisters by the finished work of Jesus Christ. If it is true that we have assurance because of what Jesus has done, if it is true that we have hope because of what Jesus has done, it is also true that we have obligations to one another because of what Jesus has done. So He tells us to love one another, stimulating one another to love and good deeds. . .

Have you seen, perhaps on the street of a large city or maybe on a television show one of these fellows who carries around the placard that reads, “Repent. The end is near.” The argument of the author of Hebrews is “Love one another. The end is near. Encourage one another. The end is near.”

Andrew Murray: Outline -- OF LIFE IN THE HOLIEST OF ALL. Hebrews 10:19-25

It may help us the better to master the rich contents of this central passage, containing a summary of the whole Epistle, if we here give the chief thoughts it contains.

I. The four great Blessings of the new worship:

1. The Holiest opened up.
2. Boldness in the Blood.
3. A New and Living Way.
4. The Great High Priest.

II. The four chief Marks of the true worshipper:

1. A True Heart.
2. Fullness of Faith.
3. A Heart sprinkled from an Evil Conscience.
4. The Body washed with Clean Water.

III. The four great Duties to which the opened Sanctuary calls:

1. Let us draw nigh (in the fullness of faith.)
2. Let us hold fast the profession of our hope.
3. Let us consider one another to provoke unto love.
4. Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

TEXT: Hebrews 10:1-18

TITLE: *ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE OF CHRIST*

BIG IDEA:

THE ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE OF CHRIST PROVIDES THE ULTIMATE CLEANSING AND FORGIVENESS THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE UNDER THE OLD COVENANT

INTRODUCTION:

This section completes the author's doctrinal presentation before he launches into practical applications beginning in **10:19**. Look at how many times in this passage the author emphasizes the once-for-all character of the sacrifice of Christ. When we fully understand the perfection of Christ's sacrifice, there should be no temptation to revert to the old covenant sacrificial system. Christ is the supreme and sufficient and clearly superior high priest and His sacrifice is all we need for full and complete and final forgiveness of sins. He has accomplished our ultimate sanctification.

Leon Morris: The preceding sections have brought out the efficacy of the blood of Jesus as a prevailing sacrifice, and now stress is laid on the once-for-all character of that sacrifice.

Hewitt: As the author draws his theological discussion to a close, he recapitulates former truths and makes certain additions to bring out the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over the ritual system of the old covenant. The sacrifices of the old covenant, though many, were inadequate. Christ's sacrifice, though one, was fully adequate (**1-4**). Animal sacrifices could never fulfil God's will; yet only by the fulfilment of His will could sin be put away. Christ accomplished this (**5-10**). The high priests stood continually as servants in the holy place, for their work was not finished. The great High Priest sits in God's presence, for by the one offering of Himself He has finished His work (**11-14**). Scripture testifies that there is no further need of offerings for sin (**15-18**).

MacArthur: The sacrifice of Jesus Christ then is effective forever. It is effective for all who believe because it fulfills God's design. It replaces the old inadequate system. It sanctifies the believer. It removes sin and replaces it with righteousness. It destroys the enemy and all who follow him. It brings with it eternal security and it fulfills the promise of God and thus convinces us of His faithfulness. It is so perfect that nothing can be added to it and all we are ever asked to do is believe in it.

I. (:1-4) INADEQUACY OF REPETITIVE OLD COVENANT ANIMAL SACRIFICES

A. (:1) Catalog of Limitations

1. Represents the Shadow – not the Reality

“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things,”

Kent: The contrast is between the law as containing in its sacrificial system only the barest shadow outline of the spiritual truths involved. It was not (nor could it be) the exact replica of what God would do about sin, for no animal nor any other finite creature could convey adequately all that God would do in His program of redemption.

Mohler: The phrase *“the good things to come”* sums up everything Christ purchased and accomplished for us by virtue of his life, death, and resurrection. The greatest of these good things is the forgiveness of sin. The writer already made this point clear in **9:11-12**.

Richard Phillips: Observations about the Old Covenant:

- **Continuity** exists with the new covenant --
The Old Testament is the reality in Christ projected backward, redemptively speaking.
- Its subject matter is **Christ**. To be sure, it is Christ in shadow form through various types and representatives in the Old Testament. . . a shadow is better understood when the reality is there to be seen.

2. Repeatedly Offered

*“by the same sacrifices year by year,
which they offer continually,”*

3. Reduced (Restricted) Results

“can never make perfect those who draw near.”

Kent: The passage does not imply that no forgiveness of any sort was possible under the Old Testament system; that was plainly not the case (**Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35**). What is asserted is the absence of any complete or final cleansing.

Constable: *“Make perfect”* does not mean to make sinless but to make acceptable to God. Jesus Christ provided perfect cleansing for us by His death, as the following verses show.

B. (:2-3) Constant Reminder of Sins and Need for Cleansing

*“Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered,
because the worshipers, having once been cleansed,
would no longer have had consciousness of sins?
But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.”*

Leon Morris: the very continuity of the sacrifices witnesses to their ineffectiveness. . . An atonement that needs constant repetition does not really atone; a conscience which has to be cleansed once a year has never been truly cleansed.

C. (:4) Conclusion of Futility

“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

Kent: No reflection is cast upon the value of Old Testament sacrifices, as long as they are viewed in proper perspective. What must be remembered is that their atoning value was temporary and typical, depending for their efficacy upon the coming sacrifice of Christ to whom they pointed.

Mohler: The old covenant sacrifices, in all their bloodiness, could not take away sin. Instead, they pointed to the one sacrifice that could bring forgiveness of sin: Jesus Christ. His perfect sacrifice happened once and never needs to be repeated. His blood, unlike that of animals, washes sins away forever.

J. Ligon Duncan: So the grand concluding statement you see in **verse 4** is this self-evident assertion that animal blood cannot accomplish forgiveness of sins. It cannot accomplish the cleansing of conscience and it cannot accomplish reconciliation with God. You see what he is saying. He is saying, “Think about it for a minute, people. Do you really think that the shed blood of animals can bring you back into fellowship with God when you have offended against Him morally. And His answer is, “Of course not.” The blood of animals cannot do that, and that is not why God set up the sacrificial system.

II. (:5-10) CHRIST’S SACRIFICE SUPERCEDES THE OT SACRIFICES

A. (:5-7) Christ Voluntarily Took on Humanity

1. (:5) Purpose of the Incarnation = to be the Perfect Lamb of God

*“Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,
‘Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired,
But a body Thou hast prepared for Me;’”*

Kent: This is a reference to the incarnation as considered as a whole. . . Sacrifice (*thusian*) refers to the animal victim; offering (*prophoran*) denotes the meal or drink offering.

Richard Phillips: Obedience pleases God. He is satisfied by a heart eager to do his will, by a life expressing the character of God set forth in the Ten Commandments . . .

Leon Morris: Now he rounds off this stage of his theme by showing that the Bible proves the correctness of the position he has advocated. Animal sacrifices could not take away the sins of the people. But it was the will of God that sin be atoned for. Christ’s perfect sacrifice of himself fulfills God’s will as animal sacrifices could never do. . . His argument up till now has been the negative one that the animal sacrifices of the old covenant were unavailing. Now he says positively that Christ’s sacrifice, which established the new covenant, was effectual. It really put away sin. And it was foreshadowed in the same passage from Jeremiah.

2. (:6) Pleasing the Father by Way of Propitiation for Sins

*“In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
Thou hast taken no pleasure.”*

Kent: The next clause contains a Hebrew parallelism, but the terms are not completely synonymous. Whole burnt offerings (*holokautomata*) describes the voluntary sacrifices brought to the tabernacle by grateful worshipers. Sacrifices for sin (*peri hamartias*) were the required sin and trespass offerings. This last pair has represented the two classes of offerings as to their function.

3. (:7) Perseverance in Accomplishing the Revealed Will of the Father

*“Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come
(In the roll of the book it is written of Me)
To do Thy will, O God.”*

Hewitt: **Psalm cx** was used to show the superiority of the priesthood of Christ over the Levitical priesthood. **Jeremiah xxxi** was quoted to indicate that the covenant of Sinai was superseded by the better covenant; and **Psalm xi** is now employed to prove that the sacrifice of a rational and spiritual being is more excellent than the sacrifice of dumb creatures.

B. (:8-10) Christ Transitioned the Sacrificial System to the Efficacious, Once-for-all Offering of Himself

1. (:8) Rejection of Old Covenant Sacrificial System

“After saying above, ‘Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the Law),”

Hewitt: God had no pleasure in a sacrifice of dumb animals which was unaccompanied by the repentance, faith and self-dedication of the offerer.

Leon Morris: We should see the statement concerning the necessity of sacrifice as another illustration of the attitude consistently maintained by the author that the OT system is divinely inspired but preliminary. He holds it to be effective but only within its own limited scope. The sacrifices were commanded in God’s law and therefore must be offered. But they were not God’s final will nor God’s answer to the problem of sin. They were partial and they pointed the way. Even though they came as part of the law, we are to recognize their limitation.

2. (:9) Transition to New Covenant Sacrifice of Christ

“then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Thy will.’ He takes away the first in order to establish the second.”

3. (:10) Accomplishment of Ultimate Sanctification by His Once-for-all Sacrifice

“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Kent: This sanctification is objective and judicial, for it was accomplished by Christ through His death. It denotes the act of God which “*set apart*” (literal meaning of *hagiazō*) believers from the spiritual contamination they had and the condemnation which they deserved to a perfect position before God, so that they are acceptable to Him. This is the status of every Christian, and for this reason they are frequently termed *hagioi* (saints) in the New Testament. (This does not describe present or practical sanctification, which is to be progressively developed in believers’ lives.)

III. (:11-14) CHRIST AS THE PRIEST WHO SITS SUPERCEDES THE LEVITICAL PRIESTS WHO CONTINUALLY STAND AND MINISTER

A. (:11) Inadequacy of Levitical Priests with Their Repetitive Animal Sacrifices

“And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;”

B. (:12-13) Efficacy of Christ’s Once-for-all Sacrifice

1. (:12) Efficacy Authenticated by His Enthronement

“but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God,”

Leon Morris: “*sat down*” -- The author is combining with the thought of a finished work the idea that our Lord is a being of the highest dignity and honor.

2. (:13) Efficacy Consummated by His Eschatological Triumph

“waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.”

C. (:14) Accomplishment of Ultimate Sanctification by Christ’s Once-for-all Sacrifice

“For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Kent: This verse summarizes the discussion just preceding. Christ’s one offering was sufficient for all time. This is why He is able to sit at the Father’s right hand, for His task is finished and was fully successful.

F. F. Bruce: Three outstanding effects are thus ascribed to the sacrifice of Christ:

- by it His people have had their conscience cleansed from guilt;
- by it they have been fitted to approach God as accepted worshippers;
- by it they have experienced the fulfilment of what was promised in earlier days, being brought into that perfect relation to God which is involved in the new covenant

IV. (:15-18) ADEQUACY OF CHRIST'S ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE FOR SINS – SUPPORTED BY OT PROPHECY

A. (:15-16a) Regarding the Superiority of the New Covenant

1. (:15a) Testimony of the Holy Spirit

“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us”

F. F. Bruce: the Holy Spirit's confirmation of the conclusion to which our author's argument has just led him. The new covenant, according to Jeremiah's prophecy, not only involved the implanting of God's laws, together with the will and power to carry them out, in the hearts of His people; it also conveyed the assurance that their past sins and iniquities would be eternally blotted out from God's record, never to be brought up in evidence against them.

2. (:15b-16a) Internal Knowledge and Empowerment

“for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them After those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, And upon their mind I will write them,’”

Remember, it was the external nature of the old covenant and its inability to empower the people to obey God's commands that proved to be its main limitation. There needed to be a way to deal with finality with man's sin problem and need for cleansing and forgiveness.

B. (:16b-18) Regarding the Final Resolution of the Sin Problem

1. (:16b-17) Complete and Final Forgiveness of Sins

“He then says, ‘And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’”

2. (:18) Complete and Final Sacrifice for Sins

“Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What should be our perspective in the present towards our consciousness of our own sins?
- 2) In what sense did the old covenant sacrifices bring a reminder of sins instead of forgiveness of sins?
- 3) How can we combat a works mentality towards Christian living by applying the

truths revealed here about the sufficiency of the sacrifice and priesthood of Jesus Christ?

4) How do the Catholic teachings on purgatory and penance completely undermine the gospel of God's grace in Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: The argument is again chiasmic.

A The inadequacy of the Old Covenant: repeated sacrifices were necessary (**Hebrews 10:1-4**)

B The one sacrifice of Christ: supersedes the repeated sacrifices (**Hebrews 10:5-10**)

B" The priesthood of Christ: supersedes the Levitical priesthood (**Hebrews 10:11-14**)

A" The adequacy of the New Covenant: no more sacrifice for sins is necessary (Hebrews 10:15-18)

The long section on the high priestly ministry of Jesus ends here (**Hebrews 7:1 to Hebrews 10:18**). Priestly ministry was such an important part of old Israelite worship that the writer gave it lengthy attention here. The writer showed that Jesus is a superior priest compared with the Levitical priests, and that His priesthood supersedes the Levitical priesthood. He also pointed out that Jesus serves under the New Covenant that is superior to the Old Covenant. Furthermore His sacrifice is superior to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. Finally, Jesus' priesthood brings the believer into full acceptance with God, something the former priesthood could not do. Therefore the readers would be foolish to abandon Christianity to return to Judaism. Contemporary believers are also foolish to turn away from Christ and the gospel.

Richard Phillips: This is the great conclusion to the main doctrinal instruction of the Book of Hebrews. From here we will move forward to the wealth of applications in the final chapters, including the examples of faith in **chapter 11**. We are far from finished with the Book of Hebrews. Yet here we stand at the conclusion of this great doctrinal teaching. How then shall we conclude our own reflections on these matters?

There can be only one answer, and that is to draw our thoughts and our hearts, our whole spiritual orientation, upward to where Jesus Christ sits now enthroned, reigning with power for our salvation, having accomplished everything needed for us to be saved. He is at the center of it all, above it all, he is the meaning of everything we have considered in the book of Hebrews. The tabernacle and temple were about him and his work. The priests and the rituals of the Old Testament served only to point to him.. The blood that was shed year after year and day after day spoke only of his blood, shed once

for all upon the cross. The veil that was torn invites our gaze into the heavens, where now our Savior sits at rest, reigning for his own, securing us for himself forever, and ruling our hearts by the Spirit he sends. Everything points to him; everything is found in and with him; everything for us comes from him and draws us to him as his people, his own reward for obedience to the will of the Father.

J. Ligon Duncan: Cleansed Once for All

Last week we focused in **Hebrews 9: 15-28** on the finality of Christ's sacrifice. This week we focus on a related subject — **the perfection of Christ's sacrifice**. Last week we emphasized the fact that whereas Old Testament sacrifices repeated themselves, Christ's sacrifice was once for all. And therein lies one of the fundamental differences between the Old Testament sacrificial system and the New Testament sacrificial system. The author of Hebrews wants to press this point a bit further in **Hebrews 10** and his contrast is going to be between a sacrifice that **actually works** and sacrifices that merely foreshadowed the sacrifice that really works. That is going to be his contrast between the Old Testament sacrifices and the work of Jesus Christ. . .

Now the author of Hebrews from **Hebrews 1** all the way through **Hebrews 10** has focused on the superiority of Jesus Christ; and he is back at it again here in this passage, focusing on the perfection of the work of atonement that Jesus Christ has done. You see in the introduction that I have listed basically the three things that He has done in this passage. First, he points out the ineffectiveness of the old covenant sacrificial system. Remember he is writing to people who are being tempted to leave Christianity and go back to Judaism. Very likely one of the reasons that they are tempted to do that is that they sort of miss the sacrifices and the ceremony from the worship. Christian worship is simple. It is spiritual. It is taken up with the reading of scriptures and the praying of prayers and the singing of songs with grace in the heart, and the hearing of the word. And they kind of miss the ceremony of the old covenant worship and especially the sacrifices that went along with that.

So the author of Hebrews wants to point out to them that those Old Testament sacrifices, considered simply in themselves, apart from the work that Jesus came to do, do not forgive sins. He wants to stress those Old Testament sacrifices, however glorious that ceremony may have been, those sacrifices did not forgive sin. He is very emphatic about that in **verse 4**.

Then he goes on to argue that the sacrifice of Christ was provided by God to do what God never intended those Old Testament sacrifices to do. He wants to tell us, "Look, when I say that the Old Testament sacrifices were not able to forgive sins, I am not telling you that God made a mistake. I'm not telling you that God set up the sacrificial system and then said 'Oops, it doesn't work to forgive sins.'" He is telling you that God set up that sacrificial system deliberately to point forward to the one true sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to make that clear.

Then finally, he tells us how Christ, through His obedience in His death (he keeps repeating that beautiful phrase "*I have come to do Thy will*"), so the stress is on the

whole of Christ's obedience and particularly that act of obedience in His crucifixion. So He shows how Christ's obedience in death brought about the realization of the things that had been promised in **Jeremiah 31:34**.

I. God designed the ceremonial system as a shadow. (:1-4)

II. Christ, therefore, came into the world as the real sacrifice. (:5-10)

III. Christ's work effects the new covenant. (:11-18)

Steven Cole: Total Forgiveness

Through Christ's obedience to God's will at the cross, new covenant believers receive what those under the Law could not receive: Total forgiveness.

The author piles up a number of synonymous phrases which show either negatively what the Law with its sacrifices could not do, or positively what Christ's sacrifice did accomplish.

Note:

10:1: The sacrifices of the Law could never "*make perfect those who draw near.*"

10:2: Those sacrifices could not completely cleanse the worshipers and take away their consciousness of sins.

10:3: Those sacrifices provided a yearly reminder of sins.

10:4: Those sacrifices could not take away sins.

10:10: By God's will through the cross, "*we have been sanctified*" once for all.

10:12: Christ "*offered one sacrifice for sins for all time.*"

10:14: "*By one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*"

10:17: God promises to remember their sins and lawless deeds no more.

10:18: "*Where there is forgiveness...*" "*there is no longer any offering for sin.*"

1. The sacrifices prescribed by the Law could not completely remove guilt and sin (10:1-4).

2. Christ's obedience to God's will at the cross set aside the Old Testament

sacrifices and provided perfect standing for us before God (10:5-10).

A. THE CROSS WAS THE DIRECT WILL OF GOD.

B. CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WILL AT THE CROSS SET ASIDE THE OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES ONCE AND FOR ALL.

C. BY CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WILL AT THE CROSS, WE RECEIVE PERFECT STANDING BEFORE GOD ONCE AND FOR ALL.

3. The totality of our forgiveness is illustrated by the contrast between the unfinished, repetitive ministry of the Old Testament priests and the finished, sufficient sacrifice of Christ (10:11-14).

4. The Old Testament prophecy of the new covenant supports the totality of our forgiveness (10:15-18).

TEXT: Hebrews 10:26-31

TITLE: WARNING #4: DON'T PERSIST IN DELIBERATE SIN

BIG IDEA:

PERSISTENT DELIBERATE SIN SHOWS CONTEMPT FOR CHRIST AND HIS SACRIFICE AND WILL BE JUDGED WITHOUT MERCY AS APOSTASY

INTRODUCTION:

The warning passages in Chapter 6 and here in Chapter 10 are especially difficult because the language seems to describe genuine believers and yet the punishment is definitely “hellish.” Since we believe in the eternal security of the believer, unlike, the Arminians, we are forced to wrestle with the tension of these passages. In keeping with the overall context of the epistle it seems reasonable to find the author addressing those who appear to be genuine believers on the surface, but who fall short and must either move forward to full saving faith or they will end up in a state of apostasy from which there is no recovery. The specific warning here relates to persisting in willful or deliberate sin.

Hewitt: the only persons the author of can conceive apostatizing are those who have received Christianity as a formulated system of beliefs, but without any personal experience of God in Christ. Such persons are typified in Balaam and Simon Magus.

I. (:26-27) NO REMEDY FOR APOSTASY UNDER THE NEW COVENANT – ONLY TERRIFYING JUDGMENT

A. (:26a) Condition of Apostasy

“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth,”

Hewitt: the deliberate and continual rejection of Christianity is a decision of the will which acts contrary to what one would have expected from the knowledge of the truth which has been received.

Leon Morris: It is clear that the writer has apostasy in mind. . . their acquaintance with Christian teaching is more than superficial. If, knowing this, they revert to an attitude of rejection . . . then there remains no sacrifice for sins. Such people have rejected the sacrifice of Christ, and the preceding argument has shown that there is no other. If they revert to the Jewish sacrificial system, they go back to sacrifices that their knowledge of Christianity teaches them cannot put away sin (v. 4).

Steven Cole: “*Sin*ning willfully” refers to what **Numbers 15:30** calls sins of defiance, for which there was no sacrifice available. Commentators compare such sins to the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, representing an unpardonable sin of “high treason and revolt against God” (Walter Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, p. 132, cited by Ronald Allen, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelein

[Zondervan], 2:830). To go on sinning willfully means deliberately and knowingly to renounce the faith by repudiating Christ's sacrifice for sins. It is a total defection from the faith in Christ as Savior.

B. (:26b-27) Certainty of Eternal Judgment

1. (:26a) No Escape

"there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,"

2. (:27) No Relief

a. Terrifying Expectation

"but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment,"

b. Consuming Fire

"and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries."

John Piper: So here you have in **verse 27** a picture of God's wrath: there is legal picture, an emotional picture and a physical picture.

- The legal picture is that his wrath is "*judgment*." It is the legal, just act of a judge.
- The emotional picture is that his wrath is "*the fury of a fire*." Literally, "a zeal of fire," or a fiery passion. God is not just a little bit angry, but passionate with fury.
- And third, there is the physical or material picture: the fire "*consumes the adversaries*." It will swallow up the sinner in the flames of legal and passionate judgment. "Consume" doesn't mean annihilate. Hell is not non-existence. "Consume" means swallow up into suffering forever. Justice will be done and holy anger will be satisfied.

II. (:28-29) NO LESSENING OF JUDGMENT UNDER THE NEW COVENANT -- REJECTING CHRIST WORSE THAN REJECTING THE LAW OF MOSES

A. (:28) Severe Judgment Under the Old Covenant

1. Offense: Rejecting the Law of Moses

"Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses"

2. Judgment: Dies Without Mercy

"dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses."

Leon Morris: An argument from the greater to the lesser brings out the seriousness of the situation. . . The writer invites the readers to work out for themselves how much more serious is the punishment of the man who apostatizes from Christ. It must be more severe than under the old way because Jesus is greater than Moses (**3:1ff.**); the new covenant is better than the old, founded on better promises (**8:6**) and established by a better sacrifice (**9:23**).

B. (:29) More Severe Judgment Under the New Covenant

1. Clear Comparison

“How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve”

Kent: The argument is that if apostates from Israel’s worship suffered physical death as retribution for their deeds, how much greater would be the punishment for rejecters of the Son of God. These rejecters are described as guilty of three terrible deeds.

2. Three Charges of Apostasy:

a. First Charge – Contempt for Christ

“who has trampled under foot the Son of God,”

Kent: implies not only rejection but also contempt

Mohler: describes those who reject the identity of Christ. Jesus extrapolates this idea in **John 14** when he says that if a person rejects the Son, he rejects the Father. . . and no longer has a sacrifice for sins.

b. Second Charge – Contempt for Christ’s Sacrifice as Accepted by the Father

“and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified,”

Mohler: means not to believe that the blood of Christ can effect purification for sins. We have already seen the centrality and power of his blood throughout the letter (**9:12, 14, 25-26; 10:19**), and **verse 29** is no different. We are told that the blood of the covenant sanctifies us. To disregard Christ’s blood is to spurn the purification it accomplishes.

John Piper: They regarded it as common, ordinary, nothing special, not sacred or precious.

John Piper: What is this **fruitless sanctification**? It seems to be the religious separation and outward purification that often happens when a person becomes part of the visible church. They come under the influence of truth in preaching and teaching. They come under the influence of love among the saints. They come under the influence of the ordinances and even eat and drink the sacred emblems of Christ's body and blood. They feel the blowing of God's Spirit of grace and taste his wooing and winning influences. And in all of this, they are visibly set apart from the world - sanctified the way the people of Israel was sanctified among the nations, even though many of them were faithless. And all of this gracious influence was purchased by the blood of Christ, so that **verse 29** says, it was indeed "*by the blood of the covenant*" that these hypocrites were sanctified.

c. Third Charge – Contempt for the Holy Spirit

“and has insulted the Spirit of grace?”

Kent: It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring men to Christ and to sanctify them. To apostatize is to reject all such activity. The divine Spirit is called the “*Spirit of grace*” in **Zechariah 12:10**. It is by the grace of God that the work of salvation was prepared and carried out. The action of the Spirit in convicting and regenerating is thus a demonstration of God’s grace to sinners in bringing them to salvation in Christ.

Mohler: equivalent to blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (**Matt 12:31-32**)

John Piper: They tasted the grace of God in their lives, were influenced by it in some measure, but then they began to turn it into license and used it to justify their love of sinning, and eventually threw it away as unnecessary.

III. (:30-31) NO SURPRISES SINCE THE JUDGE REMAINS THE SAME

A. (:30) Familiarity with the Judge

“For we know Him who said,”

Kent: The thought is that God who spoke those words through Moses was no stranger to these readers. They not only possessed the Scripture which revealed Him, but had seen countless evidences in history which demonstrated His absolute justice. . . . When God finally moves in retribution, His judgment will not be forgetful of the enormity of men’s rejection of Christ’s perfect sacrifice.

2 OT Quotes with the same message:

1. You Can Count on God Judging

“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” Deut. 32:35

2. You Can Count on God Judging

“And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’” Deut. 32:36; Ps. 135:4

Leon Morris: The quotation here emphasizes that vengeance is a divine prerogative. It is not for men to take it into their own hands. But the emphasis is not on that. It is rather on the certainty that the Lord will act. The wrongdoer cannot hope to go unpunished because avenging wrong is in the hands of none less than God. . . . That a man claims to be a member of the people of God does not exempt him from judgment. God judges all. Let not the apostate think that he, of all people, can escape.

John Piper: Externally, he calls the church the “*people of God*.” He calls them brothers - even “holy brothers” - giving the benefit of the doubt to any who has professed faith in Christ. But he knows that the visible church and the true church of God’s elect are not the same. There are many hypocrites. And, as this text shows, many of these eventually become visible by “*willfully sinning*” and forsaking the gathered body (see **verse 25**).

B. (:31) Fear of the Judge

“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

That's the verse that inspired the line from **Jonathan Edwards'** famous sermon, "*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.*"

F. F. Bruce: The privileges which Israel enjoyed as God's covenant-people meant that their responsibilities were the greater and that retribution would be the more severe in their case if they gave themselves up to unrighteousness (**Amos 3:2**). What was true then remains true for God's dealings with His people now.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is this type of "*willful sinning*" different from the weakness of a believer who keeps struggling with victory over a particular sin as Paul relates in his struggles in **Romans 6-7**?
- 2) Why does the author of Hebrews use terminology to describe these apostates that makes it sound like they started off as genuine believers? Do you think this could just be a hypothetical warning but not actually apply to any specific individuals?
- 3) What leads people to imagine that somehow they can escape accountability before God?
- 4) Why have so many people rejected the biblical truths related to eternal judgment and torment in hell?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Phillips: The Reality of Hell

This passage makes very clear a teaching that is widely denied today, even by many who consider themselves evangelicals. That teaching has to do with both the reality and the nature of hell. It is not only that our generation does not like the idea of hell, but that it simply will not accept it. Ours is a humanistic age; we think of good mainly in human terms. . .

Perhaps the best discussion of this topic to come out in recent years is found in **D. A. Carson'**s outstanding book *The Gagging of God*. Carson collects and analyzes various attempts to do away with hell, or at least to turn down the temperature on eternal punishment.

First, there are those who deny the idea of judgment altogether, as unworthy of a loving God. **Clark Pinnock** expresses this view passionately:

I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed . . . Everlasting torment is intolerable from a moral point of view because it makes God into a blood-thirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for victims whom he does not even allow to die.

Others, who find themselves unable to brush aside the biblical data in the way Pinnock does, are attracted to the idea of total destruction as opposed to everlasting torment. These people are called “annihilationists.” They agree that God will punish the wicked, not eternally, not with everlasting torment, but with annihilation. The wicked will not suffer perpetually in hell but will simply cease to exist. Annihilationists point to the imagery of fire and observe that fire not only torments but consumes, so that what is burned is destroyed. This idea of destruction, they point out, is a strong theme in the Bible (see **Phil. 3:19**; **1 Thess. 5:3**; **2 Thess. 1:9**; **2 Peter 3:7**).

Probably the best-known representative of this view is **John Stott**, who writes:

I find the concept [of eternal conscious punishment in hell] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain.

But, recognizing the folly of allowing our emotions to determine our creed, he adds, “as a committed Evangelical, my question must be – and is – not what does my heart tell me, but what does God’s word say?” . . .

The Bible depicts judgment and hell not merely as destruction but as everlasting punishment and torment for the enemies of God. Against this backdrop we see the urgency with which the writer of Hebrews speaks to this Christian community. Over against the reality of hell, we can see why he writes in **verse 31**, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*”

Steven Cole: The Only Options – Christ or Judgment

If we reject Christ as God’s sacrifice for our sins, we will face His certain, terrifying judgment.

The least likely view is the **Arminian** view, that our text describes true believers who sin and lose their salvation. . .

Some early **church fathers**, however, mistakenly inferred from this and other passages in Hebrews that there was no forgiveness for sins committed after baptism. . .

A second view is that the author is talking about genuine believers who renounce the faith, but the punishment he describes is not hell, but some awful temporal judgment

(Zane Hodges, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. by John Walvoord & Roy Zuck [Victor Books], 2:805). This view is in line with Mr. Hodges' non-lordship salvation view, that a person can believe in Christ, subsequently deny and strongly oppose the faith, and yet he will be saved, although he will lose his rewards. . .

A third view is that the author is warning true believers, who cannot possibly lose their salvation, about what would happen to them if they did apostatize (which true believers cannot do). So, it is a hypothetical warning used to frighten believers away from leaving the faith (Homer Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Baker], pp. 206-207). But, as I argued when we studied Hebrews 6, a hypothetical warning is really pointless. If these people were truly regenerate, how could God hypothetically cast them into hell if they hypothetically apostatized, none of which is possible? This entire line of thinking makes no sense to me.

The correct explanation, as I understand it, is that the passage is warning those who have made a profession of faith and have associated themselves with the church, of the danger of God's eternal judgment if they turn back to Judaism. These people outwardly seem to be regenerate, but they are not truly so. To abandon Christ's sacrifice and to return to Judaism would show that they had never truly trusted Christ in the first place.

The main difficulty for this view is the phrase "*by which he was sanctified*" (10:29). . . it refers to *outward* sanctification in the sense of being identified with God's people, but not to the person's true heart condition before God. This outward sanctification may have been through baptism or communion. The person is "*set apart*" from the world in the sense that he has joined with the church and its ordinances. He sits under the preaching of the Word and even agrees with it intellectually (10:26, he has received "*the knowledge of the truth*"). But his heart has not been transformed by God's saving grace. When pressure comes to turn away from Christ due to persecution or temptation to sin, he shows his true colors by repudiating his faith in Christ. This terrible sin (further described in 10:29) puts the apostate on the path toward certain, terrifying judgment.

1. To reject Christ willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth is to reject God's only sacrifice for sins and to fall under His certain, terrifying judgment (10:26-27).

2. If the Law of Moses had stiff penalties for disregarding it, the penalty will be much greater for spurning the Son of God who fulfilled the Law (10:28-29).

3. We know that God's judgment is as certain as His Word, and it will be terrifying (10:30-31).

The *only* options are: *Christ* or *judgment*? If you reject Christ after hearing the gospel and being associated with God's people, you will fall into the hands of the living God, and it will be an eternally terrifying ordeal! You don't want to go there! But if you entrust yourself into the hands of Christ, which were pierced for you, you will find God's abundant mercy and grace to cover all your sins!

Deffinbaugh: [Confusing to read his “stream of consciousness” wrestling with this passage. I find it difficult to articulate his position – something related to a state of carnal Christianity.]

Parunak: Chart of the Warning Passages

[He particularly focuses on what goes before and what comes after each warning.]

Warning	Sin	Follows	Precedes
2:1-4	Neglect	1:1-14, Christ higher than angels	2:5-18, Christ lower than angels
3:7-4:13	Unbelief	3:1-6, Christ as faithful high priest (faith = belief)	4:14-10:25, Christ as merciful high priest
5:11-6:12	Stagnation	4:14-5:10, Christ is like other priests	6:13-10:25, Christ is unlike other priests
10:26-31	Willful Sin	1:1-10:25, The Person and Work of the Son of God	10:32-13:19, The Life of the Sons of God
12:25-29	Refusal to Obey	10:32-12:24, Life in the World	13:1-19, Life in the Church

MacArthur: [All throughout the epistle, he has taken a more unique interpretation based on a variety of different audiences being addressed at different junctures.]

Here is possibly the clearest and most concise scriptural definition of apostasy-**receiving knowledge of the truth**, that is, the gospel, but **willfully** remaining in sin. An apostate has seen and heard the truth—he knows it well—but he willfully rejects it.

Apostasy has two major characteristics:

- knowledge of the truth of the gospel
- and willful rejection of it.

Every apostate is an unbeliever, but not every unbeliever is an apostate. Many people have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel, even in part. They are sinful and, of course, do not believe in Christ, because they have never heard of Him or of His claims. An apostate, however, is well acquainted with the gospel. He knows more than enough to be saved.

The Greek language has two primary words that can be translated “knowledge.”

Gnosis has to do with ordinary knowledge, and in the New Testament is often used for general spiritual knowledge.

But *epignosis*, the word used in **verse 26**, denotes full knowledge, understanding, and discernment. In other words, the persons described here are those who have much more than a passing acquaintance with the gospel. They know it well. An apostate has all the information. He lacks nothing intellectually. He has *epignosis*. He is among those who have “*once been enlightened, ... tasted of the heavenly gift,*” and even “*been made partakers of the Holy Spirit*” (**Heb. 6:4**).

An apostate can be bred only in the brilliant light of proximity to Christ. Apostates are not made in the absence, but in the presence, of Christ. They are bred almost without exception within the church, in the very midst of God’s people. It is possible for a person to read the Bible on his own, to see the gospel clearly, and then reject it—apart from direct association with Christians. But by and large, apostates come from within the church.

Eventually, sometimes even after years of pretense and self-deception, the unbeliever who acts like a believer finally falls away. He gives up, loses interest, and goes his own way. He returns to **sinning willfully**, with no more regard for the Lord’s way or the Lord’s people. To know God’s way, to study about it and hear about it, to identify with believers, and then turn away is to become apostate. The process of falling away may be gradual, but at some point a conscious decision is made to leave the way of God, and reject the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Willfully (*hekousios*) carries the idea of deliberate intention that is habitual. The reference here is not to sins of ignorance or weakness, but to those that are planned out, determined, done with forethought. The difference between sins of ignorance and **sinning willfully** is much like the difference between involuntary manslaughter and first-degree murder. *Hekousios* is habitual. It not only is deliberate, but is an established way of thinking and believing. It is the permanent renunciation of the gospel, the permanent forsaking of God’s grace.

A believer may sometimes lapse into sin and stray from intimacy with the Lord and with His people. But, unless the Lord disciplines him and takes him to heaven, he will come back. He will be too much under conviction to stay away permanently. In the meanwhile, he will be robbed of joy and peace and of many other blessings.

We cannot always determine who is apostate and who is backsliding, and we should not try. We are not able to distinguish between a disobedient carnal believer and an apostate unbeliever. That is the Lord’s business. But there is a difference between the two, a very great difference. A person’s concern should be first of all that he himself is a true believer (**2 Cor. 13:5**) and then that he is a faithful believer. There are many calls to self-examination in the New Testament. Every time a believer comes to the Lord’s Table, he faces the reality or unreality of his salvation.

J. Ligon Duncan: What is the deliberate sin that the author of Hebrews is warning us against going on in? The sin is the sin of rejecting Christ, of ceasing to believe on Him

in whom alone is life eternal, of failing to continue in faith in Jesus, of looking for another way to stand accepted before God than in the righteousness of Christ. What has the whole argument of this book been all the way up to **Hebrews 10:26**? That Jesus is better. So what he's warning against is you deciding that something is better than Jesus or that there is another way to stand right before God other than Jesus. In other words, failing to put your faith in Jesus and persisting in that unbelief. . .

He is talking about someone who, along the way, once trusted in Jesus that just no longer does. They've given up on Jesus. They're looking somewhere else for their hope. And he is deeply concerned about that, because if Jesus is the better and only Savior there is no Savior apart and outside of Him. And so looking away from Him is a spiritual disaster. That's what this passage is about. . .

THERE ARE ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES FOR REJECTING JESUS (:26-27)

He is giving a warning here against the deliberate sin against truth to which this congregation was tempted. There were some there who were tempted to turn their back on Jesus and to refuse to continue to trust in Him for salvation. They may have been tempted to go back to some form of Judaism, maybe Essene Judaism, where they thought they could get all the things they found in Christianity without having to reject parts of their culture and their heritage which they thought Christianity compromised. But whatever the temptation was, it was a temptation to stop trusting in Jesus. And the author of Hebrews is saying very clearly here that if a person willfully and knowingly rejects Jesus, the one real sacrifice for sins, there is nowhere else for him to turn. . .

THE GREATER MERCY OF NEW COVENANT CARRIES WITH IT A GREATER JUDGEMENT WHEN IT IS REJECTED (:28-29)

He's saying, "Don't think that if God in the days of Jeremiah and Baruch and Jehoiakim wrought His just judgment on people who turned their backs on His Word, what do you think He's going to do when He has sent His final Word into the world, Jesus, and people say, 'I'm not going to believe on Him. I can find my hope somewhere else.'" There is a terrifying judgment that awaits God's new covenant mercies when they are rejected.

THE VERY THOUGHT OF GOD, WHO IS HOLY AND JUST, OUGHT TO PROMOTE THE FEAR OF GOD IN YOU (:30-31)

The very thought of God, who is holy and just, ought to promote the fear of God in us. When you realize that God is just and we are not and that He will deal justly with the earth, it ought to promote the fear of God in you. You ought to be looking for His provision of mercy because you know that you need it. But to reject that, to fail to respond to the character of God by applying to His kind and free offers of mercy, no, this is an indication of the certainty of God's judgment falling on us. The point, of course, of this passage is to remind us of the awesome judgment of God and to ask ourselves the question, "What in the world will enable me to escape that judgment

when I stand before Him in the final of times?" And if any of my answer is, "My goodness," I'm really in trouble; I don't know myself very well. The only hope is in Christ and in Christ alone and in the righteousness that He supplies and in faith alone in Christ alone that we might receive His righteousness credited to us.

John Piper: Woe to Those Who Trample the Son of God

We believe that the only good motivation comes from hearing about grace, not judgment. And little by little we let that motivational conviction (as unbiblical as it is) creep into our view of God himself, until we have no categories anymore to understand, let alone love, a God whose wrath is a fury of fire against sinners. But the writer of this book of Hebrews will not be silent about the wrath of God.

It is a book utterly devoted to living by faith in future grace. O, the grace of God in this book! Chapter after chapter celebrates the glorious provision of God in Jesus Christ to free us from our sin and turn our future into a paradise of hope. The book begins and ends with Christ making purification for sins and sitting down at the right hand of God - our perfect sacrifice and priest and shepherd, who will never leave us or forsake us. But, like no other book of the New Testament, this book is also relentless in its warnings about the dangers of carelessness in the Christian life. And the warnings are not that we might forfeit a few heavenly rewards, but that we might forfeit our souls in the fury of God's wrath.

So here is a book that stands against the motivational assumption that the only motivating news is good news. There is both the promise of joy and the warning of pain. We saw it in **2:3**, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.*" We saw it in **3:11-12**, "*As I swore in my wrath, they shall never enter my rest. Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.*" We saw it in **6:4, 6**, "*It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened . . . if they then commit apostasy . . . [they are like land that is] worthless and near to being cursed.*"

And we see it again in today's text - the conviction that it is honest and loving and wise to tell people the truth about the wrath of God. It's at the beginning and middle and end of our text.

TEXT: Hebrews 10:32-39

TITLE: EXHORTATION TO PERSEVERE

BIG IDEA:

PERSEVERE IN LOVE, HOPE AND FAITH CONSISTENT WITH YOUR EARLY CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION:

This passage tracks nicely with vv.22-25 in terms of working through the triad of **love**, **hope** and **faith** from the orientation of perseverance. The author also works through the challenge to face persecution and suffering from the time perspectives of **past**, **present** and **future**. The author wants to encourage his audience after the strong warning in vv. 25-31 that he judges most of them to be solidly in the camp of genuine believers who will persevere in the faith rather than those who be exposed as falling away to destruction. The prospect of future rewards and the soon return of Christ should be helpful motivators for perseverance. But the reality is that believers should not be surprised to face suffering and persecution as they identify with the body of Christ.

Ray Stedman: Once again, as in **chapter 6**, we see the writer's confidence that most of those he addresses are not apostate, as he describes in **He 10:32-34**. He seeks to recall them to the love and steadfastness they had exhibited when their faith in Jesus was new. They had received the light as had also those now threatening apostasy, as **He 10:26** makes clear. But most had:

- (1) accepted insult and persecution to their own person, or supported others so treated;
- (2) visited and sustained those put in prison for their faith; and
- (3) actually felt joy over watching their property confiscated, since they took comfort in the fact that their true treasures were in heaven, not on earth.

Such actions were the product of true faith, and he urges them to keep this confident faith in verses **35-36**, since perseverance is the proof of reality. The persecutions and injustices they endured presented strong temptations to give up, to accept the values of society around, and to forget what they had learned about the realities of life, death and eternity. Many are tempted today to throw away [their] confidence. Confidence is what motivates appropriate action in view of the times in which one lives.

I. (:32-34) PERSEVERE IN LOVE AS YOU ENDURE SUFFERING AND PERSECUTION – FOCUS ON THE PAST EXPERIENCES

A. (:32-33) Reminder of Endurance During Past Persecutions

1. (:32) Impressive Endurance

“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,”

Richard Phillips: The writer of Hebrews places great stock in the use of historical examples. In **Chapter 11** he will make a tour de force through biblical history, but here in the last verses of **chapter 10** he turns back to the history of this particular congregation.

Mohler: The author calls these believers to remember the earlier days, which most likely means the years just after their conversion. They should remember their strong zeal for the Lord and how they handled the difficulties they experienced on account of following Christ in a world opposed to him. They endured sufferings for their faith then, so they can endure suffering in their present situation.

Hewitt: In the early days of their Christian experience the readers had given proof of their Christian constancy and love in the face of uncompromising hostility from the Jews and persecution from the Gentiles.

2. (:33) Intense Persecution

a. Personally Targeted

“partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations,”

Leon Morris: The readers had been made a spectacle by being exposed to insult and injury.

Wuest: In this verse we are given two forms in which the persecution was aimed at the recipients of this letter. They were made a gazingstock. The latter word is the translation of *theatrizo* from which we get our word “theatre,” and which means “to bring upon the stage, to set forth as a spectacle, expose to contempt.” This was literally true in the case of the Roman Empire exposing Christians to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre. But in the case of apostate Judaism in its treatment of its former adherents who became converts to the New Testament truth, it was not by means of lions but by means of reproaches and afflictions. The word “reproaches” is the translation of *oneidismos*. The verb of the same root means “to upbraid, to revile, to cast in one’s teeth.” It is used of unjust reproach. Here the word refers to a bitter invective hurled at the Jews for having forsaken the temple sacrifices and having embraced the New Testament truth. “Tribulations” is the translation of... *thlipsis*. The word means “a pressing together,” thus, “oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits.” All this was the result of the persecution.

b. Voluntarily Shared = Fellowship in the sufferings of others

“and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.”

B. (:34) Commendation for Past Demonstration of Christian Virtues

1. Risky Love and Compassion

“For you showed sympathy to the prisoners,”

Leon Morris: In the world of the first century the lot of prisoners was difficult. Prisoners were to be punished, not pampered. Little provision was made for them, and they were dependent on friends for their supplies. For Christians visiting prisoners was a meritorious act (**Matt 25:36**). But there was some risk, for the visitors become identified with the visited. The readers of the epistle had not shrunk from this.

2. Radical Joy and Eternal Perspective

a. Radical Joy

“and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property,”

Richard Phillips: This readiness to share in suffering has always confounded tyrants who tried to suppress the Christian faith. They put Christians in prison to isolate them, but other Christians just came to prison to keep them company. They confiscated their homes and possessions, seeking to break their spirits. But it was they, the persecutors of the church, whose spirits fell when the Christians responded with sacrificial sharing to provide for all the believers. This was the testimony of the wonderful Christian congregation in suffering, to whom the writer of Hebrews was writing. This was the display of faith by which Christians turned the ancient world upside down.

b. Eternal Perspective

“knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one.”

Kent: Not only had they been sympathetic when their Christian friends had suffered, but they also had known what it was to suffer personally. They had experienced seizure of their possessions, and the inference from the previous clause is that they might have escaped some suffering and loss if they had not openly sympathized with other suffering Christians.

Mohler: These believers understood that “better” possessions were in store for those who persevered in the midst of persecution, so they continued to align with Christ – even when it cost them in earthly matters. Moreover, they knew the possession that awaited them was “enduring.” They knew their possession in heaven was an everlasting possession that would not be taken away from them and would never expire. This knowledge helped them endure early in their faith, so the author exhorts his readers to recall those days to help them endure in their present circumstances.

F. F. Bruce: The eternal inheritance laid up for them was so real in their eyes that they could lightheartedly bid farewell to material possessions which were short-lived in any case. This attitude of mind is precisely that “faith” of which our author goes on to speak.”

II. (:35-37) PERSEVERE IN HOPE AS YOU ANTICIPATE CHRIST’S RETURN – FOCUS ON THE FUTURE REWARD

A. (:35) Motivation Tied to Future Reward

1. Motivation to Maintain Christian Confidence

“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence,”

Spurgeon: Those who are acquainted with the original will know that it is not very easy to explain this word in one English word. The nearest approach to it would be boldness — *“Cast not away your boldness,”* and it is frequently translated by that word. In the Acts, where we read, *“When they saw the boldness of Peter and John,”* it is the same word in the Greek as that which is here translated *“confidence.”* But it means something rather different from boldness, because we read of Christ, in the gospel by Mark, that he spoke openly, and there the word is precisely that which is here used, and translated *“confidence.”* And the apostle says, *“We use great plainness of speech,”* and there the word is the same also. It means that freedom, that peace, that at-home-ness, which makes a man feel bold, free, confident. We come back again to the word in the text — your confidence, your child-like plainness, freedom, quietude, peace of heart, rest, sense of security, and, therefore, courage. The apostle meant a great deal when he said, *“Cast not away therefore your confidence.”*

Kent: All Christians have need of patience in times of stress. Otherwise the temptation to despair, to discouragement, and even to abandonment of the fellowship of the saints may become too strong to resist. Patience (*hapomones*) denotes endurance, a willingness to remain under adverse circumstances without compromise or defection.

Mohler: They are urged, therefore, not to throw off their Christian confidence as they would a worthless garment, but to continue to speak and act boldly for Christ as they had so gloriously done in those former days.

Hughes: After joyfully enduring severe afflictions and losses for Christ's sake, to throw away their confidence as though it were after all something worthless and dispensable would not make sense. Of all desertions apostasy is the most unreasonable, for it means turning one's back on him who has been professed before men as the sole source and ground of our confidence, and through whose blood we have freedom of access, in full assurance of faith, into the eternal sanctuary of God's presence (**Heb 10:19-25**. above; cf. **Heb 3:6; 4:16**). Discouraged by the perils and hardships of the wilderness, the forefathers of those to whom our letter was sent were moved with a spirit of apostasy when they asked, *“Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?”* (**Nu 14:3**). These Hebrew Christians of the first century were in danger of following this evil example (cf. **Heb 3:12**) by *“forsaking the God who made them”* and *“scoffing at the Rock of their salvation”* (**Dt. 32:15**). To do this would be evidence that they had indeed *“thrown away their confidence”* and returned to the deceptive and impermanent material things of the present world which previously they had professed to *“throw away.”* It would be a tragic failure of *“earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end”* (**He 6:11**)

2. Future Reward Makes Present Suffering Worthwhile

“which has a great reward.”

B. (:36) Mission Tied to Future Reward

1. Perseverance is the Key

“For you have need of endurance,”

H. Griffith Thomas: The safeguard against degeneration, isolation, and consequent failure is to make progress in the Christian life, and to proceed from point to point from an elementary to the richest, fullest, deepest experience.

2. Mission = Perform the Will of God

“so that when you have done the will of God,”

3. Future Reward = Receiving What Was Promised

“you may receive what was promised.”

F. F. Bruce: What they need is patience. God will certainly fulfil His promise; they will enter into the utmost enjoyment of it; but in the meantime they must remain loyal, and not give up doing God’s will.

C. (:37) Soon Return of Christ Tied to Future Reward

“For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.”

Hewitt: The quotation (**Isaiah xxvi. 20**) is adapted from **Habakkuk ii. 3, 4** where the prophet speaks of the fulfilment of the prophecy regarding the overthrow of the Chaldaeans. The Hebrew text of this passage makes it plain that it is the vision of approaching salvation which will not tarry, but the LXX introduces a personal aspect. A rescuer is to come. The author follows the LXX, but by inserting the definite article makes it clear that the coming One is Christ whose return will bring to an end all trials and usher in the promised blessing.

Manson: More clearly than anywhere else in the Epistle it would appear that disappointment over the delay of the Parousia of Christ was one cause at least of the community’s apathy and loss of faith.

David Guzik: The toughest and most discouraging trials are when we are called to obey God’s will when the fulfillment of His promise seems so far away. This is why we need endurance. Faithfulness during the time when the promise seems unfulfilled is the measure of your obedience and spiritual maturity. This endurance is built through trials, the testing of our faith (**Jas 1:2, 3, 4**).

Richard Phillips: Donald Grey Barnhouse emphasized that this is why Christians never simply tolerate their circumstances. We do not descend into stoic resignation, but rather are enlivened by a mighty hope:

“There is no thought of, “I can stand it.” The pagan, in dull hopelessness, bows to the inevitable. The Christian accepts the suffering, knowing that God is bringing him through to glory; and from the hope of the past to the hope of the future, he sees the connection running through his suffering like a thread that binds all together. His life is like the turbulent rapids of a river, but he knows that the river comes from a still spring and is flowing to a calm ocean. In this knowledge, the Christian has settled peace.”

All of this being true, the only real danger to a Christian is that of abandoning the faith.

III. (:38-39) PERSEVERE IN FAITH AS YOU REMAIN ON TRACK UNTIL THE FINAL GOAL – FOCUS ON THE PRESENT CHALLENGE

A. (:38a) Principle to Live By in the Christian Life

“But My righteous one shall live by faith;”

B. (:38b) Parenthetical Warning

“And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

C. (:39) Pastoral Expectation and Encouragement

1. Apostasy Not Expected

“But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction,”

2. Perseverance in the Faith Expected

“but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

Richard Phillips: “**The perseverance of the saints**” is one of the defining doctrines of Reformed theology. This doctrine teaches that while we are saved by grace alone, because of God’s sovereign predestination, Christians must yet persevere until the end of their lives, or until Christ returns. Probably the clearest statement linking these two ideas of sovereign grace and the necessity to persevere comes in **2 Peter 1:10-11 . . .**

The same God who ordained the end of salvation for his elect also ordained the means by which we will get there, and that is perseverance in faith. Perseverance means acting in faith, and acting in faith means growing. We cannot sit still.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What specific suffering or hardship have you endured in the past in your relationship with Christ that will help you face future challenges?
- 2) Why do so many Christians take the “super spiritual” position that it is wrong to be motivated by future reward when clearly the Scriptures place a heavy emphasis on such

motivation?

3) When we think of perseverance and endurance do we think more about our own responsibility or about God's sovereignty and grace?

4) Do we place too much emphasis on the present benefits of becoming a Christian and not enough on the eternal benefits we will receive?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Phillips: Ours is a generation that foolishly thinks history is irrelevant. This is partly because we are self-centered, so we don't really care about anyone but ourselves. Many Christians are shaped in their thinking by secular ideas of progress or synthesis, and so think anything that happened before our own time is necessarily inferior. C. S. Lewis labeled this phenomenon "chronological snobbery." But the writer of Hebrews thought the past was an important resource for the present.

Steven Cole: Enduring Faith

[The Christian life] is often referred to as a fight or war (**Eph. 6:10-20; 2 Tim. 2:3; 4:7**), neither of which are pleasant. Many passages tell us to expect trials and hardship (**John 16:33; 2 Tim. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:12**). The abundant life that Jesus promised has nothing to do with a trouble-free life, but rather with having His joy in the midst of tribulation. He stated plainly the requirements for following Him: Deny yourself and take up your cross daily (**Luke 9:23**). A cross was not a slightly irritating circumstance; it was an instrument of slow, tortuous death!

Our text comes on the heels of the strong warning against apostasy (**10:26-31**). Following the same pattern as in the strong warning of **6:4-8**, the author assumes the best about his readers. He encourages them by saying that he knows they are not going to turn away from Christ, but rather that they will endure in faith, in spite of whatever hardships they may suffer. The author shows how to have a faith that endures any kind of trial, but especially, persecution. If you're going to make it as a Christian, you must learn to apply what he says here about enduring faith:

To have faith that endures trials, remember how God worked in the past, focus on doing His will in the present, and look to His promises in the future.

1. To have enduring faith in trials, remember how God worked in the past (10:32-34).

"*The former days*" refers to the time just after these Hebrew Christians had been saved. The author draws their minds back to how God had worked in their lives during that time, in spite of some very difficult circumstances. His point is, "You did well then, so

you can hang in there now and in the future if persecution hits.” He reminds them of three things that were true of them as new converts, which also are true of all believers:

A. REMEMBER HOW GOD ENLIGHTENED YOU WITH A NEW, GODLY UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE.

B. REMEMBER YOUR NEWFOUND JOY IN THE FAITH, NO MATTER WHAT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

C. REMEMBER HOW YOUR VALUES AND FOCUS IN LIFE RADICALLY SHIFTED.

These verses reveal four ways that these new believers had experienced a radical shift in their values and focus. If you think back to your conversion, you should be able to identify with them.

1). THERE WAS A CHANGE IN YOUR PRIORITIES AND VALUES FROM THE TEMPORAL TO THE ETERNAL.

2). THERE WAS A CHANGE FROM VALUING WHAT OTHERS THINK OF YOU TO VALUING MORE WHAT GOD THINKS OF YOU.

3). THERE WAS A CHANGE FROM PUTTING SELF FIRST TO PUTTING GOD AND OTHERS AHEAD OF SELF.

4). THERE WAS A CHANGE FROM DEMANDING THAT GOD BE “FAIR” TO SUBMITTING TO HIS SOVEREIGN WILL.

2. To have enduring faith in trials, focus on confidently doing God’s will in the present (10:35-36).

The author gives two aspects of this:

A. TO DO GOD’S WILL IN THE PRESENT, DON’T THROW AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST (10:35).

B. TO DO GOD’S WILL IN THE PRESENT, PERSEVERE IN OBEDIENCE, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED TO COMPROMISE UNDER PRESSURE (10:36).

3. To have enduring faith in trials, look to God’s promises for the future (10:37-39).

A. GET GOD’S PERSPECTIVE ON TIME AND ETERNITY (10:37).

B. LIVE BY FAITH EVERY DAY (10:38).

C. LET ETERNAL REALITY GOVERN YOUR PRESENT WAY OF LIFE
(10:39).

Wil Pounds: Remember Who You are in Christ

Christians draw encouragement from past experience of walking with the Lord. We stand back and see His sustaining grace, His provisions, joy of salvation, and praise to His glory and say I saw God do it. We remember how He reached down in His grace and mercy and pointed us to the saving death of Christ and believed on Christ as our Savior. We remember how He has been there for us when there was no other place to turn. We have watched Him open doors of opportunity and privilege to serve Him. We remember those special intimate moments of entering into His presence, and the daily abiding in Him. These remembrances cause us to refocus our faith in our great God and Savior. The writer of Hebrews now admonishes us to remember who you are in Christ. Look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His glory.

Here the principle of life of the righteous person is faith. "*The just shall live by faith.*" This is the only way we shall survive the perilous time in which we live. **Albert Barnes** said, "The righteous shall live by continued confidence in God." Faith in this context is the continuing trust in God, not just for our justification, but also for our sanctification and glorification.

John Piper: The Present Power of a Future Possession

They joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property. But how did they become people like this? This is utterly against the way humans are by nature. We love safety and comfort and ease and fun and lots of possessions and money and free time to do what we want to do. And if we get that we rejoice, and if we don't, we complain. But here are people who rejoice when they lose possessions and share in sufferings. So somehow there is an indomitable joy, and this joy seems to be one of the keys to love and good works.

The key to indomitable joy that produces love and good works that share the loss of property others have experienced is "knowing that you have for yourself a better possession and an abiding one." When you know that you have a better and a lasting persuasion, you are not paralyzed by loss. If that better possession is great enough, you will even be able to rejoice in loss.

What is this "*better possession and abiding one*"? Well, it's all the good news that we have been pondering for over a year in this letter. It's the triumph of Jesus over death (2:15), and the final rest for the saints in the age to come (4:9), and the subduing of all our enemies (10:13) and the perfect purification of our conscience (9:14), and the removal and forgetting of all our sins (8:12) - all of which is aimed at the ultimate and greatest reward of all, namely, that we shall be "*near to God*" (7:19, 25) and know God (8:11) and that he will be our God (8:10) forever.

In other words, "*the better possession and abiding one*" is not a thing. It is a person and a great salvation. A great relationship of acceptance with God and fellowship with God

and enjoyment of God forever. Notice the two adjectives: "better" and "abiding." It is better than anything this world can offer. And it last longer than anything this world can offer. . .

We know this because of Christ. Christ is the seal and the guarantee of our hope in all the promises of God.

J. Ligon Duncan:

Examining our graces is an impetus to perseverance. (:32-34)

This passage makes it clear that the author of Hebrews intends this whole section of his book to be an encouragement and warning to believers, not a blast against people who have already fallen away. What he is trying to do is buttress our wavering faith.

We ought to endure in faith and confidence in light of His coming. (:35-39)

In fact, this section from **verse 32 to 39** is the transition section to **Hebrews 11**. The main point is that we are to endure in the faith, and what is Hebrews 11 going to be. It is a gigantic illustration of people in the Old Testament who endured in their faith. So there is a perfect logical connection between this section of Hebrews and **Hebrews 11**. Having given this exhortation, now the author of Hebrews is going to say, "Let me give you an example of some people who went through difficult things and they endured in the faith." And he begins to list them and down that list he goes, telling a little about the things they went through.

Bruce Hurt: Blessings of Trials:

The Complete Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations- **John Blanchard**

- Times of affliction are usually gaining times to God's people. Joseph Alleine
- Adversity introduces a man to himself. Anon.
- Affliction is God's shepherd dog to drive us back to the fold. Anon.
- Affliction is the school of faith. Anon.
- Affliction, like the iron-smith, shapes as it smites. Anon.
- Afflictions are often God's best blessings sent in disguise. Anon.
- Crosses are ladders that lead to heaven. Anon.
- Fire is the test of gold, adversity of strong men. Anon.
- Our great Teacher writes many a bright lesson on the blackboard of affliction. Anon.
- Some hearts, like evening primroses, open more beautifully in the shadows of life. Anon.

- The Christian justifies tribulation. Ten thousand times ten thousand saints ... are ready to witness that their most manifest and rapid spiritual growth is traceable to their periods of trial. Anon.
- The darker the night, the brighter the stars; the hotter the fire, the purer the gold. Anon.
- The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials. Anon.
- The hammer shatters glass, but forges steel. Anon.
- The more a tree of righteousness is shaken by the wind, the more it is rooted in Christ. Anon.
- The water that dashes against the wheel keeps the mill going; so trial keeps grace in use and motion. Anon.
- Trial is the school of trust. Anon.
- Where there are no trials in life, there are no triumphs. Anon.
- The purpose of the tests of life are to make, not break us. Maltbie Babcock
- Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the new. Francis Bacon
- Night brings out stars as sorrow shows us truths. Gamaliel Bailey
- Suffering so unbolts the door of the heart that the Word hath easier entrance. Richard Baxter
- Weakness and pain helped me to study how to die; that set me on studying how to live. Richard Baxter
- The brook would lose its song if you removed the rocks. Fred Beck
- Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things. Henry Ward Beecher
- For the Christian, trials and temptations are not only means for proving his faith but for improving his life. John Blanchard
- I have learned more from life's trials than from its triumphs. John Blanchard
- The Christian's midnight is brighter than the sinner's noon. John Blanchard
- The trials of life are meant to make us better, not bitter. John Blanchard
- Affliction is the shaking of the torch that it may blaze the brighter. Horatius Bonar

- We have got more from Paul's prisonhouse than from his visit to the third heavens. Andrew Bonar
- It is the usual way of providence with me that blessings come through several iron gates. Thomas Boston
- Afflictions are blessings. Thomas Brooks
- Afflictions are but as a dark entry into our Father's house. Thomas Brooks
- Afflictions are the mother of virtue. Thomas Brooks
- Affliction is an excellent comment upon the Scriptures. Thomas Brooks
- Afflictions ripen the saint's graces. Thomas Brooks
- Afflictions, they are but our Father's goldsmiths who are working to add pearls to our crowns. Thomas Brooks
- God's house of correction is his school of instruction. Thomas Brooks
- Stars shine brightest in the darkest night. Torches are the better for beating. Grapes come not to the proof till they come to the press. Spices smell sweetest when pounded. Young trees root the faster for shaking. Vines are the better for bleeding. Gold looks the brighter for scouring; and juniper smells sweeter in the fire. Thomas Brooks
- The grand design of God in all the afflictions that befall his people is to bring them nearer and closer to himself. Thomas Brooks
- The vinegar of adversity quickens our graces. Thomas Brooks
- As threshing separates the wheat from the chaff, so does affliction purify virtue. Richard E. Burton
- The Lord uses his flail of tribulation to separate the chaff from the wheat. John Bunyan
- Thou art beaten that thou mayest be better. John Bunyan
- Afflictions ought ever to be estimated by their end. John Calvin
- In the darkness of our miseries the grace of God shines more brightly. John Calvin
- Our afflictions prepare us for receiving the grace of God. John Calvin
- Our faith is really and truly tested only when we are brought into very severe conflicts, and when even hell itself seems opened to swallow us up. John Calvin
- The more we are afflicted by adversities, the more surely our fellowship with Christ is confirmed! John Calvin

- Whatever poison Satan produces, God turns it into medicine for his elect. John Calvin
- The staying power of our faith is neither demonstrated nor developed until it is tested by suffering. D. A. Carson
- There is a certain kind of maturity that can be attained only through the discipline of suffering. D. A. Carson
- The saint knows not why he suffers as he does, yet he comprehends with a knowledge that passes knowledge that all is well. Oswald Chambers
- The brightest crowns that are worn in heaven have been tried, and smelted, and polished, and glorified through the furnace of tribulation. E. H. Chapin
- We often learn more under the rod that strikes us, than under the staff that comforts us. Stephen Charnock
- Affliction makes saints eminent.
- Chrysostom In prosperity, our friends know us; in adversity we know our friends. Churton Collins
- It is not until we have passed through the furnace that we are made to know how much dross there is in our composition. C. C. Colton
- Calamity is the perfect glass wherein we truly see and know ourselves. William Davenant
- There is no education like adversity. Benjamin Disraeli
- Fiery trials make golden Christians. William Dyer
- Eminent virtue always shows brightest in the fire. Pure gold shows its purity chiefly in the furnace. Jonathan Edwards
- Great men are made greater by their misfortunes. Minucius Felix
- Afflictions ... are as necessary for our waftage to heaven as water is to carry the ship to her port. William Gurnall
- God's wounds cure; sin's kisses kill. William Gurnall
- God sometimes snuffs out our brightest candle that we may look up to his eternal stars. Vance Havner
- It takes the grindstone to sharpen the axe. Vance Havner
- It is better to drink of deep griefs than to taste shallow pleasures. William Hazlitt
- The Lord doesn't take us into deep water to drown us but to develop us. Iry Hedstrom

- Afflictions are continued no longer than till they have done their work. Matthew Henry
- Afflictions are sent for this end, to bring us to the throne of grace, to teach us to pray and to make the word of God's grace precious to us. Matthew Henry
- Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary graces. Matthew Henry
- If we cry to God for the removal of the oppression and affliction we are under, and it is not removed, the reason is not because the Lord's hand is shortened or his ear heavy, but because the affliction has not done its work. Matthew Henry
- It has been the advantage of God's people to be afflicted. Matthew Henry
- Many are taught with the briars and thorns of affliction that would not learn otherwise. Matthew Henry
- Of the many that are afflicted and oppressed, few get the good they might get by their affliction. It should drive them to God, but how seldom is this the case! Matthew Henry
- Outward losses drive good people to their prayers, but bad people to their curses. Matthew Henry
- Sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions. Matthew Henry
- Sometimes God teaches us effectually to know the worth of mercies by the want of them and whets our appetite for the means of grace by cutting us short in those means. Matthew Henry
- The injuries men do us should drive us to God, for to him we may commit our cause. Matthew Henry
- Let prosperity be as oil to the wheels of obedience and affliction as wind to the sails of prayer. Philip Henry
- Affliction is the medicine of the mind. John P. K. Henshaw
- The great blows of God are designed to make a man stand up. John Hercus
- Afflictions are the cause of eternal glory. Not the meritorious cause, but still the procuring cause. Charles Hodge
- Afflictions are unavoidable; they occupy a large proportion of life, and of godliness. William Jay
- The Christian is more formed from his trials than from his enjoyments. William Jay

- As the wicked are hurt by the best things, so the godly are bettered by the worst. William Jenkyn
- Trouble is only opportunity in work clothes. Henry J. Kaiser
- Only in the hot furnace of affliction do we as Christians let go of the dross to which, in our foolishness, we ardently cling. David Kingdon
- This school of trial best discloses the hidden vileness of the heart and the vast riches of a Saviour's grace. Henry Law
- Christian people are generally at their best when they are in the furnace of affliction and being persecuted and tried. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- Trials and tribulations are very good for us in that they help us to know ourselves better than we knew ourselves before. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- Affliction is the Christian's theologian. Martin Luther
- I never knew the meaning of God's Word until I came into affliction. Martin Luther
- No man, without trials and temptations, can attain a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Martin Luther
- We should never see the stars if God did not sometimes take away the day. Kenneth Macrae
- God's children never gain so much honour as in their troubles. Thomas Manton
- Trial is not only to approve, but to improve. Thomas Manton
- Affliction is the whetstone of prayer and obedience. Edward Marbury
- Trouble is the structural steel that goes into character-building. Douglas Meador
- A dark hour makes Jesus bright. Robert Murray M'Cheyne
- Affliction is the school in which great virtues are acquired, in which great characters are formed. Hannah More
- No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown. William Penn
- One breath of paradise will extinguish all the adverse winds of earth. A. W. Pink
- Afflictions often possess remarkable power to remind us of our sins. William S. Plumer

- It is a blessed thing when our trials cure our earnest love for things that perish. William S. Plumer
- By afflictions God is spoiling us of what otherwise might have spoiled us—when he makes the world too hot for us to hold, we let it go. John Powell
- The hiding places of men are discovered by affliction. S. I. Prime
- I have never met with a single instance of adversity which I have not in the end seen was for my good—I have never heard of a Christian on his deathbed complaining of his affliction. Alexander M. Proudfit
- Afflictions clarify the soul. Francis Quarles
- Afflictions are a fan in God's hand to separate between good and evil men. Maurice Roberts
- No enemy of Christ's cause ... has it in his competence to inflict so much as one naked blow on the Christian or on the church. Every blow is parried for our good. Every curse aimed at us is sweetened into a blessing. Every poisonous dart is deflected. Every wound is healed. Every accusation is silenced. Maurice Roberts
- Grace grows best in the winter. Samuel Rutherford
- Affliction is a searching wind which strips the leaves off the trees and brings to light the bird's nests. J. C. Ryle
- In the resurrection morning ... we shall thank God for every storm. J. C. Ryle
- Let us settle it firmly in our minds that there is a meaning, a needs-be and a message from God in every sorrow that falls upon us. J. C. Ryle
- Prosperity is a great mercy, but adversity is a greater one, if it brings us to Christ. J. C. Ryle
- There are no lessons so useful as those learned in the school of affliction. J. C. Ryle
- The tools that the great Architect intends to use much are often kept long in the fire, to temper them and fit them for work. J. C. Ryle
- Trials are intended to make us think, to wean us from the world, to send us to the Bible, to drive us to our knees. J. C. Ryle
- Trials are the resistances God gives us to strengthen our spiritual muscles. George SeEVERS
- Misfortune is an occasion to demonstrate character. Seneca
- No one appears to me more pitiable than the man who has never known misfortune. Seneca

- We become wiser by adversity. Seneca
- Afflictions should be the spiritual wings of the soul. Richard Sibbes
- After conversion we need bruising, to see that we live by mercy. Richard Sibbes
- Poverty and affliction take away the fuel that feeds pride. Richard Sibbes
- When the afflictions of Christians are doubled, then they are commonly most humbled. Richard Sibbes
- As Jacob was blessed and halted both at one time, so a man may be blessed and afflicted both together. Henry Smith
- A true Christian's losses are gains in another shape. C. H. Spurgeon
- I am afraid that all the grace that I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the crucible and the furnace, the bellows that have blown up the coals, and the hand which has thrust me into the heat? C. H. Spurgeon
- I am sure I have derived more real benefit and permanent strength and growth in grace, and every precious thing, from the furnace of affliction, than I have ever derived from prosperity. C. H. Spurgeon
- I bear my witness that the worst days I have ever had have turned out to be my best days. C. H. Spurgeon
- I can bear my personal testimony that the best piece of furniture that I ever had in the house was a cross. I do not mean a material cross; I mean the cross of affliction and trouble. C. H. Spurgeon
- I owe more than I can tell to the graver's tool, and I feel the lines of its cutting even now. C. H. Spurgeon
- In shunning a trial we are seeking to avoid a blessing. C. H. Spurgeon
- None of us can come to the highest maturity without enduring the summer heat of trials. C. H. Spurgeon
- On some few occasions I have had troubles which I could not tell to any but my God, and I thank God I have, for I learned more of my Lord then that at any other time. C. H. Spurgeon
- Our troubles have always brought us blessings, and they always will. They are the dark chariots of bright grace. C. H. Spurgeon

- Stars may be seen from the bottom of a deep well, when they cannot be discerned from the top of a mountain. So are many things learned in adversity which the prosperous man dreams not of. C. H. Spurgeon
- The anvil, the fire and the hammer are the making of us. C. H. Spurgeon
- The Christian gains by his losses. He acquires health by his sickness. He wins friends through his bereavements, and he becomes a conqueror through his defeats. C. H. Spurgeon
- The tears of affliction are often needed to keep the eye of faith bright. C. H. Spurgeon
- There are some of your graces which would never be discovered if it were not for your trials. C. H. Spurgeon
- There is nothing that makes a man have a big heart like a great trial. C. H. Spurgeon
- We find no sword-blades so true in metal as those which have been forged in the furnace of soul-trouble. C. H. Spurgeon
- Jesus was transfigured on the hilltop, but he transforms us in the valley. J. Charles Stern
- It takes a world with trouble in it to train men for their high calling as sons of God and to carve upon the soul the lineaments of the face of Christ. J. S. Steward
- A sanctified person, like a silver bell, the harder he is smitten, the better he sounds. George Swinnock
- Cold blasts make a fire to flame the higher and burn the better. George Swinnock
- God's rod, like Jonathan's, is dipped in honey. George Swinnock
- We are safer in the storm God sends us than in a calm when we are befriended by the world. Jeremy Taylor
- For a Christian, even the valleys are on higher ground. D. Reginald Thomas
- Despise not the desert. There is where God polishes his brightest gems. R. A. Torrey
- As the hotter the day the greater the dew at night; so the hotter the time of trouble the greater the dews of refreshing from God. John Trapp
- Better be preserved in brine than rot in honey. John Trapp
- Better be pruned to grow than cut up to burn. John Trapp
- Troubles are free school-masters. John Trapp

- Affliction is God's flail to thresh off our husks. Thomas Watson
- Christians are commonly best in affliction. Thomas Watson
- Is it any injustice in God to put his gold into the furnace to purify it? Thomas Watson
- Jonah was sent into the whale's belly to make his sermon for Nineveh. Thomas Watson
- The eyes that sin shuts affliction opens. Thomas Watson
- The whale that swallowed Jonah was the means of bringing him safe to land. Thomas Watson
- There is more evil in a drop of sin than in a sea of affliction. Thomas Watson
- When God lays men on their backs, then they look up to heaven. Thomas Watson
- Whilst I continue on this side of eternity, I never expect to be free from trials, only to change them. For it is necessary to heal the pride of my heart that such should come. George Whitefield.
- We know not what we lose when we pray to be delivered out of afflictions, because God always increases his consolation and grace as afflictions abound. Thomas Wilson
- I am mended by my sickness, enriched by my poverty, and strengthened by my weakness. Abraham Wright
- What fools we are, then, to frown upon our afflictions! These, how crabbed so ever, are our best friends. They are not intended for our pleasure, they are for our profit. Abraham Wright
- Among my list of blessings infinite stands this the foremost that my heart has bled. Edward Young

TEXT: Hebrews 11:1-3

TITLE: *THE FUNDAMENTALS OF FAITH*

BIG IDEA:

FAITH IS THE MEANS:

- **TO FOCUS ON THE FUTURE,**
- **TO REALIZE UNSEEN REALITIES,**
- **TO GAIN GOD’S GRACE AND**
- **TO COMPREHEND CREATION**

INTRODUCTION:

I don’t want to confuse you here. I am not talking about “the fundamentals of **the faith**” – that would be all of the great doctrines of Christianity. Instead as we begin this famous chapter on God’s Hall of Fame for those who have excelled in faith, we are going to start with what the author describes as “**The Fundamentals of Faith.**” The previous paragraph set the stage for **Chapter 11**. The author had talked about the need for perseverance in faith in light of the persecution and suffering that would potentially cause people to fall away and revert back to Judaism.

These first few verses don’t give a formal, comprehensive definition of faith. But these verses do lay the groundwork for the essence of faith – leading to an examination in the rest of the chapter of biblical historical examples of how faith works itself out in practical ways. “*The righteous shall live by faith*” – and here is how that looks.

Kent: Having just discussed the importance of maintaining faith and not turning back, the author proceeds to a demonstration that it was this principle of faith even in Old Testament times that God was most interested in. Steadfast endurance in the face of obstacles is the evidence of true faith, and it was this very feature which the Old Testament heroes here mentioned exemplified in their lives. For the readers to give up their present faith in order to escape censure or suffering would be contrary to the stalwart examples of these Old Testament greats whose memories were justly honored. One would not be showing respect for Old Testament religion, even if he reverted to Judaism, by abandoning the very essence of his ancestors’ worship. Hence the burden of this section is to set forth the vital importance of Biblical faith.

Mohler: We must remember the “*hard struggle*” that the audience is called to endure in the midst of persecutions and trials (**10:32**). . . Perseverance is the demonstration of faith. Faith is grounded in what God has done for us in Christ. The author expresses confidence that his audience’s endurance of persecution for the sake of Christ is a demonstration of their faith.

F. F. Bruce: Our author might we have proceeded from **Ch. 10:39** to the exhortation, “*Therefore . . . let us run with patience the race that is set before us*” (**Ch. 12:1**); but first he encourages his readers further by reminding them of examples of faith in earlier

days. . . who had nothing but the promises of God to rest upon, without any visible evidence that these promises would ever be fulfilled; yet so much did these promises mean to them that they regulated the whole course of their lives in their light. The promises related to a state of affairs belonging to the future; but these people acted as if that state of affairs were already present, so convinced were they that God could and would fulfil what He had promised.

Phil Newton: The idea of perseverance in the exercise of faith dominates the emphasis of this chapter, coming as an explanation of what the writer states in **10:39**, that we are "*of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*" Keep in mind the struggles the first century audience faced, as they were in the throes of opposition and imminent persecution. How would they be able to make it through without abandoning their faith for that which had no power to eternally save them? They might escape immediate danger but their souls would suffer the fate of those who reject the gospel. So our writer calls for the kind of faith that preserves the soul through the most demanding circumstances. Such faith enables the believer in the midst of trials to "*run with endurance the race that is set before*" him (**12:1**). We know very well the opening words of **chapter 12** and the crescendo that sets our attention upon our exalted Lord. Exercising faith fixes the eyes on Jesus and endures even hostility in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ. Faith aims for soul preservation-that's perseverance in concept; and it runs with endurance-that's perseverance in process. Exercising faith in Christ stands at the heart of persevering as Christians.

I. (:1) THE VALUE OF FAITH – THE ASSURANCE OF GOD’S PROMISES AND APPREHENSION OF UNSEEN REALITIES DERIVE FROM FAITH

A. (:1a) Assurance of God’s Promises -- FOCUS ON THE FUTURE / LIVE FOR ETERNITY

1. Essence of Faith = Assurance or Confidence

“Now faith is the assurance”

Constable: Essentially faith is confidence that things yet future and unseen will happen as God has revealed they will. This is the basic nature of faith. **Hebrews 11:1** describes faith rather than defining it.

C. F. Pfeiffer: The guiding principle of the Christian life is faith. This is not simply a psychological factor, however. To some people faith means believing that you can do a job better than you have done it in the past, or believing that a loved one will rise from his bed of sickness. There may be real value in such “positive thinking,” but this is not the meaning of faith. True Biblical faith has God as its object. We believe God and trust His Word. That Word does not tell us that we have any reason to expect to be the richest merchant on Main Street. It tells us, on the contrary, that we will have tribulations and that as Jesus’ disciples we will have crosses to bear. It assures us, however, of grace to bear them. Faith has a backward look. It declares that God has done mighty acts in days gone by. Faith also has a forward look. It declares that He can

be trusted for the future... Faith is the firm assurance, the conviction, that God will do what He has promised to do. It would, of course, be presumption to insist that He must do what we want done. Many Christians grow disillusioned in their Christian lives because God does not conform to their wills. Faith takes God at His word; faith does not insist that He conform to our ideas.

Maclaren: Faith is the hand that grasps. It is the means of communication, it is the channel through which the grace which is the life, or, rather, I should say, the life which is the grace, comes to us. It is the open door by which the angel of God comes in with his gifts. It is like the petals of the flowers, opening when the sunshine kisses them, and, by opening, laying bare the depths of their calyxes to be illuminated and coloured, and made to grow by the sunshine which itself has opened them, and without the presence of which, within the cup, there would have been neither life nor beauty. So faith is the basis of everything; the first shoot from which all the others ascend... **Faith works.**

F. B. Meyer: There seem to be three necessary preliminaries in order to faith.

- First, some one must make an engagement or promise.
- Second, there must be good reason for believing in the integrity and sufficiency of the person by whom the engagement has been made.
- Third, there follows a comfortable assurance that it will be even so; in fact, the believer is able to count on the object promised as being not less sure than if it had already come into actual possession.

And this latter frame of mind is precisely the one indicated by the writer of this Epistle, when, guided by the Holy Spirit, he affirms that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the persuasion or conviction of things not seen. In other words, faith is the faculty of realizing the unseen. These three conditions are fulfilled in Christian faith.

2. Perspective of Faith = Oriented towards the Future / towards God's Promises
"of things hoped for,"

Leon Morris: Faith is a present and continuing reality. It is not simply a virtue sometimes practiced in antiquity. It is a living thing.

Bruce Hurt: Faith in simple terms is believing that God will keep His promises, despite circumstances that seem to be to the contrary! In short, "looks can be deceiving!" We have not seen the end of the story. More specifically and more personally, we have not see the end of God's story in our life (cp **Php 1:6**). Faith takes God at His Word, even when the odds seemed to be stacked against His Word. However, keep in mind that faith is NOT faith in faith, but is faith in God and in His Word. Faith is resting one's heart and mind on God's immutable, faithful (trustworthy) character. Faith is seeing the eternal in the now and choosing to live accordingly, doing so in dependence on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

B. (:1b) Apprehension of Unseen Realities -- REALIZE UNSEEN REALITIES

1. Essence of Faith = Apprehension or Conviction or Evidence

“the conviction”

F. F. Bruce: Physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of visible things; faith is the organ which enables people (like Moses in **verse 27**) to see the invisible order. Philo similarly links “faith towards God” with “apprehension of the unseen”.

Kent: Faith is the confident assurance which the believer has because God has provided conviction about unseen realities. . . This description does not discuss how faith is arrived at, but merely states its essential nature. A fuller definition of Biblical faith would need to include the fact of divine revelation on which true faith is based. Faith in the Biblical sense is the assurance and conviction that what God has said is true, and is to be acted upon by the believer.

2. Perspective of Faith = Oriented towards Unseen Realities

“of things not seen.”

Andrew Murray: Faith is the spiritual faculty of the soul which deals with the spiritual realities of the future and the unseen. Just as we have our senses, through which we hold communication with the physical universe, so faith is the spiritual sense or organ through which the soul comes into contact with and is affected by the spiritual world. Just as the sense of seeing or hearing is a dormant power till the objective reality, the light or the sound, strikes it, so faith in itself is a sense with no power beyond the possibility or capacity of receiving the impressions of the eternal. It is as an empty vessel which wants to be filled with its unseen contents.

John Phillips: **Verse 1** describes the environment in which faith exists and works. Faith takes place when things are hoped for but not yet possessed or manifested. In this respect, faith deals with the future. (**Rom. 8:24-25**) Faith concerns unseen spiritual realities, things as they are in God’s sight. Faith, therefore, relates to the things we do not yet have, to the things we hope for and do not see, to things that are promised by God but are so far unfulfilled in our actual experience. . . .

Faith gives substance to the unseen realities. The believer hopes in these things and proves their reality in his personal experience by faith. Faith is a kind of spiritual "sixth sense" that enables the believer to take a firm hold upon the unseen world and bring it into the realm of experience. All our senses do this. The eye takes hold upon the light waves that pulsate through space and make real to a person the things he sees. The ear picks up the sound waves and translates them into hearing. But there is a whole spectrum of waves beyond the range of the senses. We cannot see them or hear them or taste them or smell them or feel them. But they are real, nevertheless, and, with the aid of modern instruments, we can pick them up and translate them into phenomena that our senses can handle. Faith reaches out into the spiritual dimension and gives form and substance to heavenly and spiritual realities in such a way that the soul can appreciate them and grasp them and live in the enjoyment of them.

II. (:2) THE VICTORY OF FAITH – THE WAY TO GOD’S APPROVAL DERIVES FROM FAITH GAIN GOD’S GRACE

“For by it the men of old gained approval.”

Mohler: On the day of judgment, we will either be approved in Christ or we will be condemned without him. How did the people of old win God’s approval? In other words, why were the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel commended? . . . The author plainly answers that these men and women received their approval because they exercised faith.

Richard Phillips: Those who put their faith in God and in his Word, and not in this world and the evidence it presents are those whom God receives. . . What will follow in this chapter is the record of those men and women God commends in Scripture, starting in the Book of Genesis. What we are to note in each and every case is that the one thing that brought people God’s commendation was their faith. Not their gifts, not their attainments, not their beauty, strength, or popularity – these are the things that bring people the commendation of the world. . . What the world admires is power, wealth, worldly glory, fame. . . Their faith in God, though scorned by men, made them great in the eyes of the Lord and brought them his commendation and approval.

III. (:3) THE VIEWPOINT OF FAITH -- THE WORLDVIEW OF CHRISTIANS (BEGINNING WITH OUR PERSPECTIVE ON CREATION) DERIVES FROM FAITH COMPREHEND CREATION

A. (:3a) Faith is Rooted in the Objective Word of God

“By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God,”

The bottom line is that everybody operates from some type of **faith perspective**. We just need to be honest about our presuppositions and about the object of our faith.

Richard Phillips: The nature of the universe, the creation or beginning of all things cannot be explained by evidence that is available to our eyes. Without faith we cannot even explain the world in which we exist. . . For the materialist, the Big Bang has taken on divine qualities that rule out questions regarding its origin. But the Christian finds the answer not in this kind of scientific mysticism, but in the Word of God. . .

This is how we distinguish biblical faith from the popular notion of faith as a leap in the dark. Faith is not blind trust, wishful thinking, a mere manifestation of our positive attitude. We believe the Word of God because it is the Word of the God who made all things, and who, as **Hebrews 1:3** tells us, “*sustain[s them] by his powerful word*” (NIV).

Deffinbaugh: All the other examples are of Old Testament saints, but this example is one that includes the readers. “*By faith we understand that the worlds were set in order. . .*” In every other example, the individual(s) mentioned express their faith in a particular set of circumstances, circumstances that we will not experience in that precise form. But every single Christian is called upon to exercise their faith by being firmly convinced that all creation is the handiwork of God.

B. (:3b) Faith is Manifested in the Perception of God’s Workings in the Invisible Realm

“*so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.*”

Hewitt: Even in the world-history of revelation, beginning with the creation, faith is manifested in its perception of the existence and operation of God, as the unseen creator and Sustainer of the visible universe and in its perception of the overruling providence of god in world affairs.

Mohler: just as we begin our Christian lives by faith, we also embrace the Christian worldview through faith in the Word of God. We were not eyewitnesses to creation. Simply put, we were not there to experience it. We affirm the divine creation of the cosmos because by faith we receive it from Scripture and affirm with Scripture that everything exists to display God’s glory.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can I take risks to live in light of eternity and trust God for the fulfilment of His future promises rather than be overly concerned with my present circumstances?
- 2) Since God’s promises are given to specific people or groups in specific historic contexts, how can we tell which promises we should apply to ourselves? How does our faith function in the absence of specific promises that apply to our situation?
- 3) What would help people to appreciate the reality of the things that are unseen and to live accordingly?
- 4) Why is it so important to hold to the biblical understanding of Creation *ex nihilo*?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bible Background Commentary: In form, the chapter is a literary masterpiece. It follows the frequent literary practice called historical retrospective, a summary of Jewish history to make a particular point, as in texts like **Acts 7**, 1 Macc. 2:49-69 and

Sirach 44-50. The retrospective consists of encomiastic biographies (favorable accounts of virtuous lives). (Ancient moralists normally used examples of people who embodied the virtue they advocated, and sometimes wrote biographies for this purpose.) The writer builds the chapter around a literary device called anaphora, beginning each new account with the same Greek word, “*by faith*.”

Richard Phillips: Philip Hughes’s excellent commentary on Hebrews lists four main ways we may take *hypostasis*, all of which have something to offer. . . The first corresponds to the way it is used in **Hebrews 1:3**. There this same word describes God’s **substance** or being . . . This is the idea that comes across in the King James Version of **11:1**: “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for.*” The point is, as Hughes says, that “faith lays hold of what is promised and therefore hoped for, as something real and solid, though as yet unseen.” . . . Faith makes real to us and gives us possession of things that are hoped for but are not yet part of our experience.

The second way we may take *hypostasis* is as a **foundation**. . . A *hypostasis* is something that stands under something else, as a foundation to a building. This is the way Saint Augustine understood our passage, that faith is the beginning which contains the **certainty** of the end. By faith we begin what we will ultimately conclude by possessing and seeing.

Third, *hypostasis* may be taken as **confidence** or **assurance**, which is how the majority of translations render it. . . This is how the word is used in **Hebrews 3:14**, the other occasion where it appears in this letter: “*we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*” Faith, then, is our attitude toward our circumstances, particularly toward uncertainty and want. Paul wrote, “*We walk by faith, not by sight*” (**2 Cor. 5:7**). By faith we live as if things were other than they appear, because of what God has said.

Finally, this word may be rendered as **guarantee** or **attestation**. Faith, in this sense, is the title deed to things we do not possess but hope for in the Lord. One commentator writes, “Faith is a guarantee of the heavenly realities for which we hope; not only does it render them certain for us, but it envisages them as rightfully belonging to us; it is, in itself, an objective assurance of our definite enjoyment of them. Consequently, faith ‘takes possession by anticipation’ of these heavenly blessings and is a genuine commencement of the divine life.” Faith is our guarantee that provides a foretaste of the spiritual blessings that ultimately we will know in full.

I have said that this word *hypostasis* can be taken in at least four ways, and so the question may arise as to which one is right. It seems that the writer of Hebrews deliberately chose a word that has a broad and rich array of meanings, all of which are to the point. Faith is the substance of things hoped for; it is the foundation upon which they are brought into being; it is a confident attitude toward those things God has promised; and it is the guarantee that gives us a sure possession even now.

Steven Cole: By Faith

It is essential for every believer to understand the nature of enduring faith. As we saw last week, there is a type of faith that does not endure trials and temptations. The seed sown on the rocky ground sprang up quickly, but it also quickly withered and died when trials hit. The seed on the thorny ground may have lasted a bit longer, but eventually it was strangled by the temptations of worries, riches, and the pleasures of this life. Neither type of faith brought forth fruit to maturity. Only the seed on the good ground bore fruit with perseverance (**Luke 8:11-15**).

That parable serves as a useful backdrop to our text last week (**10:32-29**), where the author urges his readers on to enduring faith. He cites **Habakkuk 2:4**, “*But My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.*” Then he expresses his confidence in his readers (**10:39**), “*But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*” His subject is “*enduring faith.*” Some of his readers were in danger of shrinking back to destruction. With the threat of persecution looming over them, the Hebrew believers needed to be steeled to endure the coming trials by faith. He wants them to become “*imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*” (**6:12**).

To that end, he devotes **chapter 11** to an explanation and illustration of genuine faith that endures. He is not focusing on the aspect of justification by faith, as Paul does in **Romans 3**. Rather, his emphasis is more on the operation and outworking of justifying faith in the face of trials (**John Owen**, *An Exposition of Hebrews* [The National Foundation for Christian Education], VII:5, 7). This faith lays hold of God’s promises and the reality of the unseen world, obediently applying those realities to present trials.

Faith is the means of realizing spiritual reality, of gaining God’s approval, and of understanding the origin of all that is.

Understanding these principles—*trust is essential for close personal relationships; truth is the basis for trust; and, truth must be expressed in love*, which means, “seeking the highest good of the other person”—shows why *faith (trust) is at the heart of a relationship with God*.

1. Faith is the means of realizing spiritual reality (11:1).

There is, of course, overlap between the objective and subjective senses of these words. Our faith *substantiates* what we hope for, thus giving us *assurance* that they are true. Faith *proves* or *gives evidence* for the things that we cannot see, thus giving us a *conviction* that these unseen things are true. I suggest this expanded paraphrase of **11:1**, “Faith makes real in our experience the promises that God has given about the future. Faith proves to us the fact that the things we presently cannot see—God, angels, demons, heaven, hell—are very much true and real.” **In other words, faith applies the reality of God’s promises and the unseen world to life in the present, visible world.**

A. W. Pink (*An Exposition of Hebrews* [Ephesians 4 Group], p. 652) uses the analogy of two men standing on the deck of a ship, looking in the same direction. One sees nothing, but the other man sees a distant steamer. The difference is, the first man is looking with his unaided eye, whereas the second man is looking through a telescope. Faith is the telescope that brings the future promises of God into present focus. Faith enables us to see the unseen world that the natural man cannot see.

2. Faith is the means of gaining God's approval (11:2).

We need to recognize that faith is not a meritorious work that we do to gain rewards from God. That would conflict with the entire teaching of the New Testament, that faith is simply the channel through which God's blessings flow. Two seemingly paradoxical things are true of faith: On the one hand, it is *our responsibility* to believe the gospel, because God commands us to believe (**Mark 1:15**). On the other hand, sinners are *unable to believe* because of spiritual blindness (*2 Cor. 4:4*). Saving faith comes as God's gift, not as a human effort (**Eph. 2:8-9**). Jesus is both the author and perfecter of faith (**Heb. 12:2**). Good works flow from saving faith as their source and give proof of genuine faith (**Eph. 2:10; James 2:14-26**). Both faith and works come from God.

3. Faith is the means of understanding the origin of all that is (11:3).

The fact that the author puts **verse 3** at the start of his list of "*by faith*" examples, shows that faith in God as Creator is foundational to knowing God. The first verse of the Bible hits us squarely with a vital fact: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" You cannot begin to understand yourself, other people, world history, or God if you reject the early chapters of Genesis. The first verse of Genesis presents you with a crucial choice: If God created everything that is, then He is the sovereign of the universe. If you do not come to Him in faith as your Savior, you will stand before Him in terror as your Judge! But when you believe in His Word about salvation, you gain understanding about the origins of the ages that makes everything in history fall into place.

Deffinbaugh: Why is Hebrews Chapter 11 Important?

This chapter plays a very important role in the developing argument of the entire epistle. To speak in the simplest terms, **chapters 1-10** portray the deity and humanity of the Lord Jesus, and the supremacy and sufficiency of our Lord as the Great High Priest. The truths set forth in **chapters 1-10** are the foundation for our faith. With a Savior like this, we can place our entire trust in Him, not only for this life, but also for all eternity. Before the author concludes this epistle with specific exhortations for the reader in **chapters 12-13**, he pauses in **chapter 11** to give numerous examples of living by faith from the Old Testament. The Old Testament heroes of the faith were saved by faith, and so they lived by faith. This is what gained God's approval, and it was the basis on which they drew near to Him.

Hebrews 11 is vitally important for today's reader because it spells out what living by faith really looks like in real time. As our author states in this chapter, these great men

and women of faith continue to speak to us today, long after their death.⁸ We would do well to listen to them. . .

While we do not have time to explore the implications of creation being a matter of faith in this lesson, I would recommend that the reader give this matter some thought. Surely this truth has implications for apologetics, as well as for evangelism. If creationism is a matter of faith, then we must recognize that we can pile up fact after fact, and without faith, it will not convince the lost. Since faith is a gift from God, we must look to Him to give men the faith to believe that creation is His work. We will no more argue someone into belief in creationism than we will argue them into the kingdom of God. But since faith is God's work, we can pray that He will open men's hearts to truth in Him, and thus, to believe what the Bible says of Him.

John Piper: What Faith Knows and Hopes For

So the first important thing to see here is that the power to sacrifice and love and joyfully accept the seizure of your property, which we saw in **10:34**, is called "*faith*." Faith is the assurance of things hoped for - that is, faith is the confidence that "you have a better possession and an abiding one." There's the link between the life of sacrificial love in **10:34** and the hall of fame in **chapter 11**. **Chapter 11** is a catalogue of people who illustrate that this kind of faith - the assurance of things hoped for - really makes a difference in life

Assurance and Conviction

So the first task we have in this new chapter is to understand more exactly what faith is. That's what verse 1 gives us - a twofold definition of faith. Let's look at both parts, one at a time: "*Now faith is (1) the assurance of things hoped for, (2) the conviction of things not seen.*"

Do you see the connection? **Verse 1** says "*faith is the evidence of things not seen,*" and **verse 3** says that faith understands that the world - what is seen - was made out of what is not seen - the word of God. So **verse 3** is a specific illustration of the definition of faith in **verse 1b**.

So the crucial question is: How is faith "evidence" of things unseen, namely, that God created the world by his word? I take my clue from the one other place in the New Testament where God's invisible attributes are said to be "clearly seen" by man, namely, **Romans 1:20**. "*Since the creation of the world [God's] invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood by what has been made.*" The word "understood" here in **Romans 1:20** is the same word as in **Hebrews 11:3**, "*By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God.*"

So there in Romans 1:20 it says, "*we understand the invisible attributes of God by what has been made.*" And here in **Hebrews 11:3** it says, we understand the invisible word of God behind creation by faith. **Romans 1:20** seems to say that the evidence that God

made the world is the things made - they clearly point to a Maker. **Hebrews 11:3** seems to say that the evidence that God made the world is faith. Now think about this for a moment. What shall we make of it? Here's what I make of it. Faith - at least in part - is the spiritual seeing or perceiving of the fingerprints of God on the things he has made.

Now the fingerprints of God on the things he has made - the order, the beauty, the greatness, the "irreducible complexity" (as Michael Behe says, in Darwin's Black Box) - are the evidence that God made the world. But so is the seeing of these fingerprints a kind of evidence. It's just the other side of the coin. If you ask me, "How do you know Focus on the Family has a headquarters in Colorado Springs," I will say, "I saw it on Tuesday." My seeing is evidence that it is there.

I think that is the way faith is the evidence of things unseen. We all look at the same fingerprints, but some see and some don't. Those who see have the evidence - the testimony - in themselves. . .

Now that leaves us just a few minutes to focus on the other part of the definition of faith in **verse 1**: "*Now faith is the assurance - or the substance - of things hoped for.*" It may be that all this means is that faith is a deep confidence that the promises of God will come true so that we bank on them. That would be enough to free us from the fears and greed and worldliness that block the flow of radical, risk-taking, sacrificial love. If we have a strong conviction that God will care for us and bring us to glory and fulfill all his promises to us forever, then we will be free from self-indulgence and free for serving others.

But I think it means more - or maybe this is just a way of filling up this meaning with all that's really here. The word "*assurance*" here can mean "nature" or "substance" or "reality" or "essence" in other places, for example, **Hebrews 1:3** ("exact representation of God's nature"). If that is what is meant here, then we should think like this.

What could the "substance" or "nature" of things hoped for mean? I think it could mean that faith apprehends the goodness and the sweetness of what God promises so clearly that this goodness and sweetness are substantially present in faith. In other words, faith grasps - lays hold of - God's preciousness so firmly that in the faith itself there is the substance of the goodness and the sweetness promised. Faith doesn't create what we hope for - that would be a mere mind game. Faith is a spiritual apprehending or perceiving or tasting or sensing of the beauty and sweetness and preciousness and goodness of what God promises - especially his own fellowship, and the enjoyment of his own presence.

Faith does not just feel confident that this is coming some day. **Faith has spiritually laid hold of and perceived and tasted that it is real.** And this means that faith has the substance or the nature of what is hoped for in it. Faith's enjoyment of the promise is a kind of substantial **down payment** of the reality coming.

In summary then faith is a kind of spiritual tasting of what God has promised so that we

feel a deep, substantial assurance of things hoped for; and faith is a kind of spiritual seeing of the invisible fingerprints of God in the things he has made. By the one we know God's power and wisdom to make us, and by the other we know his goodness and grace to save us.

Scott Grant: In putting together the entire verse, we can say that faith provides the evidence that events that we cannot yet see will in fact happen. We can also say that those events will bring about our complete enjoyment of God, the partial enjoyment of whom guarantees that we will one day completely enjoy him. Faith provides the guarantee of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Faith believes in things that are real, and faith is, in fact, evidence of the reality of those things. We can also say that faith is forward-looking. It banks on things hoped for and things not seen - things that haven't happened yet. The forward-looking faith the writer speaks of gives us a taste of what it will be like to be with God forever. When we taste something good, we want more of it. Tasting the guarantee and seeing the evidence, we are motivated to pursue God, the one who satisfies in the deep and eternal places of our souls - the one who will do so forever. The more we "*taste and see that the Lord is good,*" the more we long to dwell in the better country. The more we long to dwell in the better country, the more we are able to suffer loss in this country. In fact, the more we are liable to make radical decisions to intentionally let go of seemingly invaluable earthly possessions, dispositions and relationships. The examples that the writer highlights in **Hebrews 11** show people doing precisely that. Earthly loss is nothing in comparison to heavenly gain, and those who have faith know that and are thereby liberated to live outrageous lives of obedience to the heavenly call of God. We'll see numerous examples of such obedience as we move through **Hebrews 11**, beginning in **verse 4**. It's important to understand that faith does not create reality; faith responds to reality. Something exists or something will happen; therefore, we believe it exists or will happen. Faith is not believing that something exists or that something will happen and thereby compelling something to exist or to happen. That is a pagan understanding of faith, one that the current New Age movement holds, but one that has also infiltrated the church.

Swindoll: FIVE FACTS ABOUT FAITH FROM HEBREWS 11

- 1) Faith builds assurance and conviction (11:1). It drives out doubts about the past, insecurity in the present, and fear of the future.
- 2) Faith faces the future with confidence (11:1). It solidifies hope and stands firm in the midst of the gale-force winds of trials.
- 3) Faith focuses on an invisible reality (11:1, 3). It perceives "things not seen," which unbelievers will never accept.
- 4) Faith fulfills its purpose in pleasing God (11:2, 6). It can't be substituted by good works, good feelings, or good intentions.
- 5) Faith fixes our lives fully on God (11:6). It takes seriously God's promise of reward for faithfulness.

TEXT: Hebrews 11:4-7

TITLE: EARLIEST OT EXAMPLES OF LIVING BY FAITH

BIG IDEA:

ONLY A LIFE OF FAITH PLEASURES GOD – HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF ABEL, ENOCH AND NOAH

INTRODUCTION:

The fundamental principle being illustrated by these key OT historical figures is that the righteous must live by faith if they want to please God. The essence of faith, the operation of faith and the rewards of faith are all highlighted in the examples of Abel, Enoch and Noah in the biblical narrative leading up to the devastation of the worldwide flood. Faith must live in light of the reality of God and the conviction that God will reward those who seek Him. There is always a past component of faith (drawing upon historical examples of God's faithfulness to His promises) and a future component of faith (looking forward with confident anticipation to the rewards that God has promised) in order to motivate the present outworking of our faith.

Richard Phillips: As we study this great eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we will discover the variety of things that faith does or accomplishes. We often think of this chapter as focusing on the heroes of the faith, on the people themselves, and certainly the writer of Hebrews does draw upon the wonderful histories of the Old Testament and therefore on its personalities. But ultimately it is not these men and women who are on display, in all their variety of experience, but rather the one faith that shows its various facets in their lives. Through these historical and biblical figures, the author personifies the faith he is commending, and we thereby see all the things faith does and the benefits it conveys.

In the previous chapter we saw two things that faith does. It makes present and real things that are future and unseen. By faith we presently lay hold of our possessions in Christ. Moreover, faith sees the Creator behind the creation; by faith we understand who made and sustains the universe. As we proceed through this chapter, we are going to see more of the many things faith does. Faith pleases God; it does good works; it looks upon a heavenly city; it trusts God's promises; and it conquers over obstacles. This is what the apostle John had in mind at the end of his first epistle: "*This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith*" (1 John 5:4).

John Piper: Notice how the two parts of **verse 6** correspond to the two parts of **verse 1**. "*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" That's **verse 1**. The "*conviction of things not seen*" corresponds to faith's belief that God exists (**verse 6a**). And the "*assurance of things hoped for*" corresponds to faith's belief that God is the rewarder of those who seek him (**verse 6b**). Faith has at least these two components: one is the conviction that there is a great unseen God who exists absolutely and does not depend on us in the least. And the other is the assurance that

this great unseen God is a God of love and bounty and free and sovereign grace for all who seek him in truth.

What we have seen in Hebrews now is that the nature of faith and the vitality of faith is rooted in what God is like, not what we are like. You don't find out what Christian faith is by consulting your felt needs. You find out by consulting the nature of God. Therefore, if you would have your faith be strong, and your soul be strong and your family be strong and your church be strong and your denomination and schools be strong, know your God. Know your God!

I. (:4) FAITH OF ABEL – TESTIMONY OF RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER (Gen. 4:1-15)

A. Primary Highlight – Faith Approaching God the Right Way

“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain,”

Two different views:

1) **Kent**: the author of Hebrews does not state specifically that the superiority of Abel's offering was due to its bloody character. Rather, he says it was accepted because it was offered by faith. The statement in **Genesis 4:4** that God had respect first “unto Abel” and then “to his offering” may suggest that it was the character of Abel that was primarily in view. With this Matthew, as well as Hebrews, concurs as it emphasizes that Abel was “*righteous*” (**Matt. 23:35**). Abel's heart was right in the sight of God, and his offering was a demonstration of his faith. With Cain it was a mere ritual, having no efficacy because it was not offered in faith.

2) **Steven Cole**: The Genesis account simply says, “*the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard*” (**Gen. 4:4-5**). The only hint of a reason is when the Lord tells Cain, “*If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?*” (**Gen. 4:7**).

That question indicates that God had previously made clear to these brothers the type of sacrifice that would please Him. Faith is always an obedient response to God's revelation. “*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*” (**Rom. 10:17**). Biblical faith never rests on manmade ideas, or on vague speculations. It rests on the revealed word of God. Abel, by faith, had obeyed God's command. Cain refused to submit to it. Abel's faith pleased God; Cain's disobedience displeased God. When the Lord told Cain to “do well,” He meant, “Bring the kind of sacrifice that you know that I commanded.”

We are not reading too much into the story to infer that God had made this plain to Adam and Eve after they sinned. Their sin caused them to be ashamed of their nakedness, and so they sewed together fig leaves to try to cover that shame. But God did not accept their fig leaves. Instead, He clothed them with garments made of animal skin (**Gen. 3:7, 21**). Undoubtedly, at that time He explained to them four things. First, to stand before the holy God, they needed a proper covering. Second, humanly

manufactured coverings were not adequate. Third, God would provide the necessary covering apart from their efforts. Fourth, the only acceptable covering for their sin required the death, or shedding of blood, of an acceptable sacrifice (adapted from **A. W. Pink**, *An Exposition of Hebrews* [Ephesians 4 Group, CD], p. 658).

Surely, Adam had communicated these facts to his sons. They did not think up on their own the idea of bringing sacrifices to God! No, God had clearly revealed to Adam and Eve the necessary and proper way to approach Him through a blood sacrifice. They had made this way plain to their sons. But Cain disobeyed, while Abel, by faith, obeyed.

John MacArthur explains,

In Abel's sacrifice, the way of the cross was first prefigured. The first sacrifice was Abel's lamb—one lamb for one person. Later came the Passover—with one lamb for one family. Then came the Day of Atonement—with one lamb for one nation. Finally came Good Friday—one Lamb for the whole world (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Hebrews* [Moody Press], p. 301).

So Abel's sacrifice was better than Cain's because he offered it in obedient faith to what God had clearly revealed. God rejected Cain's sacrifice because he did not offer it by faith, and "*without faith, it is impossible to please God*" (**Heb. 11:6**).

B. Testimony of Righteousness

*"through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous,
God testifying about his gifts,"*

C. Legacy of Faith

"and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."

Kent: In Genesis Abel's blood cried out to God for vengeance. Here it is Abel himself (not his blood) that speaks to us (not crying out to God) of the vital importance of faith in God's sight. He may have died prematurely, but he still has something of great value to say to us by way of his life recorded in Scripture.

F. F. Bruce: Our author's point appears to be that Abel is still appealing to God for vindication, until he obtains it in full in the judgment to come. The idea in that case is paralleled in **Rev. 6:9 ff.**, where the souls of the martyrs cry aloud for vindication, and are told that they must wait until the full tale of martyrs is complete. It has been held, on the other hand, that our author simply means that Abel, by his faith, bears abiding witness to succeeding ages; but that more than this was in his mind is suggested by **Ch. 12:24**, where he says that the purifying blood of Christ "*speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel*" (RSV) – a clear reference to **Gen. 4:10**.

Mohler: What will be said at your funeral? What words are going to make up the content of your eulogy? How will your life be summarized in fifteen minutes of reflection? Hopefully, we will all leave the type of testimony left by Able: though he

was dead, his life bore witness to the grace and mercy found only in a substitutionary sacrifice. Christians should aspire to leave behind a legacy of faith.

Steven Cole: By bringing his own sacrifice as the way to approach God, Cain became the father of all false religion. False religions reject the cross. It offends them because it confronts their self-righteousness. Those in false religions take pride in their own goodness and their own works. They reject the idea that they are sinners in need of a Savior who shed His blood. Or, if they accept the cross (as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches do), they still want to add their good works to it as a partial means of salvation. But to add human works detracts from the total sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross and gives sinners grounds for boasting in their works.

MacArthur: Now, this text is divided into three progressive points, and I want to share these with you tonight. Abel's faith led him to do three things. Number one, to offer a more excellent sacrifice. Number two, to obtain righteousness. Number three, to openly speak though dead. Because he believed God, he did those three things, and they're progressive. Because he believed, he offered a better sacrifice. Because he offered a better sacrifice, he obtained righteousness. Because he obtained righteousness, he is for all the ages a living voice saying righteousness is by faith. You see? So, it's progressive.

II. (:5-6) FAITH OF ENOCH – TESTIMONY OF PLEASING GOD (Gen.5:21-24)

A. (:5a) Primary Highlight – Faith Walking with God

“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up;”

B. (:5b) Testimony of Pleasing God

“for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.”

“pleasing to God” = Same meaning as *“walking with God”* in the Genesis account

Richard Phillips: What does it mean to walk with God? First, this speaks of a living relationship, a companionship between a man or woman and God. It implies personal knowledge, an ever-increasing understanding of the one with whom we walk. It implies agreement of mind and heart (**Amos 3:3**). There are an intimacy, a fellowship, and a joy of company between two who walk together. . . So every day – ordinary days, difficult days, joyful days – are days with God, a foretaste of heaven: to be with him, to know his love, to see his light and feel the warmth of his pleasure.

C. (:6) Essential Connection Between Faith and Pleasing God

1. Connection of Faith to Pleasing God

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him,”

Not just difficult, but impossible

Mohler: without faith it is impossible to be commended. While works of external righteousness and general morality may commend us before men, these things are not sufficient to commend us before God. Humanitarianism, religiosity, morality, and following the most scrupulous personal ethical codes cannot bring us God's approval on the day of judgment.

2. Commitment of Faith

a. Committed to the Existence of the Living God – God is Real --

The Object of Faith

“for he who comes to God must believe that He is,”

F. F. Bruce: Belief in the invisible spiritual order involves, first and foremost, belief in Him who is *“King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1 Tim. 1:17)*; and belief in God carries with it necessarily belief in His word. It is not belief in the existence of a God that is meant, but belief in the existence of **the** God who once declared His will to the fathers through the prophets and in these last days has spoken in His Son. Those who approach Him can do so in full confidence that He exists, that His word is true, and that He will never put off or disappoint the soul that sincerely seeks Him.

b. Committed to His Faithfulness to His Promises – God is a Rewarder -
The Motivation of Faith

“and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

Hewitt: Verse 6 is neither confined nor necessarily related to Enoch. It is a truth of universal application that whoever approaches God to worship Him and to receive a blessing from Him must believe in His existence and in His power to recompense those who diligently seek Him.

III. (:7) FAITH OF NOAH – TESTIMONY OF SALVATION VS. CONDEMNATION

A. Primary Highlight – Faith Working (relationship between faith and works)

“By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household,”

Leon Morris: In the NT the noun *“salvation” (soteria)* usually refers to salvation in Christ. Here, however, as in a few other places, it is the more general idea of salvation from danger – deliverance from disaster – that is in mind. Noah's faith led to the preservation of his entire household during the Flood.

Richard Phillips: Indeed, what God demanded of Noah was far greater than what he asks of us. God required Noah to believe something that had never happened before, something totally unprecedented and seemingly unlikely. . .

The Puritans in seventeenth-century England were like Noah. The name “Puritan” was given to them by scoffers because of their care for studying and obeying God’s Word in great detail. Then, as today, people think such reverent attentiveness to be narrow religion. They wrongly equate it with the attitude of the Pharisees, who made life difficult not with their biblical obedience, but with their man-made restrictions. Yet biblical obedience does not fetter you, or make you narrow. Rather, it liberates you to what is good and true and wholesome. This is why James speaks of the “*law of liberty*” (**James 1:25**). Studying and following through on God’s Word will not shrink you but make you grow.

B. Testimony of Salvation vs. Condemnation – Two Contrasting Results

1. Condemned the World

“by which he condemned the world,”

Kent: Noah’s faith is regarded as throwing into bold relief the unbelief of those around him. The very fact that Noah believed God made the guilt of his contemporaries all the more inexcusable.

Mohler: Whenever an individual lives in obedience to God against the immorality of the world, that individual condemns the rest of the world in its unrighteousness.

Wil Pounds: Noah's testimony condemns the world to this day. Jesus used Noah's experience and testimony to declare a sudden coming day of judgment when He returns. *"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark" (Matthew 24:37-38).*

2. Obtained Righteousness

“and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

Doctrine of justification by faith alone and imputed righteousness

Leon Morris: Here in v. 7 we have the author’s one use of the term “*righteousness*” in the Pauline sense of the righteousness that is ours by faith. In the Bible Noah was the first man to be called righteous (**Gen. 6:9**). He was right with God because he took God at his word; he believed what God said and acted on it.

Mohler: For some reason, many evangelicals underestimate the importance of the story of Noah in redemptive history. . It is important that we pause to make a few theological observations about the Noah story.

- First, the Bible is absolutely clear that this was a universal flood. The biblical text clearly indicates that the flood was a global judgment on all of humanity. Further, the geological features of the earth testify to this reality – from remnants of marine life in the middle of Colorado to the formation of the Grand Canyon.

- Second, the flood's origin is divine, not natural. In other words, this was not just a natural disaster like any other. Noah's flood was a divinely orchestrated, supernatural judgment on humanity.
- Third, the story of the flood is an essential element of biblical theology. The flood is the archetypal example of God's judgment and the catastrophe of human sin. In fact, throughout Scripture we see that the flood typologically points to God's final eschatological judgment.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what sense was Abel's sacrifice "*better*" than Cain's?
- 2) Do you think the historical example of Enoch in a typological sense offers any support for the doctrine of the Rapture?
- 3) How do you live each day in light of the fundamental truths that God is real and is a rewarder of those who seek Him?
- 4) Why is Noah's attitude of *reverence* towards God so special in light of the abuse and mockery he was subjected to for believing God's testimony about things he had never witnessed?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: Pleasing God (11:5-6)

A life of faith pleases God.

We should learn three things from these verses:

1. Our number one aim in life should be to please God.

If you love someone, you aim to please him or her. The foremost commandment is that we should love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (**Mark 12:30**). It is impossible to obey that commandment without seeking to please God. Note two things in this regard:

A. PLEASING GOD BEGINS ON THE HEART (OR THOUGHT) LEVEL.

We can fake out people by being nice on the surface, while in our hearts we don't care about them. But God knows our every thought, and so we can't fake Him out! Even if we fulfill a list of religious duties or live outwardly moral lives, God judges the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (**Heb. 4:12-13**). So if you want to please God, you must judge all sin on the thought level and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (**Mark 7:20-23; 2 Cor. 10:5**). God condemns those who honor Him with their lips, while their hearts are far from Him (**Mark 7:6**). This is essential: *Aim to please God with your thought life and your emotional life!*

B. PLEASING GOD REQUIRES CONSISTENTLY DRAWING NEAR TO HIM AND SEEKING HIM.

Verse 6 mentions the one “*who comes to God.*” *Comes to* translates the same word that is translated *draw near* in **4:16**, where we are exhorted to “*draw near* to the throne of grace.” In **7:25**, the author says that Jesus “is able to save forever those who *draw near* to God through Him.” In **10:1**, he states that the Old Testament sacrifices could never “make perfect those who *draw near.*” In **10:22**, he exhorts us to “*draw near* with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.” So in **11:6**, it should be translated, “he who *draws near* to God.” It means drawing near to God in worship and prayer.

Verse 6 also mentions “*those who seek Him.*” The KJV translates it, “diligently seek,” but scholars are divided about whether it has this intensive sense. It is parallel here to *drawing near* to God. The Hebrew word that is often translated *seek* originally meant to beat a path under foot. The idea was that if you sought your neighbor often, you would beat a path through the grass to his door. We should seek God so often that we beat a path to Him!

Drawing near to God and seeking Him are deliberate, intentional activities. You do not accidentally draw near to the Holy One. No one ever seeks God apart from God's first choosing and calling that person (**Rom. 3:11; 1 Cor. 1:26-31**). But once God has called you to salvation and you have responded in faith to His call, you must exert deliberate effort and intention to seek the Lord. Make it your priority and aim in life!

Note also that we are to *seek God Himself*, not just the rewards that He can give us. Knowing the living God *is* our reward. The Lord promised Abraham, “*Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your very great reward*” (**Gen. 15:1**, NASB, margin). In the context of explaining that the priests would not have any inheritance in the land, God promised Aaron, “*I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel*” (**Num. 18:20**). The psalmist proclaimed (**Ps. 73:25-26**), “*Whom have I in heaven, but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*”

F. B. Meyer wrote, “To have God is to have all, though bereft of everything. To be destitute of God is to be bereft of everything, though having all” (*Abraham* [Christian Literature Crusade], p. 63). Donald Barnhouse observed, “God's method of supplying

our need is to give us fresh knowledge of Himself, for every need can be met by seeing Him” (*Genesis* [Zondervan], 1:105).

So our number one aim in life should be to please God from the heart. To do so, we must consistently draw near to Him and seek Him. But our text mentions an essential for pleasing God:

2. Faith is essential to please God.

Two words underscore this in verse 6: *impossible* and *must*. Faith is not just something nice, if you care to practice it. It is *impossible* to please God without faith.

You *must* believe that God is and the He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. We know this on a human level. If someone does not believe you or questions your integrity, you are not pleased with that person. In effect, they’re calling you a liar. If you have spoken the truth, to have someone call you a liar is not pleasing.

How much more does it displease the God of truth, who cannot lie, when we call Him a liar by doubting His word! What could be more insulting? What could be more arrogant than to imply that we know more than God does? When we do not trust Him, we are in effect saying, “God, You’re wrong and I’m right!” How impudent! So, if we want to please God, we must learn what faith means, and live by faith on a daily basis. The author mentions two aspects of God-pleasing faith:

A. FAITH MUST BELIEVE THAT GOD IS.

Why does the author start with believing in God’s existence with Jews, who obviously believed that? In fact, even the pagan poet, Cicero, observed, “There is... no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God” (cited by John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Westminster Press], 1:44). So why does the author start with this basic matter?

For one thing, his readers were under the imminent threat of persecution. When you have done what is right and get persecuted for it, the devil comes to you with doubts about God. He whispers in your ear, “You repented of your sins and trusted in God, but look what has happened to you now! If there were a God in heaven, would He let you be treated in this way?”

Although Jesus did not yield to the temptation, Satan threw this at Him while He hung upon the cross. The chief priests, scribes, and elders mocked Him, saying, “*He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him*” (**Matt. 27:43**). The enemy was trying to get Jesus to doubt God’s love, His power, or even His very existence, because a God who is unloving and weak is not really God at all!

When the author says that we must believe that “*God is*,” he means, “We must believe that God is exactly who His Word reveals Him to be.” Sinful people cannot know the

living and true God apart from His revealing Himself to them. To believe in God “as you conceive Him to be” is to believe in an idol, a god of your own making and imagination. We must believe in the God who is not only the God of love, but also of judgment, because that is how He has revealed Himself. He is not only a God of mercy and kindness, but also of holiness and wrath. So when the author says that we must believe that God is, he is saying, “Believe in the God who reveals Himself in His Word.”

Why would he say that? Because when we are under persecution or severe trials, it is easy to invent a friendlier “god” who treats us more nicely! It is not so easy to bow before the God of the Bible, who is sovereign over every trial. When God permits your ten children to be killed in a common accident and strips you of your wealth and health, it is not easy to join Job in proclaiming, “*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord*” (**Job 1:21**). Yet at just such times, we must believe, *God is!*

Perhaps you’re wondering, “How do you hang on to faith in God at such difficult times?” I always ask, “What’s the alternative?” In **John 6**, Jesus taught some difficult doctrines that caused many of His disciples to turn away from following Him. Rather than softening the teaching, He turned to the twelve and asked, “*You do not want to go away also, do you?*” Peter gave a classic answer, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God*” (**John 6:67-68**). You may not like the trials or the teaching, but where else are you going to go? The world certainly offers no satisfying answers! If you turn your back on God in times of trials, you have just robbed yourself of the only source of hope and comfort! Faith holds on, believing that *God is!*

B. FAITH MUST BELIEVE THAT GOD IS A REWARDER OF THOSE WHO SEEK HIM.

This has to do with God’s goodness or justice, as well as His power. In times of trial, if Satan can’t get you to doubt God’s existence, he will try to get you to doubt God’s goodness, His fairness, or His power. “If God loves you and cares about you, why is this terrible trial happening to you? Maybe God cares, but He can’t do anything about it.” Faith takes a stand against this temptation, believing, “God *will* reward me because I have sought Him. God *does* love me and care for me, even though I’m suffering. God *is* able to deliver me, if that is His purpose.”

How do we do this? Do we just say it over and over until we convince ourselves, against all of our circumstances, that it is true? Rehearsing it in your mind may help. But, there is more to be said:

(1). MAKE SURE THAT YOU’RE TRUSTING IN CHRIST FOR SALVATION.

Saving faith is not just mentally assenting to the promise that if you believe in Jesus

Christ, you have eternal life. You must agree with God's promise, but faith is more than agreeing. It is also relying personally on Christ as your only hope of heaven. You turn from relying on your own good works as the basis of your standing with God. You do not trust in any religious rituals, ceremonies, vows, or disciplines to gain acceptance with God. You do not believe that God will grade on the curve, and since you're better than average, you will pass the course. You trust solely on the shed blood of Christ as the only satisfaction for your sins. You believe God's promise that the one who trusts in Jesus will have eternal life. If you do not have this foundation, you will not be able to believe God in times of severe trials.

(2). UNDERSTAND THAT FAITH IS NOT IN ANY WAY MERITORIOUS; RATHER, IT IS GOD'S ORDAINED MEANS OF OBTAINING HIS BLESSINGS.

In other words, your faith does not earn or merit eternal life or any other blessing. That would be to turn faith into a work that makes God your debtor! Rather, Christ Himself merits our salvation and all spiritual blessings. We deserve nothing from God but judgment, but in His grace, He offers mercy and full pardon to the one who trusts in the merits of Christ. John Owen explains, "Faith alone is the gracious power which takes us off from all confidence in ourselves, and directs us to look for all in another; that is, in God himself" (*An Exposition of Hebrews* [The National Foundation for Christian Education], 7:41).

Salvation and everything that we have is from God as a gift by His grace. The Reformer, Martin Bucer, explains, "when God rewards our good works he is rewarding his works and gifts in us, rather than our own works." *Since God works in us, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure"* (**Phil. 2:13**), Bucer says, "all the good that God does to us and the eternal life that he gives us still remain the results of his grace alone, so that no one should boast of himself, but only of the Lord" (cited by Philip Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 461).

So, make sure that you're trusting in Christ alone for salvation. Understand that you do not in any way merit salvation by your faith, but that faith is simply the channel through which God's blessings flow.

(3). REMEMBER THAT THE REWARDS OF FAITH ARE IN ETERNITY, NOT NECESSARILY IN THIS LIFE.

We saw this last week with Abel, who didn't live a long and happy life on earth. But his life was blessed and Cain's life was cursed, even though Cain lived many years and had many earthly successes. The same thing is true of Moses. He chose to give up his comfortable situation as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and to endure ill-treatment with God's people, "*for he was looking to the reward*" (**11:24-26**).

This is also illustrated in the case of Enoch (**11:5**). Even though he lived 365 years, which is very long by today's standards, in the context of **Genesis 5**, he has by far the

shortest life of all of the pre-flood patriarchs. His father, Jared, lived 962 years. His son, Methuselah, set the record at 969 years. Yet Enoch, who is noted for his godliness, only lived about a third as long as they did! This shows us that faith's reward is not necessarily a long life on earth, but eternal life with God in heaven.

Enoch's translation into heaven is also an illustration of what God will do for those who are alive when Jesus returns. We will be caught up in the clouds "*to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord*" (1 Thess. 4:17). Even for believers who die physically, there is a sense in which they will not see death. As Jesus told Martha at Lazarus' tomb, "*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.*" Then He pointedly asked her, "*Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26). Faith looks to God for the reward of eternal life in heaven, not for the good life here and now.

We've seen that our number one aim in life should be to please God, and that faith is essential to please Him. Finally,

3. Faith is a daily walk that extends over a lifetime.

Enoch's life also illustrates this point. **Genesis 5** does not mention faith in connection with Enoch, but it does say twice that he walked with God. The LXX translators, seeking to make the language less anthropomorphic (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 287), render that phrase, "*Enoch was well-pleasing to God.*" Since it is impossible to please God without faith, it follows that Enoch walked by faith. His 300-year walk of faith obtained God's testimony that he was pleasing to Him. We must walk by faith with God on earth if we expect to dwell with Him forever in heaven.

Let's briefly explore the word picture of a walk with God. First, consider that *a walk is not spectacular or impressive*. If we were writing the biography of a man who was taken up into heaven bodily without dying, I'm sure that we would *not* title it, "The Man Who Walked With God." We'd call it, "The Man Who *Flew* With God." We're attracted to the sensational, but God calls our attention to a man who *walked* with Him. To *fly* with God sounds impossible, but to *walk* with God is doable. Walking is not the flashiest or quickest way to get someplace, but it's a frequent description of the Christian life. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a wonderful expanded description of the Christian walk.

To walk with God means that our lives are *in step with God*, yielded in obedience to Him, headed in the direction He chooses. Walking also implies *intimacy* and *fellowship*. Walking with a friend is a time to talk, to get to know one another, and to share the things that are happening in your lives. Walking with God is a daily process of growing more intimate with Him as you share everything in your life with Him and learn more of His ways.

Of course, *you have to do your own walking*. Someone else can't do it for you. Just as a

physical exercise program requires *discipline*, so spiritual walking requires discipline (1 Tim. 4:7). You have to take the initiative, the time, and the effort that is required to walk with God. If you don't make frequent appointments to get alone with Him, it won't happen. If you don't make an effort to *read His Word* and apply it to your life, you're not walking with Him. If you are not *memorizing His promises* and applying them to the various situations you face, you're not walking by faith. If you have trusted in Christ as Savior, but you have grown lazy and aren't walking with Him, then get up and get back on the path. Faith is a daily dependence on God, step by step, that continues over a lifetime.

John Schultz: His faith in God and his life of righteousness must have been seen by his contemporaries as a condemnation of their lifestyle. Added to this was the construction of the ark, a project which must have become an object of ridicule in the eyes of society. We don't know anything about weather conditions in the time before the deluge. But a universal flood that threatened the existence of life on our planet had never occurred before. Noah's building of the ark triggered questions the answer of which must have become a reason to ridicule Noah's project. A corrupted society believed that they were immune to judgment. When the flood came it was too late for repentance.

The author's observation that Noah "*became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*" is a phrase loaded with theological content, as we saw above. The word "heir" suggests that Noah received something that was originally not his. In the natural, Noah was a man with the same sinful nature that all of mankind had inherited from Adam in his fall. In stating that Noah inherited righteousness, the author of Hebrews draws a line between what God did for Noah in the Old Testament dispensation and what He does for us in our relationship with Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul writes about this: "*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*"

Steven Cole: Faith That Escapes the Coming Judgment (Gen. 11:7)

To be saved, we must by faith obediently respond to God's warnings of future judgment.

1. The basis of Noah's faith: He believed God's word regarding the coming judgment.

A. GOD'S WORD OF WARNING CONCERNS THINGS NOT YET SEEN.

B. GOD'S WORD OF WARNING CONCERNED JUDGMENT THAT WAS DELAYED, BUT ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN.

C. GOD'S WORD OF WARNING REQUIRED FAITH IN THE FACE OF THE WORLD'S CONDEMNATION.

2. The effects of Noah's faith: Out of reverential fear, he steadfastly obeyed God's

directive about salvation.

A. NOAH'S FAITH CHANGED HIS AFFECTIONS (EMOTIONS).

B. NOAH'S FAITH CHANGED HIS ACTIONS (BEHAVIOR).

3. The consequences of Noah's faith: He saved his family, he condemned the world, and he became an heir of the righteousness according to faith.

A. BY FAITH, NOAH SAVED HIS FAMILY.

B. BY FAITH, NOAH'S LIFE AND WORDS CONDEMNED THE WORLD.

C. BY FAITH, NOAH BECAME AN HEIR OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS ACCORDING TO FAITH.

John Piper: Without Faith it is Impossible to Please God (Gen. 11:4-6)

So the point of **chapter 11** is to flesh out and demonstrate more stories of faith so that we would imitate the faith and inherit the promises of God.

You can know we are on the right track here by remembering **Hebrews 6:11-12**, which described exactly the same pattern of imitation and inheritance: "*We desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*" That's the point of **Hebrews 11** - to give more examples of "*those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*" so that we can imitate their faith and join them in the inheritance.

The issue of endurance, and perseverance for the long haul, and staying alive, and thriving and being renewed day after day, and finding the pace to finish the race - It is a huge issue for us all.

Now the writer is fully aware of the problem he has created. He has chosen two Old Testament saints to illustrate his principle in verse 2 - that by faith the men of old gained approval - when in fact in neither of these Old Testament stories is faith ever mentioned. This is no slip-up. He knows exactly what he is doing. And if we are willing to follow him, we will see how profound his insight is.

He is not arguing for the nature of faith from these Old Testament texts. He is not saying: because I find faith mentioned in these stories, therefore faith must be the way they pleased God. His argument is just the opposite, in fact. He sees faith in the stories, not because it is mentioned, but because these men did, in fact, please God, and there is no other way to please him than by faith.

TEXT: Hebrews 11:8-22

TITLE: FORWARD-LOOKING FAITH OF THE PATRIARCHS

BIG IDEA:

ONLY A LIFE OF FAITH PLEASURES GOD – HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF THE FAITH OF THE PATRIARCHS THAT LOOKED FORWARD TO GOD’S PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION:

The previous examples of faith predated the establishment of the nation of Israel. Now the author moves on to the faith of the patriarchs with special emphasis on the life of Abraham – the father of all those of faith. The forward-looking nature of faith stands out as the concepts of inheritance and promises and eschatological blessing (New Jerusalem, etc.) are developed. In all of life, believers must not get too rooted or attached to this world because we are to live as strangers and pilgrims and aliens who have our vision set on the eternal heavenly realities. The great Messianic promises that God introduced to Abraham and reinforced to the other patriarchs are faithfully passed down from generation to generation. The delayed realization of the fulfillment of all of God’s promises in no way diminishes their certainty or their impact on our lives in the present. *The righteous shall live by faith.*

Mohler: The inclusion of Abraham in the hall of faith is expected but nonetheless significant. Abel, Enoch, and Noah are figures who come before the formation of the nation of Israel. In other words, they are just as much a part of the story of all humanity as they are a part of Israel’s story. But Abraham is the fountainhead of the nation. If Abraham lived by faith in the promises of God and in a coming Messiah, then the implication is that all Jews should do the same. If the readers of Hebrews think that to reject Christ is to embrace Abraham, they are mistaken. Embracing Christ is, in fact, to walk in accord with Abraham.

I. (:8-12) FAITH OF ABRAHAM – PROMISE OF FUTURE INHERITANCE

A. (:8) Faith Obeys God’s Call

1. Obedience is Key

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance;”

Richard Phillips: We see in Abraham that faith acts in response to God’s call. It is God’s initiative that is emphasized at the beginning of Abraham’s life of faith, God’s sovereign grace that goes forth with his saving call.

2. Overcoming the Obstacle of the Unknown – Going without Knowing

“and he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

Mohler: The fact that Abraham left Haran and traveled to a land that he did not know [very dangerous] is indeed a remarkable act of trust in God.

Leon Morris: To leave the certainties one knows and go out into what is quite unknown – relying on nothing other than the word of God – is the essence of faith, as the author sees it.

Wiersbe: Waiting is, for me, one of the most difficult disciplines of life. Yet true faith is able to wait for the fulfillment of God’s purposes in **God’s time**. But, while we are waiting, we must also be obeying.

B. (:9-10) Faith Focuses on Eternity

1. (:9) Living on Earth as an Alien / Pilgrim

“By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;”

Kent: Even though it was the land of promise because God had promised it to him (**Gen. 12:7**), for all practical purposes it was a foreign land to him. He never became a citizen. He never built a house in Canaan. He lived the life of a nomad, moving his tent from place to place.

Steven Cole: The application is that as people of faith, we often must live in this world with conditions that seemingly contradict God’s promises (see **11:35b-39**). The “health and wealth gospel” does *not* square with Scripture. Sometimes God’s people face tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and even death (**Rom. 8:35**; see also **2 Cor. 6:4-5**; **11:23-28**). Paul described himself “*as having nothing, yet possessing all things*” (**2 Cor. 6:10**).

Abraham, the alien in a foreign land, dwelling in tents, stands in contrast with his nephew Lot, who moved to Sodom and lived in *a house*. Although Lot was a believer, he became tainted by the godless values of Sodom. Abraham, the alien, was involved with his neighbors in Canaan, but he always remained distinct.

As pilgrims, we need to adopt the mindset of pilgrims. When you travel in a foreign country, you stand out as different. They can spot you! They know that you are not one of them. You may temporarily adopt some of their local customs, so as not to be offensive, but on most things you think and live differently, according to the customs of your homeland.

As God’s people, our homeland is heaven. We’re just passing through this earth. Our mindset toward success, possessions, and purpose in life should be radically different than the mindset of the natives. The natives’ hopes center in this life only, and so they try to accumulate all of the things and engage in all of the activities that they think will bring them happiness in this life. But pilgrims’ hopes center in Jesus Christ and their

eternal inheritance in Him. So they hold the things of this life loosely. They enjoy all that God provides, but their real treasures are in heaven (**1 Tim. 6:17-19**).

2. (:10) Looking Forward to Our Heavenly Home

*“for he was looking for the city which has foundations,
whose architect and builder is God.”*

Kent: It should be clear, therefore, that Abraham’s faith was centered not only on a city (as something more permanent than a tent) but on a heavenly and eternal goal. It was because his trust was placed in heavenly verities that temporal factors were of small consequence to him. This city, the heavenly Jerusalem, is regarded in Scripture as the final home of God’s people.

Mohler: The city that God is building is truly the eternal city. It is entirely secure, unshakable, and cannot be destroyed. By racing the theme of “city” through Scripture, we find that this promised city is the “*new Jerusalem*” described in **Revelation 21:9-27**.

Lenski: The earthly land of promise is only the earthly type and symbol of the heavenly Canaan. The type is advanced from the idea of a land or country to the antitype of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. This brings out the idea of permanency. . . Built by God, this city stands forever.

C. (:11) Faith Believes the Impossible

*“By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive,
even beyond the proper time of life,
since she considered Him faithful who had promised;”*

Debate over whether this is a continuation of the faith of Abraham (with some textual explanations necessary) or whether Sarah is truly the subject of this verse.

F. F. Bruce: the verse then reads: “*By faith he [Abraham] also, together with Sarah, received power to beget a child when he was past age, since he counted him faithful who had promised*” – and **verse 12** follows on very naturally.

Leon Morris: [agrees with Bruce] – we see the words “*Sarah herself*” as dative and not nominative.

Steven Cole: This view also alleviates another problem, namely, that in the account in **Genesis 18**, Sarah is rebuked for her unbelief rather than commended for her faith. When the Lord confronts her, she denies, rather than confesses, her unbelief. Probably, in spite of her initial doubt, she eventually came to believe God’s promise as Abraham did. But if Abraham is the subject of **11:11**, then the emphasis is on **his faith**, not on Sarah’s faith.

[If you take the traditional reading of the text as in the NASB then you could follow Kent below]

Kent: Sarah may be understood as the subject, and *eis* should be regarded as “in connection with” or “in regard to.” Thus the sense would be: Sarah received power with regard to Abraham’s depositing of seed, and thus even at her advanced age she was able to do her part in conceiving a child.

Steven Cole: We would be wrong not to trust God to do far beyond our human abilities. Nothing is impossible with God (**Luke 1:37**). He is “*able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think*” (**Eph. 3:20**). Our faith is not in ourselves or in our faith, but in God who is faithful.

D. (:12) Faith Receives Countless Blessings

“therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.”

Leon Morris: God’s blessing is beyond human calculation.

II. (:13-16) FAITH ORIENTED TOWARDS FUTURE PROMISES

A. (:13) Faith Does Not Look for Immediate Gratification

1. Promises of God not Realized in This Life

“All these died in faith, without receiving the promises,”

Richard Phillips: Abraham’s experience informs us that the life of faith is not one of receiving all God’s promises in tangible form, but rather of believing them in the face of hardship, receiving them by faith, living as Abraham did out of confidence in and reliance on God.

2. Promises of God Still Joyfully Anticipated

“but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance,”

Kent: The patriarchs were mighty examples of the steadfastness that is an integral part of true faith, for they died not having received the promise, but from afar having seen and greeted them.

3. Perspective is One of Strangers and Exiles

“and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”

Steven Cole: We must see and welcome God’s promises, although we can only do so in this life from a distance. Seeing and welcoming God’s promises alienates us from this world.

B. (:14-16) Faith Looks for Heavenly Blessing

1. (:14) Forward Looking to Eternity

“For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.”

2. (:15) Not Looking Backwards to Earthly Security and Comforts

“And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.”

Mohler: Nothing prevented Abraham from going back to Haran –nothing except faith in God’s promise. The people of God don’t look backward. They look forward because they are absolutely convinced God’s promises are true.

3. (:16a) Desiring the Future Eternity which is Better than the Past

“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.”

Kent: The eternal values involved in the promises of God made them willing to regard their earthly experience as a pilgrimage, and kept them from despair even when it was evident that death would overtake them before fulfilment came.

Jonathan Edwards: The Christian Pilgrim

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature; and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied.-- To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is **infinitely** better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops; but God is the ocean.-- Therefore it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven, as it becomes us to make the seeking of our highest end and proper good, the whole work of our lives; to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for, or set our hearts on, anything else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness?

C. (:16b) Faith Enjoys a Relationship with God Where Future Blessings are Guaranteed

“Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.”

Cf. how God is ashamed of those who fall away from the faith; of those who reveal themselves to be friends of the world rather than friends of God (**1 John 2:28**)

Richard Phillips: All those long years Abraham identified himself not by the home he had left or by the place where he resided, but by the home he was seeking and the God who called him and gave the promises he believed. He and his sons were willing to be called men of God, not men of the world.

III. (:17-22) FAITH OF THE PATRIARCHS – PASSING THE BATON OF GOD’S PROMISES TO THE NEXT GENERATION -- LOOKING FORWARD TO FUTURE BLESSING

A. (:17-19) Faith of Abraham – Tested but Still Anticipating the Seed of Isaac

1. (:17) Extreme Test Matched by Extreme Obedience

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;”

Wiersbe: we have four generations of faith. These men sometimes failed, but basically they were men of faith. They were not perfect, but they were devoted to God and trusted His Word. . . They handed God’s promises down from one generation to another.

2. (:18) Firm Promise

*“it was he to whom it was said,
‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’”*

3. (:19) Radical Conviction Regarding Resurrection

*“He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead;
from which he also received him back as a type.”*

Kent: After waiting twenty-five years, long after Sarah had passed her child-bearing years, Abraham experienced the first stage of the fulfilment by the remarkable birth of Isaac. Furthermore, God had confirmed the fact that Isaac was the promised seed. Hence Abraham could not expect some other son to replace Isaac in the event that Isaac would die childless. When God told Abraham to slay his son, Isaac was as yet unmarried and without offspring. Hence Abraham drew the conclusion that since God had definitely related the fulfilment of the covenant to Isaac, if God had ordered his death, then He must intend to resurrect him. This is all the more remarkable when we remember that Abraham had no precedent for any physical resurrection.

Hewitt: Abraham’s faith was able to reach the wonderful heights of the resurrection and for this reason Isaac was restored to him as one from the dead, as a type of the death and resurrection of the divine Son who was not spared (cf. **Rom. viii. 32; Jn. viii. 56**).

B. (:20) Faith of Isaac – Anticipating Future for Jacob and Esau

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.”

Leon Morris: What impresses the author about these patriarchs was that they had a faith that looked beyond death. . . With all three the significant thing was their firm conviction that death cannot frustrate God’s purposes. Their faith was such that they were sure God would work his will. So they could speak with confidence of what would happen after they died. Their faith, being stronger than death, in a way overcame death, for their words were fulfilled.

C. (:21) Faith of Jacob – Blessing Two Sons of Joseph

*“By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph,
and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.”*

Leon Morris: Jacob’s claim for inclusion in the list rests on his blessing of his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh (**Gen 48**). As with Isaac, the blessing went against the natural order of birth. In fact, when Jacob was dying, Joseph tried to have the major blessing given to Manasseh, the firstborn. But Jacob crossed his hands to pick out Ephraim as the greater. God is not bound by human rules like those that give pride and benefit of place to the firstborn. He fulfills his purposes as he chooses. The incident, like the preceding one, again illustrates the theme of the patriarchal blessing with its fulfillment far distant. At the time the words were spoken, fulfillment could be known only by faith.

Lenski: Why are only Joseph’s sons mentioned? Because they were born in Egypt, and Jacob adopted them as his own sons (**Gen. 48:5**); it was thus that he blessed them. That blessing was, indeed, a notable act of faith. Jacob was near his death and would not see the realization of his blessing, but Manasseh and Ephraim and especially their descendants would not remain in Egypt as Egyptians but would as sons of Jacob found two tribes that would live in Canaan. Jacob believed all that God revealed to him regarding the future, which was in line with the Messianic promise made to Abraham.

D. (:22) Faith of Joseph – Anticipating the Return to the Promised Land

“By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.”

Hewitt: Joseph’s request was honoured by Moses (**Ex. xiii. 19**) and fulfilled by Joshua (**Jos. xxiv. 32**).

F. F. Bruce: Joseph had spent the whole of his long life, apart from the first seventeen years, in Egypt; but Egypt was not his home. Even when the rest of his family came down to Egypt at his invitation, he knew that their residence there would be temporary. Just as his father Jacob had insisted on being carried back to the promised land for burial, so Joseph made his relatives swear that they would perform the like service for him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of radical obedience has issued from your faith?
- 2) To what extent are we motivated right now by the future promises of God as opposed to living for “our best life now”?
- 3) What do we learn about conception from this passage?
- 4) How can we develop a deeper desire for heaven?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Philip Hughes: He who begins by faith must continue by faith, for faith is the principle not only of initiation but also of perseverance. The life of faith did not cease for Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldees behind him or when at length he set foot on the territory toward which he had directed his steps. Indeed, the situation into which he moved on his arrival in the land of promise was a more severe trial of his faith than was the call to leave home and kindred, and it was easier for him to live by faith as he journeyed toward a goal as yet unseen than to do so upon reaching this goal and finding that the fullness of all that had been promised was “*not yet.*”

MacArthur: The Christian . . . is willing to forsake the present glory, comfort, and satisfaction of this present world for the future glory that is his in Christ. In contrast to the “buy now – pay later” attitude prevalent in the world, the Christian is willing to pay now and receive it later. What makes Christians willing to make such sacrifices? Hope, based on faith that the future holds something far better than the present. (Rom. 8:18)

Richard Phillips: Their faith was focused on **spiritual realities**. . . second, it was **forward-looking**, as the passing of the blessing demonstrates. None of these men experienced the fulfillment of the promises when they died, but were looking ahead to what God would do in the future. This is why they took the passing on of God’s blessing so seriously. . .

Hebrews 11 also emphasizes how faith **handles the prospect of death**, and this is a third feature of the patriarchs’ faith. It is obvious that these men trusted in God’s resurrection, for they faced death with a calm serenity, Jacob worshiping God while resting on his staff. It is always a mark of Christian faith to approach death with a peace that comes from God. . .

Fourth and finally, the faith of all three patriarchs was firmly **fixed upon the Word** of God, and therefore upon the plan God revealed through it. They received God’s revelation in faith, and in his plan they saw that they were joined to his grand redemptive purpose, stretching back in history through Abraham and those before him, and reaching forward toward eternity future. They saw that by the grace of God they played a part in that plan, and that they were links connecting others to God’s true Promised Land. In the promises and prophecies of God’s Word, they saw the substance of things to come just as we must, and they knew how to face the present as well as the future which is what faith does for the believer.

Deffinbaugh: What about the Omission of the Sins of the Patriarchs?

First, we should acknowledge that there are skeletons in the “patriarchal closet” and that our author deliberately omitted them from this account. The author of Hebrews did not fail to remember the failures of Noah and Abraham; he chose not to mention them.

Second, this should serve as a reminder that there are proverbial skeletons in everyone's closet. We are fallen, fallible creatures. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, but it does not keep us from failing in this life. When you look at the eleven disciples of our Lord, you find men of faith, but you also continue to see men who fail. Both Peter and Barnabas failed regarding Gentile Christians and giving in to the influence of Judaizers, and thus it was necessary for Paul to rebuke them (see **Galatians 2:11-21**). Men of faith fail, and this is why we find such comfort in the teaching of Hebrews regarding the high priestly role of our Lord Jesus, who can sympathize with our weaknesses, come to our aid, and give us mercy and grace in our time of need (**Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16**). Living by faith means trusting God when we fail, knowing that only our Great High Priest has lived a perfect human existence.

Third, we should assume that the author expects his readers (who are steeped in the Old Testament stories) to immediately notice the omission of these failures on the part of Noah and Abraham. In my opinion, the author of Hebrews deliberately omitted the failings of Noah and Abraham, expecting that his readers would note the omission and ponder the author's reasons for leaving them out of his account.

Fourth, we can summarize by saying that the author of Hebrews has deliberately left his readers with a tension (his emphasis on their faith; our recognition of their failures), which they (and we) must acknowledge, and ponder carefully to resolve. . .

So, our author's description of Noah and Abraham is perfectly consistent with the fact that those who trust in God's provision for sin by faith are fully forgiven, and their sins are remembered no more. Is this not the way God sees us, in Christ? Is this not what allows and encourages us to "*draw near*" to God, assured that our sins have been forgiven and forgotten? So what purpose would be served by pointing out the failures of these men, when they are saved by faith and their sins are washed away? I believe this is precisely the truth that our author wanted his readers to see in his description of the faith of these two men of faith.

Steven Cole: Dying Faith

Facing death is the acid test of our faith. Will it sustain us at that time? As the author of Hebrews gives multiple examples of those who lived and died in faith, he briefly mentions Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He calls attention to incidents from each man's life just before he died. In Isaac's case, he does not state specifically that he was near death, but this incident happened when he was very old, feeble, and blind. In the case of the other two men, the author states specifically that they were dying. In each case, as they faced death, none of God's promises was near fulfillment. Circumstances seemed contrary to their fulfillment. These men had lived all of their lives hearing about and believing in God's promises, but God had not yet delivered. Even so, they all died with their faith and focus on things to come, believing that God would keep His word. They teach us that...

Faith faces death trusting God to fulfill His future promises, even when circumstances seem to contradict those promises.

While there are some different lessons to be learned from each man, the author uses each example to drive home the same basic point. Each one died with faith in God's promises, even though circumstances seemed to contradict those promises. In the cases of Isaac and Jacob, they both had many failures in the life of faith, and yet, by God's grace, they crossed the finish line with a strong flourish of faith. They illustrate what Paul wrote (**Phil. 1:6**), "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*" If, by God's grace, you and I have begun the life of faith, by that same grace we will die strong in faith, testifying to others that God's promises are true, in spite of our circumstances.

John Piper: The Hope of Exiles on Earth (11:13-22)

- The Promises of God are not Mainly for this World (:13-16)

What the coming of Jesus has done is put the foundation of the promises on a visible, demonstrable footing. In Christ all the promises of God are Yes (2 Corinthians 1:20). But the promises are still future. And we are still aliens and exiles and sojourners, just like the fathers and like the other Old Testament saints.

- The Life of Faith is the Life of a Sojourner

So the point here is that the life of faith is the life of an exile, a sojourner, a refugee. The promises of God are our real home and we have seen them from afar and have greeted them and tasted them and they have made us restless and uneasy. They have begun to shape our whole way of seeing and thinking and feeling. They have colored all our values and goals and desires. We have been put out of sync with this world because our treasure is in heaven.

- Seeking and Desiring another Country

A sojourner living by faith in God's promises is "seeking" another country (see **Matthew 6:33**). He is not settling in here. He is sitting loose to things, and is unwilling to be conformed to this age. He is "seeking" the one he has greeted from afar.

- God is not Ashamed

So what are the two reasons God is not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? The reason at the back is that he has prepared for them a city - a heavenly city of promise. And the reason at the front is that they desire that city. It says, "They desire a better country - that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." God made it for them and they desire it, that is why he is not ashamed to be called their God.

- What a City God's City Is!

The city of God will be perfect because God will be in it. He will walk in it and talk in it and manifest himself in every part of it. All that is good and beautiful and holy and peaceful and true and happy will be there, because God will be there. Perfect justice will be there, and recompense a thousandfold for every pain suffered in obedience to Christ. And it will never deteriorate. In fact, it will shine brighter and brighter as eternity stretches out into unending ages of increasing joy.

- **The Behavior of Faith (:17-19)**

Faith not only desires what God promises more than anything, it also does things that can only be explained by the assurance that God will do what he has promised, in spite of humanly impossible obstacles. Faith desires the God of the promises and faith trusts the God of the promises to deliver. And so faith acts in ways that are out of sync with a world that does not desire or trust God.

- **When Obedience Feels Like the End of a Dream**

Now I close by applying this to your life. For many of you right now - and for others of you the time is coming - obedience feels like the end of a dream. You feel that if you do what the word of God or the Spirit of God is calling you to do, it will make you miserable and that there is no way that God could turn it all for good.

MacArthur: Abraham – An Exemplary Faith (11:8-19)

But when we come to Abraham, the whole thing comes together. We get the full picture. Let me give you five features of faith that show us the completeness of Abraham's faith. This is consistent with him as the prototype for all of us who are children of faith. Here is Grade A faith, here is five-star faith. Here is the pattern for our life of faith.

- The Pilgrimage of Faith (:8)
- The Patience of Faith (:9-10)
- The Power of Faith (:11-12)
- The Perseverance of Faith (:13-16)
- The Proof of Faith (:17-19)

TEXT: Hebrews 11:23-31

TITLE: FROM EGYPT TO JERICHO – FROM BONDAGE TO VICTORY

BIG IDEA:

FAITH FOCUSES ON THE UNSEEN GOD TO GAIN ETERNAL REWARD

BY:

- **CHOOSING GOD**
- **DELIVERING FROM DEATH AND BONDAGE**
- **CAPTURING ENEMY STRONGHOLDS TO ACHIEVE VICTORY**

INTRODUCTION:

Consider how important Moses was to the Jews. In this important lesson on faith, the author transitions from the foundation of the patriarchs to the ultimate law-giver Moses to see how his life modeled faith and endurance. In what ways did he trust in the unseen God and place the motivation of eternal reward ahead of instant gratification as he was willing to share in the sufferings of God's people?

Hewitt: The author now moves from Genesis to Exodus, from the age of the patriarchs to that of Moses, the leader of Israel, but he introduces the great lawgiver by first mentioning the faith of the parents who preserved his life as a babe.

Richard Phillips: What a difference faith makes! Now it means the difference between fear and courageous perseverance, the very thing the early Christians needed and we so badly need today. But it will mean even more on that great day to come when the heavens part as the Red Sea once did, and Jesus comes back to bring salvation to those who trusted in him and judgment on the world that turned away.

I. (:23-26) FAITH OF MOSES AND HIS PARENTS – CHOOSING GOD

A. (:23) Choosing Obeying God Rather Than the King

1. Action – Protected the Infant Moses

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents,”

2. Motivation – Purpose of God Visualized

a. Positively Stated

“because they saw he was a beautiful child;”

Kent: it is strongly suggested that the parents of Moses discerned from his exceptional beauty that God had special plans for him.

Acts 7:20 *“lovely in the sight of God”*

b. Negatively Stated

“and they were not afraid of the king's edict.”

B. (:24-26) Choosing Suffering for God Rather Than Pleasures of Sin

1. (:24-25) Action – Identifying with God’s Suffering People

a. (:24) Negatively Stated – Rejecting Position, Power, Possessions

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;”

Charles Spurgeon: O Moses, if you must needs join with Israel there is no present reward for you; you have nothing to gain but all to lose; you must do it out of pure principle, out of love to God, out of a full persuasion of the truth, for the tribes have no honors or wealth to bestow. You will receive affliction, and that is all. You will be called a fool, and people will think they have good reason for so doing.

b. (:25) Positively Stated – Embracing Suffering over Sin

“choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin;”

Hewitt: Sin in this verse has the meaning of apostasy from God, which here is identified with the abandonment of the communion of the people of God.

Leon Morris: *“The pleasures of sin”* does not mean Moses saw himself as a dissolute rake while at court. It implies rather that once he saw where God’s call lay, it would have been sin for him to turn away from it and align himself with the Egyptians.

MacArthur: If you have a true and saving faith, and you make choices, there are certain things that you accept, and there are certain things that you reject. And they’re really modeled for us here in the story of Moses. . .

Now, what is going to take hold of his heart? Is it going to be the wisdom of the Egyptians, or is it going to be the truth of God? With the formal education in Egypt, the inculcation of Egyptian wisdom, Egyptian idolatry, he would have learned hieroglyphics; he would have learned the hieratic scripts. He no doubt would have been involved in copying the texts that was part of formal education. He would have learned multi languages. He would have learned the languages of surrounding nations, the languages – the various languages of the Canaanites so that he could interact with them in trade. But would he have lost what he had as a foundation of his life, the Word of God? When he reached the age of maturity, he faced a crucial decision. Actually, he reaches 40, so it’s not a full 40 years of Egyptian education, but he faces a crucial decision. He is now to become fully absorbed into Egyptian culture. When he had grown up, he has to make a choice. What is his choice going to be?

The third thing that he turned from – not only the world’s prestige and the world’s pleasure, but let’s just call it the world’s plenty, **verse 26**, *“- considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.”*

He considered – in the Greek he judged; he made a judgment. This is not a rash conclusion; this is a very careful consideration. He had prestige to the max. He had pleasure to the max at his fingertips, and he had treasure to the max, but faith rejects all of those things. True saving faith. “*He considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.*” The implication there is to the final reward, to the divine reward, to the eternal reward.

And there’s one other thing that I think we can say without exhausting this particular portion of Scripture. Let’s just say this; he rejected the world’s pressure.

2. (:26) Motivation –Eternal Inheritance Worth More than Temporary Riches

a. Accepting the Reproach of Christ

“considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt;”

Mohler: Moses recognized the vanity of Pharaoh’s house and the all-surpassing worth of obedience to God.

F. F. Bruce: To choose the side of a slave-nation, with all the contempt and privation which that entailed, in preference to the very real advantages and prospects which were his as “*the son of Pharaoh’s daughter*”, must have seemed an act of folly by all worldly standards.

Steven Cole: He considered “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” *The reproach of Christ* is a startling phrase! It probably means, “reproach similar to what Christ endured when He was despised and rejected by the world.” How much Moses knew about the promised Anointed One, we cannot know for sure. But Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus’ day (**John 8:56**). Moses knew that God promised to raise up a prophet like him, who would speak His word (**Deut. 18:15**). He knew of God’s promise to Eve, that one from her seed would bruise the serpent’s head (**Gen. 3:15**). He also no doubt knew that the sacrificial system pointed ahead to a Redeemer. And so Moses considered that any reproach that he endured for identifying himself with God’s Messiah was far more valuable than the worldly treasures he could amass in Egypt.

b. Anticipating Future Reward

“for he was looking to the reward.”

Kent: By his action Moses displayed his faith that the Israelites were not just slaves of Pharaoh but were a people whose destiny was appointed by God. In casting his lot with them, it was not a display of mere national identification but of spiritual affiliation (the people of God). At the same time Moses was well aware that his choice would cause him to suffer hardship. The alternative would have been to repudiate his national origins and make the most of the opportunities which his fortuitous adoption by Pharaoh’s daughter made possible. Surely the life of one in his position provided for enjoyment in stark contrast to Pharaoh’s Hebrew slaves.

Richard Phillips: Faith will always make itself known through its choices. . . What was it that Moses believed? Mainly, he believed that the Israelites, though enslaved, were the people of God. He understood that the Egyptians, though wielding power and enjoying wealth, were in opposition to the true God. Their pleasures were sinful ones and Israel's afflictions were holy ones. Surely this means that he knew Israel's God, Yahweh, to be the true God, and the many gods of the Nile to be empty idols. If this was true, he knew it as better to be one of God's people, even in a state of affliction.

II. (:27-29) FAITH OF MOSES – DELIVERING FROM DEATH AND BONDAGE

A. (:27) Trusting God for a New Life – Leaving the Palace for the Desert

1. Leaving Privilege for Leadership Development

“By faith he left Egypt,”

Argument could be made either for:

- Flight to Midian after slaying the Egyptian oppressor (**Exod. 2:11-15**) – this would be more consistent from a chronology standpoint with the Passover event happening afterwards; seems the preferred view
- Departure with the rest of the Israelites at the Exodus

2. Leveraging Courage

“not fearing the wrath of the king;”

3. Looking to God for Endurance

“for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.”

Moses had to endure for 40 years before God called him to lead his people out of Egypt.

Mohler: Their trust in promises was intimately connected to their trust in God. As they trusted in the unseen God, so they trusted in the unseen fulfillment of his promises. This is the very essence of faith.

B. (:28) Trusting God for Redemption – Worshiping via Blood Sacrifice to Avoid the Sentence of Death

1. Observing Passover

“By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood,”

2. Experiencing Passover

“so that he who destroyed the first-born might not touch them.”

C. (:29) Trusting God for Escape – Following God's Leading Where Enemies Cannot Go

1. Safe Passage

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea

as though they were passing through dry land;”

2. Unsafe Passage

“and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.”

What is good for the goose is not always good for the gander!

III. (:30-31) FAITH OF ISRAEL AND RAHAB -- CAPTURING ENEMY STRONGHOLDS TO ACHIEVE VICTORY = JERICHO

A. (:30) Following the Divine Battle Plan

1. Mission Accomplished

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down,”

Hewitt: Since the author looked upon the wanderings in the wilderness as an example of unbelief rather than of faith, of apostasy rather than of fidelity, no mention is made of them. The capture of Jericho may have been chosen because it was the first campaign in the promised land.

Leon Morris: The taking of Jericho is a striking example of the power of faith. Apart from the conviction that God would act, nothing could have been more pointless than the behavior of those warriors. They did not attack. Instead, they simply walked around the city once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh. But once more faith was vindicated, for the walls tumbled down.

2. Mission Performed

“after they had been encircled for seven days.”

MacArthur: True faith has the courage to believe God in impossible conflict, with ridiculous orders and incredible promises. And the experience at Jericho is an illustration of that kind of faith, to do what seems ridiculous, unnecessary, foolish. But what marks faith is obedience. Obedience.

B. (:31) Facilitating the Mission of the Spies

1. Avoiding Destruction

“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient,”

MacArthur: in the case of Rahab, she acknowledged faith in the true and living God. She believed and staked her life on it. She put herself in a dangerous, dangerous position, hiding spies on the roof. She staked her life on the fact that this was the true God. She had a kind of adventurous courage to fling her lot with this deity about which she had only heard from second-hand sources, but she believed in the true God, and because of that she was spared.

2. Accepting Danger

“after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”

Hewitt: This despised heathen woman, who became united with the people of God and also an ancestress of the Messiah, points to the universality of the gospel.

F. F. Bruce: The earliest Christian writer outside the New Testament canon, Clement of Rome, recounts the story of Rahab to illustrate the virtues of faith and hospitality, and makes her a prophetess to boot, since the scarlet rope by which she let the spies down from her window on the city wall, and by which her house was identified at the capture of the city, foreshadowed “that through the blood of the Lord all who trust and hope in God shall have redemption” (1 Clem. 12:7).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the good choices you have made by faith and what are some of the bad choices you have made in your life?
- 2) How does our desire for comfort and security impact our faith choices when suffering may be the outcome?
- 3) Why doesn't God grant instant deliverance from our problems?
- 4) Why is Joshua not mentioned specifically (although included by association in the account of Jericho) and yet the prostitute Rahab is highlighted?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

F. F. Bruce: Moses weighted the issues in his mind, and decided that the temporal wealth of Egypt was far less valuable than “*the stigma that rests on God's Anointed*” (NEB). What others would have considered as something to be shunned at all costs he esteemed as a prize to be eagerly sought. Like Paul after him, what things were gain to him these he counted loss for Christ. The identification of Christ with His people is noteworthy. The words which the God of Israel put in Moses' mouth when he went to Pharaoh to demand his people's release, “*Israel is my son, my firstborn*” (Ex. 4:22), are as applicable to Jesus personally as they are to Israel corporately. The Messiah is one with the messianic people, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. “*In all their affliction he was afflicted*” (Isa. 63:9), and in the fullness of time He too, like His people before Him, was called out of Egypt and had His Exodus to accomplish. The “*stigma*” and disrepute which the people of God bore were borne in concentrated form by the Lord's Anointed; to Him the New Testament applies the psalmist's cry to God:

“the reproaches of them that reproach thee are fallen upon me” (Ps. 69:9). The national history of Israel, which began under Moses’ leadership, led on to Christ; by his obedience to the heavenly vision Moses, like Abraham at an earlier date, looked forward to the day of Christ.

To readers whose perseverance was in danger of faltering because of the stigma attached to the name of Christ the example of Moses was calculated to be a challenge and encouragement. It would help them fix their eyes on the *“recompense of reward”* held out to faith if they remembered how Moses weighed the issues of time in the balances of eternity: *“his eyes were fixed upon the coming day of recompense”* (NEB). To have such a secure place in the history of redemption might have been reckoned reward enough; but to our author’s mind Moses, as truly as the patriarchs, looked for his perfect recompense in the well-founded city of God.

Steven Cole: Overcoming Faith -- Hebrews 11:27-29

Faith overcomes enormous obstacles, enduring by seeing the unseen God.

There are three obstacles here that faith had to overcome.

The first obstacle: Powerful opposition:

1. Faith overcomes powerful opposition by seeing the unseen God (11:27).

A. FAITH OFTEN PUTS US INTO OPPOSITION WITH POWERFUL FORCES.

When you believe the gospel and submit to Jesus Christ, you declare yourself to be the enemy of the prince of the power of the air, who commands an army of evil spirits intent on your destruction. That’s why the Christian life is often portrayed as warfare. Don’t be surprised by opposition; expect it!

B. FAITH ENABLES US TO OBEY GOD WITHOUT FEAR.

C. FAITH OVERCOMES POWERFUL OPPOSITION BY SEEING THE UNSEEN GOD.

The second obstacle: God’s impending judgment

2. Faith trusts in God’s sacrifice for deliverance from His judgment (11:28).

A. ALL PEOPLE FACE THE THREAT OF GOD’S IMPENDING JUDGMENT.

It was not only the Egyptians, but also the Jews, who faced God’s impending judgment of the death of their firstborn if they did not apply the blood of the lamb to their doorposts. Being a Jew by birth would not have spared anyone. Being a decent, hardworking person who had never committed a crime would not have gained an exception. While *Moses’* faith is mentioned in **11:28**, his faith did not cover all of the

Jewish homes. Each home had to apply the blood as God had commanded or they would suffer the consequences. . .

The accusation that God is not fair to judge sinners minimizes the holiness of God and the sinfulness of every person on earth. God would be perfectly fair to send every sinner straight to hell. He does not owe salvation to anyone, because none deserve it. God's sovereign election does not keep anyone out of heaven that wants to go there, because if God left people to themselves, *none* would seek Him (**Rom. 3:10-12**). If He had not chosen us, we would have continued in rebellion against Him until the day we died. Election results in millions going to heaven who otherwise would never have gone there (see **Eph. 1:4-5; Eph. 2:5; Rev. 5:9**).

B. GOD HAS APPOINTED A WAY OF DELIVERANCE FROM HIS JUDGMENT THROUGH THE BLOOD OF A SUBSTITUTE.

C. GOD'S WAY OF DELIVERANCE MUST BE APPLIED BY FAITH IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE.

The third obstacle: Overwhelming problems:

3. Faith trusts God for deliverance from overwhelming problems (11:29).

A. FAITH DOES NOT EXEMPT US FROM OVERWHELMING PROBLEMS, BUT RATHER IT OFTEN LEADS US INTO SUCH PROBLEMS.

If Israel had stayed in Egypt, they wouldn't be in the mess they were in at the Red Sea. Some of the unbelievers sarcastically said to Moses (**Exod. 14:11**), "*Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?*" But the fact is, Moses had not led them to the dire situation that they were in; *God* had led them there and *He* had hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would chase after them (**Exod. 14:1-9**)!

So by God's direct actions, this defenseless bunch of slaves had the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's army charging at them from behind. They were doomed unless God intervened, which He planned to do. But they had to learn that salvation is *completely* from Him. There was no place for human ingenuity or some scheme to escape. God led them into this desperate situation to teach them to trust Him as their only option.

That's how God grows our faith. We know in our heads that we must trust Him totally, but we don't believe it in practice until He throws us into situations where there is no way out if He does not act. We need to learn in experience that "salvation belongs to the Lord" (**Ps. 3:8**).

B. GOD DELIGHTS TO TURN OUR OVERWHELMING PROBLEMS INTO EXHIBITIONS OF HIS MIGHTY POWER WHEN WE TRUST HIM.

The situation that the enemy thought would bring them an easy victory led to their

defeat. God miraculously piled the water up as a wall on both sides for Israel to walk through on dry ground (**Exod. 14:21-22**). He moved the pillar of cloud behind them until they all passed through. Then He let the Egyptians pursue them in blind fury. They should have looked to both sides and seen the trap. But as **John Owen** observes (pp. 173-174), “There is no such blinding, hardening lust in the minds or hearts of men, as hatred of the people of God and desire for their ruin.” The Egyptians abandoned reason and common sense and rushed into the sea to their own destruction. And so a helpless, defenseless, unorganized band of two million slaves were delivered from a powerful, well-equipped army. Nothing is too difficult for the Lord (**Jer. 32:17**)!

Steven Cole: Faith to Conquer and Convert – Hebrews 11:30-31

As a leader in Israel after Moses’ death, Joshua had a pile of *disguised opportunities*. He had to lead this fledgling nation of refugee slaves out of 40 years in the wilderness, across the Jordan River, and into the promised land that happened to be filled with evil, violent giants. The first *disguised opportunity* was to conquer the fortified city of Jericho. God gave Joshua the plan for victory. *By faith*, the walls of that fortress crumbled.

Meanwhile, inside the city, a prostitute had a huge *disguised opportunity*. She had heard of how God had miraculously delivered this people from Egypt 40 years before. She heard how they had defeated two powerful kings across the river. She knew that her city was next and that she and all of her family would perish, unless somehow the God of the Jews—the God of heaven and earth—intervened on their behalf. Then the impossible happened—two spies from that feared people came to lodge with her. She hid them from the authorities and they promised to spare her family and her, if she followed their directions. *By faith*, she and her family did not perish when her city was destroyed. These two stories that took place during the conquest of Jericho illustrate how...

God conquers our powerful enemies by faith and converts hopeless sinners by faith.

1. God conquers our powerful enemies by faith (11:30).

A. SALVATION BRINGS US INTO CONFLICT WITH POWERFUL ENEMIES.

B. GOD’S WAY OF VICTORY OVER THESE ENEMIES ACCENTUATES HIS POWER AND OUR WEAKNESS.

C. FAITH MUST OBEY GOD IMPLICITLY.

(1). TO OBEY GOD, WE MUST KNOW WHAT HIS WORD SAYS ABOUT OUR SITUATION.

God had appeared visibly and spoken audibly to Joshua. While I often wish that He would do that today (I’d settle for the audible voice!), such direct communication from

God is very rare. How does God speak to us? He “*has spoken to us in His Son*” (**Heb. 1:2**), and the sum of His word to us is recorded in the Bible. While sometimes it is difficult to know how the Bible applies to our specific problem, it is obvious that we cannot obey His Word unless we know what it says and how it applies. Yet I’ve often seen Christians who are disobeying the clear commands of God’s Word, but they wonder why God isn’t blessing their lives!

(2). KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S WORD MUST BE FOLLOWED BY OBEDIENCE, NO MATTER HOW MUCH IT GOES AGAINST CONVENTIONAL WISDOM.

God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways His ways (**Isa. 55:8**). Moses’ leading two million refugee slaves down to the Red Sea, with no way of escape from Pharaoh’s army, was not in line with conventional wisdom. But he did it in direct obedience to God. Taking the same group out into the barren wilderness seemed like a sure formula for major disaster, but God had commanded him, and Moses obeyed.

D. FAITH MUST WAIT UPON GOD.

E. FAITH MUST WAIT ON GOD EXPECTANTLY.

2. God converts hopeless sinners by faith (11:31).

Rahab’s story is a wonderful exhibit of God’s grace! It contains seven lessons that I can only touch on briefly:

A. RAHAB WAS AN UNLIKELY CANDIDATE FOR SALVATION.

B. RAHAB’S FAITH SAVED HER FROM PERISHING.

C. RAHAB’S FAITH SEPARATED HER FROM HER DISOBEDIENT CONTEMPORARIES.

D. RAHAB’S FAITH WAS AN OBEDIENT FAITH.

E. RAHAB’S FAITH RESULTED IN THE SALVATION OF HER PAGAN FAMILY.

F. RAHAB’S FAITH BROUGHT HER INTO COVENANT WITH GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

G. RAHAB’S FAITH CHANGED HER LIFE FROM FUTILITY TO FRUITFULNESS.

John Piper: Liberated for Love by Looking to the Reward – Hebrews 11:23-28 Crisis #1 in Moses' Life - Were his Parents Afraid?

The first has to do with the faith of Moses' parents when he was born. You recall that the king of Egypt was fearful of the growing number of Jewish males. So he ordered

them to be killed at birth: **Exodus 1:22**, "*Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, 'Every [Jewish] son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive.'*"

Notice that there are two threats in that edict from the king: one is explicit, that Jewish baby boys are to be killed; the other is implicit, that if you disobey this command and keep a Jewish baby boy alive, you will be disobedient to the king's law and risk your own life. In other words, parents had two choices: they could kill their sons and save themselves, or they could try to save their sons and risk their own lives. There was no middle way.

Now that's important to see, because Hebrews 11:23 doesn't make sense if you don't see it. It says, "*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.*" Someone might respond to that and say, "Of course, they were afraid of the king's edict; otherwise they would not have been hiding the baby. They would have been showing him off to the neighbors if they weren't afraid of the king's command that baby boys be killed."

So what does **verse 23** mean, that they hid their baby son "*because . . . they were not afraid of the king's edict.*" You would expect, "They hid their son because they were afraid," not ". . . because they weren't afraid." And surely that's right: if they had not been afraid for their son's life, they would have carried him around in public.

The answer is that there are two threats in the king's edict, not just one. One against the babies and one against those who don't kill the babies. If you kill the baby you save your life. If you don't kill your baby, you risk your life. So when Moses' parents decide they are not going to drown Moses in the Nile River but hide him, they are risking their lives. In other words, they look the fear of death and perhaps torture in the face and say: we will not give in to you. We will not kill our son out of fear for our own lives. Fear of death will not control us.

And the point of this text is: that act of courage against the king, and that act of love toward their son comes from faith. "*By faith Moses . . . was hidden by his parents . . . because they were not afraid of the king's edict.*"

How does faith produce that kind of courage and love? The definition from **Hebrews 11:1** gives the answer. "*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.*" Faith frees us for this kind of radical courage and risk-taking and love because it is the assurance that what God promises to those who die in the path of love is better than what the world promises those who shun risk and save themselves. More simply, faith in God's promises frees us from the fear of death and makes us brave in the risks of love.

Human Ingenuity or Faith in God?

There's a minor point here as well as this main one. It's important for all of us who want our lives to be on the cutting edge where there are risks and dangers and great crises

and great needs. It's a point of realism and balance. Notice. Moses' parents risked their lives by not killing their baby. But they did hide the baby. Some people's minds - immature minds with little real-life experience and out of touch with the complexities of the soul - might say, "If Moses' parents really had faith, they would have entrusted the child's care to God and just walked around the community with their new baby. That would have been real faith."

How would you respond to somebody like that? - people who say, "They don't trust God; they're using human ingenuity to protect their baby instead of entrusting him to God"? Perhaps the best way to respond is simply to tell them to read their Bibles and read them carefully. Because the Bible says, in Hebrews 11:23, that Moses' parents did indeed have faith, and they hid their baby. Not killing the baby put their lives at risk and was a great act of faith and love. Hiding their baby was a act of human, but God-given, wisdom (and no less from faith); and to do otherwise would probably have been presumption - like the idea of Jesus jumping off the roof of the temple to see if God would catch him (**Luke 4:9-12**).

So how shall we apply this today? One way would be to say that following God's call to work with AIDS patients is an act of risk-taking faith; and wearing rubber gloves during treatments is an act of faithful wisdom. Following God's call to live in a rough neighborhood is an act of risk-taking faith; and buying deadbolts is an act of faithful wisdom. Following God's call to Guinea or Tanzania or Khazakstan or Uzbekistan with your children is an act of risk-taking faith, and giving your children vaccinations and malaria treatments is probably an act of faithful wisdom.

In other words, living by faith is often perplexing - which is why, I think, Paul prays incessantly that his converts would have "*spiritual wisdom . . . and bear fruit in every good work*" (**Colossians 1:9-11**). Which risky, inconvenient, dangerous, inopportune "*good works*" we should do will seldom be written in the sky or spoken in a dream. (That is why Paul prays for spiritual wisdom.) They will be wrestled into by agonizing prayer and Biblical saturation and self-mortification and - above all - faith, the assurance of things hoped for. Radical confidence in God's promise to take care of us is the main key to unlock the power and path of risk-taking love.

Crisis #3 in Moses' Life - Was Moses Afraid?

Now jump with me over the second act of faith in **Hebrews 11:24-26** to the third act in **verse 27**. I make this move because what we see here in **verse 27**, forty years later, is a situation that Moses faced which is a lot like the one his parents faced at his birth. We will understand it better if we see it in connection with what we saw in **verse 23**.

According to **Exodus 2:11-12**, Moses began to identify himself with his Jewish kinsmen and be indignant at their slavery. He found an Egyptian beating a Jew and intervened and killed him. He thought his act had been done secretly, but the next day he discovers the word has gotten around. Exodus 2:14 says, "*Then Moses was afraid, and said, 'Surely the matter has become known.'*" Then the next verse says, "*When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence*

of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian."

Now here is a problem like the one we saw in **verse 23**: is Moses afraid when he leaves Egypt or isn't he? Were his parents afraid when they hid their baby or weren't they? In **verse 23** it says that his parents hid their baby because "they were not afraid of the king's edict." Here in **verse 27** it says, "*By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.*" Yet we saw that Moses' parents were at least afraid enough to hide their baby. And here we read in **Exodus 2:14** that Moses was afraid when he heard that his violence was known.

So you see the similarity between these two crises.

So did Moses leave Egypt out of fear or didn't he? It's like asking: did his parents hide Moses from Pharaoh out of fear or didn't they? The answer for his parents is that they did fear for the child's life; but they did not act out of fear for themselves; they risked their lives, and they did it by faith in future grace.

It's a little different with Moses, but not basically different. He probably did save his life by leaving Egypt. But was fearful self-preservation his motive in leaving? When **verse 27** says, "*By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king,*" did the writer forget about **Exodus 2:14** and the fear Moses felt, or is he pointing us to something very crucial and very deep in Moses' heart so that we won't misconstrue **Exodus 2:14**?

The key is found in the word "*endured*" in **verse 27** - or your version may have the word "*persevered*." **Verse 27**: "*By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured - he persevered - as seeing Him who is unseen.*" In other words, it wasn't basically fear that caused Moses to leave Egypt, it was "*endurance*." Endurance? In what? Endurance implies a chosen path of difficulty that you are tempted to forsake but you hang in there and "endure." What is the writer referring to when he says in **verse 27** that Moses "*left Egypt . . . for he endured . . .*"? What path had Moses chosen that required endurance to stay on and even led him out of Egypt for 40 years before he came back to rescue his people?

Crisis #2 in Moses' Life - He Endured

The answer was given in **verses 24-26**. Now we can go back and pick up the second act of faith that we passed over. These verses describe a radically dangerous and costly path that Moses had chosen before (mark this!) he felt threatened by the Pharaoh. What was this path? **Verses 24-26**:

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather [there's the chosen path] to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

The writer expresses the dangerous, painful path Moses had chosen in two ways: First (in **verse 25**) it is the choosing of ill-treatment with the people of God over the passing

pleasures of sin. Second (in verse 26) it is the choosing of reproach for Christ (the Messiah) over the treasures of Egypt. Now don't miss this! The choice was made before the threat of Pharaoh. The bridges had already been burned between Moses and Egypt. It had happened in his heart. Not yet geographically, but spiritually and morally he was gone already. Do you see that?

Now the question was, would he endure in this chosen path of suffering for the people of God and the glory of the Messiah? Or would he cave in - like so many cave in today to the Egypt - the passing pleasures - of this world?

Was Moses' flight from Egypt a capitulation to a self-serving, fearful, pursuit of ease and comfort and safety? **Verse 27** says, No. "*By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king*" - fear was not his basic mindset. What was? Next phrase: "*For he endured.*" In what? In the same deep motive that caused him to choose ill-treatment with the people of God and reproach for the sake of the Messiah, namely, "*he endured as seeing Him who is unseen*" (**verse 27b**). In other words, "*by faith.*" By looking to God's promise, not Pharaoh's threat.

This is the same motive that drove his radical choices in **verses 24-26**. You can see it at the end of verse 26: he chose ill-treatment with God's people and he chose reproach for the Christ "*because he was looking to the reward.*" "*Looking to the reward*" in **verse 26** corresponds to "*seeing him who is unseen*" in **verse 27**. He had, by faith, burned the bridges in his mind (by "*the assurance of things hoped for*"), and then, by faith, he burned them in his flight (by "*the conviction of things unseen*").

Yes, he experienced fear when the word spread that he had killed an Egyptian while saving a Jew - just as his parents had experienced fear when they saved their baby boy and risked their own lives. But hiding their baby was not an act of fearful, self-serving unbelief, and Moses' leaving Egypt was not an act of fearful, self-serving unbelief either. It was a persevering, an enduring, in spite of fear, in the obedience of faith. He wasn't driven merely or mainly by fear; he looked to the unseen God to work out some purpose for his people, and forty years later he would discover what that purpose was, and he would be back.

Burning our Bridges by Faith

The bridges were burned between Moses and Egypt well before he was threatened by Pharaoh - they were burned in his heart and they were burned by faith. That's what faith does all through this chapter. Faith is a hunger for God that triumphs over our hunger for the pleasures of this world. And so faith unleashes radically God-centered, risk-taking, people-loving behavior.

Let's be like Moses this morning. Let's look to the reward of God's promises, as it says in **verse 26**. And let's look to the God who is unseen, as it says in **verse 27**. And let's be so hungry for the superior worth of our glorious God that the bridges are burned to a hundred sins and a hundred fears.

TEXT: Hebrews 11:32-40

TITLE: HEROISM AND REWARD OF THE CHAMPIONS OF FAITH

BIG IDEA:

THESE FINAL HEROES OF FAITH HIGHLIGHT GRAND ACHIEVEMENTS, ENDURANCE THROUGH SEVERE SUFFERING AND THE HOPE OF ETERNAL REWARDS

INTRODUCTION:

The author is now forced to blitz through the remainder of Israel's history to highlight the types of experiences that characterize a life of faith. The predominant tone is one of courage and perseverance. Whether it is achieving impressive victories or enduring severe suffering the same elements of faith are present – with the emphasis on future reward. There should be no thought of falling away from the faith or shrinking back to the types and shadows of the old testament economy.

Phillip Hughes: All of the preceding examples and those in these closing verses are consistent with **Hebrews 11:1** -- faith is a dynamic certainty made up of two certitudes: a future certitude that makes one sure of the future as if it were present, and a visual certitude that brings the invisible within view. One hears God's Word and so believes it that its future fulfillment becomes subjectively present and visible to the spiritual eye.

Robert Ross: The writer now resorts to piling up examples, because of the impossibility of taking each case separately. The list is impressive . . . The list of deeds is equally impressive. In some cases the incidents referred to are well known; in others they are more obscure. In each instance, however, something typical of those who live by faith is brought out. The faith life makes such deeds possible, deeds of valor, might, courage, or perseverance. And these are the kinds of experience that those who live by faith are called upon to endure. All of the history of Israel is encompassed in these few brief sentences.

I. (:32) THEIR FAMOUS IDENTITY – LARGER THAN LIFE EXAMPLES

“And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of”

Not listed in chronological order; no time to cover all examples; has to content himself with some major representative names

F. F. Bruce: The comparative detail in which examples of faith have been adduced from the earlier period of Old Testament history now gives place to a more summary account covering the later period.

Richard Phillips: His point is that the Old Testament is filled with accounts of faith, each of which is enough to inspire us to imitation.

Constable: This is the only New Testament reference to Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. The writer employed the rhetorical device of *paraleipsis* here. In *paraleipsis* the speaker or writer suggests that he is not going to mention something but then does so. This technique stresses the suggestiveness of what he has omitted. In this case the writer suggested that he could have cited many more examples of persevering faith.

A. Judges

1. “*Gideon*”

2. “*Barak*”

F. F. Bruce: Barak’s insistence on having Deborah with him was perhaps an expression of his faith in the God whose servant and spokeswoman Deborah was. And when he was told by her that the expedition which he was undertaking would not be for his own honor, he led it none the less; it was not his own honor, but the triumph of Yahweh and His people, that he sought.

Spurgeon: Look at Barak; after he has once believed in the power of God, he marches to the fight and wins the victory, and is commemorated in soul-stirring words by the poetess, “*Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, sing a song! Get up, Barak! Take captive your captives, O son of Abinoam*” (**Jdg 5:12**). Mighty to conquer was the man who was timid to fight. When faith gave him courage, it made him triumph. Carry a vial of strong faith along with you, and a good dose of it will drive off fainting fits.

3. “*Samson*”

F. F. Bruce: the narrative of Judges portrays him as one who was deeply conscious of the invisible God, and of his own call to be an instrument in God’s hand against the enemy.

4. “*Jephthah*”

Each brought about substantial and significant deliverance and victory for God’s people in troubled times

Kent:

- Gideon – used of God to free Israel from the **Midianites**. . . It was obvious that military prowess was not the explanation, but commitment without reserve to the word which God had revealed.
- Barak – used of God in connection with Deborah, the prophetess and judge, to deliver Israel from the oppression of the **northern Canaanites** under Jabin of Hazor and his general, Sisera.
- Samson – God’s instrument to defeat Israel’s enemies the **Philistines** on numerous occasions. . . closing episode of his life especially noteworthy
- Jephthah – delivered his people from the threat of **Ammonite** domination. . .

believed in God's power and was willing to face the enemy in the faith that God was leading and would give victory.

B. Kings

"of David"

The most prominent king and the closest link to Messianic typology

C. Prophets

"and Samuel and the prophets,"

The first prominent prophet followed by a succession of prophets

II. (:33-38) THEIR ADMIRABLE HEROISM – EXTREME ACHIEVEMENTS / EXTREME GRACE TO ENDURE SUFFERING

"who by faith"

Hewitt: The deeds enumerated in **verses 33 and 34** need not be assigned exclusively to particular heroes, but may rather be taken as denoting generally the kind of exploits by which faith was evidenced throughout the history.

A. (:33-34) Extreme Achievements

1. Powerful Triumphs of Faith

a. Military Triumphs

"conquered kingdoms,"

b. Governing Triumphs

"performed acts of righteousness,"

A. W. Pink: right actions must spring from right principles and must be performed with right ends, if they are to be acceptable to God. In other words, they must issue from a living faith and have in view the glory of God.

c. Spiritual Triumphs

"obtained promises,"

Spurgeon: The promises of God are to the believer an inexhaustible mine of wealth. Happy is it for him if he knows how to search out their secret veins and enrich himself with their hidden treasures. They are to him an armory containing all manner of offensive and defensive weapons. Blessed is he who has learned to enter into the sacred arsenal, to put on the breastplate and the helmet, and to lay his hand to the spear and to the sword.

2. Unnatural Testimonies of Deliverance

- a. From Animal **Predators**
“shut the mouths of lions,”

Kent: Most probably it was the experience of Daniel that was in the author’s mind (**Dan. 6:16-23**).

- b. From Natural **Powers**
“quenched the power of fire,”

Three companions of Daniel: Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego (**Daniel 3**)

F. F. Bruce: The people to whom this epistle was sent might well have a fiery ordeal to face in the near future, but whether life or death was their portion they could be sure of divine companionship in the midst of it such as the three Hebrews enjoyed.

- c. From Deadly **Persecution**
“escaped the edge of the sword,”

3. Divine Enablements to Further God’s Agenda of Victory

- a. Granted **Strength**
“from weakness were made strong,”
- b. Granted **Victory**
“became mighty in war,”
- c. Granted **Dominion**
“put foreign armies to flight.”

Westcott: Vs. 33 -- three groups of three . . . indicating, first, the broad results of the believers’ faith: material victory, moral success in government, spiritual reward; second, forms of personal deliverance: from wild beasts, from physical forces, from human tyranny; third, the attainment of personal gifts: strength, the exercise of strength, and the triumph of strength. In each case it is possible to see OT examples, perhaps the very ones the writer has in mind

B. (:35-38) Extreme Suffering

1. Dealing with Death – Looking Forward to Resurrection

- a. Temporary Resurrection as Foretaste of Ultimate Resurrection
“Women received back their dead by resurrection;”

Kent: The Old Testament women referred to are the widow of Zarephath, whose son was raised by Elijah (**1 Kings 17:17-24**), and the Shunammite woman, whose son was raised by Elisha (II Kings 4:18-37).

- b. Ultimate Resurrection

“and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection;”

Leon Morris: A “better” resurrection perhaps implies that all will be raised but that the prospects for apostates are grim. It is better to endure suffering and even torture now in order that the resurrection may be joyous.

MacArthur: The particular torture referred to involved stretching the victim over a large drum-like instrument and beating him with clubs, often until dead. God’s faithful are willing to be beaten to death rather than compromise their faith in Him. They would not sacrifice the future on the altar of the immediate. They preferred being put to death, because by faith they knew that one day they would be resurrected.

2. Dealing with Persecution, Imprisonment and Martyrdom

- a. *“and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.”*
- b. *“They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword;”*
- c. *“they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated”*

3. Despised by the World but Valued by God

“(men of whom the world was not worthy),”

Leon Morris: To all outward appearance, these people of faith were insignificant and unimportant. But the true situation was very different. They were worth more than the whole world, though they lacked everything. The author appeals to deep realities, not apparent on the surface of things. The despised and ill-treated group of servants of God was of greater real worth than all the rest of humanity put together.

Constable: Sometimes the faithful person’s reward comes on the other side of the grave. Some of the readers, and we, might have to endure death. Those who accept death without apostatizing are those the world is not worthy of because they do not turn from following the Lord even under the most severe pressure.

4. Destitute of Earthly Homes but Destined for Heavenly Rest

“wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.”

III. (:39-40) THEIR ETERNAL REWARD – BENEFITS EXTEND TO US

A. (:39a) Faith Gains God’s Approval

*“And all these, having gained approval **through their faith,**”*

B. (:39b) Faith Requires Patience to Realize God’s Promises

“did not receive what was promised,”

Kent: The strength of their faith is seen in the fact that during their lifetime they still received not the promise. Hence their need to persist in faith even to death was amply demonstrated.

Constable: Those faithful believers who died in Old Testament times have not yet entered into their inheritances. This awaits the future, probably the Second Coming when Christ will judge Old Testament saints (**Daniel 12:1-2**; cf. **Isaiah 26:19**). We will have some part in their reward. We will do so at least as Christ’s companions who will witness their award ceremony. Their perfection refers to their entering into their final rest (inheritance) and rests, as ours does, on the sacrificial death of Christ (cf. **Hebrews 9:15**).

C. (:40a) Faith Looks to the Salvation Accomplished by Christ on the Cross

“because God had provided something better for us,”

Mohler: This again highlights the supreme significance of the new covenant. It was only in the establishment of the new covenant by the blood of Jesus that the old covenant promises could be fulfilled. . . . Apart from the new covenant, there is no hope of perfect, unmitigated fellowship with God on the last day.

D. (:40b) Faith Unifies All Believers

“so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

Kent: Christian believers are the recipients of certain blessings unavailable in the Old Testament period. The sacrifice of Christ is an accomplished fact for them, not a future hope. Many of the blessings of the new covenant are already being enjoyed (see **8:6-13**). Thus by delaying the fulfillment beyond the Old Testament saints’ lifetime, God has brought in the better revelation in Christ, and has secured salvation for New Testament believers also. Both groups will find their salvation fully consummated when Christ returns and physical resurrection as well as the other provisions of the Abrahamic promise and of the new covenant will be brought to pass.

Hewitt: God’s purpose in history was wider than the Jewish nation, and His decree has gone forth that believers from that nation can never attain to the consummation until the number of the elect be accomplished, and all the redeemed of all ages shall be gathered together in one through Christ, and God shall be all in all.

A. M. Stibbs: For God in His providence had reserved **for us** (i.e. Christian believers) the crowning blessing and had ordained that they should not enjoy the consummation until we had been brought in to share it. Note the implication that the men of faith of OT and NT times alike are all called to belong to the one company of God’s purpose who are to be made perfect together (cf. **12:22-24**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why only mention one king in this long list of heroes of the faith?
- 2) What are some of the significant actions of faith that you have undertaken and how did God bless you in those endeavors? Conversely, what have been some of the significant times of suffering that you have been asked to endure?
- 3) Are there any spiritual leaders you have known to whom you could apply the phrase “*men of whom the world was not worthy*”? Why?
- 4) In what sense are the old covenant heroes of faith made perfect or completed in accordance with the new covenant and its saints?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leon Morris: we find that each man battled against overwhelming odds so that, humanly speaking, there was little chance of his coming out on top. For men in such positions faith in God was not a formality. It meant real trust when the odds seemed stacked against them. They set worthy examples for the readers in their difficult circumstances. **Calvin** points out that there were defects in the faith of four of them. Gideon was slow to take up arms; Barak hesitated and went forward only when Deborah encouraged him; Samson was enticed by Delilah; and Jephthah made a foolish vow and stubbornly kept it. **Calvin** comments, “In every saint there is always to be found something reprehensible. Nevertheless although faith may be imperfect and incomplete it does not cease to be approved by God.”

F. B. Meyer: FAITH IS the link between our souls and God. It is the capacity of entering into fellowship with the Eternal Love and Power, so that we are able to do all things with the sense that it is not we who do them, but God in us and with us. Faith is the open door and window towards God. In faith our heart goes out towards God in clinging dependence, and God comes in to strengthen us with His Divine fullness.

In human life, when we trust a man, we draw from him all that he is able to supply; in the Divine life, faith draws upon the resources of God, so that they flow freely into our nature, and the results of our life-work are immensely increased. Faith is possible amid a great deal of ignorance. It is clear that Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah were ignorant of the truth which the Gospel has revealed, and yet we learn that their work was largely due to their faith. Dispensations come and go; the revelation of God grows from less to more; but the attitude of faith is always the same--in the simple woman that touched the hem of Christ's garment, as in St. John the beloved disciple, who had years of training in Christ's School.

Faith achieves very different results. In some, it produces the heroic strength that turns the battle from the gate; in some, the passive suffering that endures the long ordeal of pain. Here, it turns the edge of the sword; there, shuts the mouths of lions. We know how electric force may be applied to all the various machinery of human life. In one place used for the beaming light, in another to drive the motor car, or to flash the message of music and speech from one continent to another. So Faith is able to appropriate God's might for any purpose that lies within the compass of the life-task, whether active or passive. (See **Heb. 11:32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39.**)

God bears a witness to all who trust Him. He never fails us in the hour of need. His response is the echo of our appeal. As soon as the uplifted arm of the tramcar touches the overhead wire, there is the spark, and the immediate entrance of electric power. So God answers faith.

Steven Cole: Faith's Reward

The author of Hebrews sounds like a preacher with his eye on the clock. He could say far more, if time allowed. But instead, he simply lists a few names without comment and then describes the experiences of others, without naming them. Some won great victories by faith. Others suffered horrible torture and death by faith. While all of them gained approval (or, testimony; our word *martyr* comes from the Greek word) by their faith, they did not receive the promise that we have received. The author is trying to steel his readers to be faithful to Christ in the face of looming persecution. His message is much needed because of the human tendency to use faith in Christ as the means to personal comfort and happiness. But when trials come, faith is abandoned. His message is that...

Faith trusts God in spite of results, looking to the final reward.

The text falls into three sections. In **11:32-35a**, he shows how sometimes God blesses those who trust Him with spectacular results. But without even catching his breath, in the middle of **verse 35** he shifts direction to show (**11:35b-38**) that sometimes God blesses those who trust Him with the grace to endure horrible persecution without wavering. He concludes (**11:39-40**) by showing that God will bless all who trust Him with eternal rewards.

1. Sometimes God blesses those who trust Him with spectacular results (11:32-35a).

Time would fail me if I went into detail on every person listed here, so I will summarize this section under two points:

A. FAITH ENABLES FLAWED PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS FOR GOD.

B. FAITH ENABLES US TO ACCOMPLISH THINGS THAT ARE

EXPLAINABLE ONLY BY GOD'S POWER.

But one thing on the list is common to everything accomplished by faith: “*from weakness were made strong.*” Faith requires recognizing our weakness, but at the same time, laying hold of God’s strength. As Jesus said (**John 15:5**), “... *apart from Me you can do nothing.*” The apostle Paul, who on the surface seems to be a competent, powerful man, confessed (**2 Cor. 3:5**), “*Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.*” He further explained (**2 Cor. 4:7**), “*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.*” That is why he taught that the Christian must walk by the Spirit, who produces His fruit in our lives (**Gal. 5:16, 22-23**).

2. Sometimes God blesses those who trust Him with the grace to endure horrible trials without wavering (11:35b-38).

The last two verses of the chapter show us that...

3. God will bless all who trust Him with eternal rewards (11:39-40).

“*All these*” refers to both groups. They all gained approval (or “a testimony”) through their faith, yet none received “the promise” (literal translation). Abraham received the promise of Isaac (**11:17**). Others “*obtained promises*” by faith (**11:33**). But none received *the promise*, which refers to Christ. They saw Him from afar in types and shadows, but we see Him clearly revealed in the New Testament. Most of them were under the old covenant, but God “*provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.*” That something better is the new covenant in Christ’s blood. The old covenant with its sacrifices could not make the worshipers perfect (**10:1**). But the new covenant has sanctified us “*through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*” (**10:10**). The Old Testament saints were saved, but their salvation was not complete until the cross. Ours is complete because Jesus is the perfect sacrifice.

The author’s point is that if the Old Testament saints were faithful through all of these trials, even though they didn’t receive the promise of Christ in the flesh, how much more should we be faithful, since we have Christ! **John Calvin** (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], p. 308) put it, “A small spark of light led them to heaven; when the sun of righteousness shines over us, with what pretense can we excuse ourselves if we still cleave to the earth?”

Any yet, although we have the promise of Christ, we do not yet have the full experience of the glory that is to be revealed with Him in heaven. And so we must, like the Old Testament saints, live by faith in God’s promise as we await the final consummation when Jesus returns. We must endure whatever trials come, even persecution, by fixing our eyes on Jesus (**12:1-3**).

Conclusion

Let me sum up this section with four applications. I cannot expand on these, but I encourage you to think about how they apply more extensively to your life:

(1) *Faith is ready to sacrifice present comfort for future reward with Christ.* Faith recognizes that this life is very short in comparison with eternity. With Paul, faith recognizes that “*momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison*” (2 Cor. 4:17). In Paul’s case, this “*light affliction*” included beatings, imprisonments, being stoned, shipwrecked, and often being in danger of death (2 Cor. 11:23-27)! When you experience “*light affliction,*” do you grumble or do you joyfully trust God?

(2) *Faith lives with a God-ward focus, not with a focus on people or things.* The saints mentioned in our text could endure mockings, scourgings, imprisonments, and death because their focus was on God, not on other people or things. They were looking to eternity, not to this vapor of life here. Calvin put it this way, “we ought to live only so as to live to God: as soon as we are not permitted to live to God, we ought willingly and not reluctantly to meet death” (*ibid.*, p. 306).

(3) *Faith trusts and obeys God, leaving the results to His sovereignty.* Some trust and obey God and He grants spectacular results. Others trust and obey the same mighty God and He enables them to endure horrific trials in His strength. The difference is not in the people or in their faith, but in God’s sovereign purpose in each situation. We know the same God that these Old Testament saints knew, and we have even more, in that we know Christ personally. So we should trust Him as they did, whether He chooses to put us to death, as He did with the apostle James, or to deliver us from death for a while, as He did with Peter.

(4) *Faithfulness to Jesus Christ counts more than anything else, even than life itself.* As Martin Luther put it (“A Mighty Fortress”), “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever.” Trust God in whatever difficult situations you face. One day soon you will hear, “*Well done, good and faithful slave.... Enter into the joy of your master*” (Matt. 24:21)

MacArthur: A Conquering, Courageous Faith

Here we sweep through the – basically the history of the Old Testament, all the way to the end. We start with the judges: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah. We touch on the kings: David. We touch on the first of the prophets since Moses really: Samuel. And then we sweep through the prophets with just an identification of the prophets. And then following that, there are all kinds of statements made about the kind of suffering that they endured. And in every case, their faith stood the test. . .

So, when this group of Christians and associates became persecuted, that raised the stakes on being a Christian. The true believers had the faith that endures. The true believers were hanging in there. But the superficial nonbelievers, those who were merely associated and attracted but not genuine, were in danger of leaving. They could

be described, I think, pretty easily by the rocky soil or the weedy soil of our Lord's soils parable. There was an appearance of life, but it wasn't going to last, especially when the persecution started. They were in danger, then, of going backward, back into their Judaism. . .

So, the word to have in your mind, in this last section, particularly **verses 32** and following, is the courage of faith – the courage of faith. Courage in struggle, courage in suffering, courage in waiting – waiting. Because remember now, as the close of the chapter says, they hadn't received what they had put their faith in. . .

“They gained approval through their faith, though they didn't receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us so that apart from us they wouldn't be made perfect.” None of them would ever be in heaven if it weren't for what happened that we know about. Right? The cross and the resurrection. The better thing's the new covenant. Perfect means saved in the book of Hebrews. Perfect means access open and granted to God. Full access to what the old covenant couldn't give. Access into the presence of God both in time and eternity. They lived by a faith in something they couldn't see. They lived – and that's how the chapter's beginning launches it, *“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* That's how these great heroes lived. Their faith was courageous faith. They conquered in struggling. They continued in suffering, and they counted on a salvation that would be provided in a way they could not see.

TEXT: Hebrews 12:1-3

TITLE: PERSEVERE IN FAITH BY FOCUSING ON JESUS

BIG IDEA:

PERSEVERANCE IN FAITH AND MINISTRY REQUIRES MINIMIZING OBSTACLES AND MAINTAINING OUR FOCUS ON JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

You must understand that the Christian life is one of **walking by faith in Jesus Christ**. We entered into this new life by turning away from faith in ourselves to put all of our faith in Jesus. These Jewish believers were being enticed to retreat back to a legalistic religious system where they would abandon this difficult faith journey. This short-sighted perspective would cause them to come up short of the promises that could only be appropriated by persevering in faith.

You must understand also that the Christian life is one of **ministry**. You have received a call to run a very specific race – a course laid out just for you that takes advantage of your unique spiritual giftedness. This life of discipleship to Jesus Christ – the one who said: *“Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men”* – is filled with dangers and difficulties and the potential for discouragement. At some point – in fact numerous points -- there will be the temptation to lay down and quit the race. Genuine faith is characterized by perseverance – by pressing on and continuing to fight the good fight. There is no place for retirement from Christian ministry. The finish line is the doorway of death that ushers us into the presence of the one who has gone before us – *the author and perfecter of our faith*. Are you growing weary in serving Jesus? Do you feel discouraged or are you tempted to lose heart and back off from your commitment to be everything that God has called you to be and do everything He wants you to do? Why not take the easy road and back away from Christian ministry?

You don't want to be a flash-in-the-pan Christian. You don't want to flame out like a Fourth of July firecracker. You want to be in the Christian race for the long haul. You want to reach the goal. How we finish the race is more important than how we start the race.

TWO CRITICAL WAYS TO PERSEVERE IN OUR FAITH JOURNEY

Easy to become spiritually weary if we are not prepared for the difficulty and length of the race.

I. (:1) KEEP RUNNING YOUR RACE (FIGHTING THE FIGHT)

A. Encouragement for Running the Race: Faith Works

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us,”

Zemek: Triple compound word for the connective here; only other NT usage is 1 Thess. 4:8. A particle introducing an inference especially with an exhortation to follow

Vincent: emphatic particle strongly affirming the facts on which the exhortation is based; look back at the recent context

Not witnesses in the sense of people watching how well we run the race; but those great heroes of the faith from **Chapter 11** whose life of faith and perseverance bear witness to us that **Faith**

Works! Those who by their actions have testified to the value and victory of faith. They have entered into their reward. Now it is our turn to run the race with perseverance.

MacArthur: They are examples, not onlookers. They have proved by their testimony, their witness, that the life of faith is the only way to live.

Think how many more witnesses we can point to today. We have over 2000 years of church history. Do you ever read any of the biographies of Christian leaders? How about people you have known personally – those who have been faithful to the end of their journey and still look you in the eye and testify that their faith in Jesus Christ means everything to them.

B. Encumbrances and Entanglements that Slow Us Down and Trip Us Up

1. Encumbrances that Slow Us Down – Amoral Hindrances – the Fat
“let us also lay aside every encumbrance,”

Marathon runners can't afford to put on extra weight. Used of flab and blubber;
Bulk, impediment; that which serves to hinder or prevent someone from doing something

There is not a rule against running a marathon in a heavy coat and boots ... but . . .
“All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient” – all that does not help hinders
There are things which might not be evil in themselves but which definitely are enemies of
God's best for our life.

MacArthur: I believe the main encumbrance was Judaistic legalism, hanging on to the old religious ways. Most of those ways were not wrong in themselves. Some had been prescribed by God for the time of the Old Covenant. But none of them was of any value now, and in fact had become hindrances. They were sapping energy and attention from Christian living. The Temple and its ceremonies and pageantry were beautiful and appealing. And all the regulations, the does and don'ts of Judaism, were pleasing to the flesh. They made it easy to keep score on your religious life. But these were all weights, some of them very heavy weights.

How long did Noah have to patiently labor before the promised devastation of the flood arrived?
120 years = model of perseverance

What did Abraham have to lay aside in order to follow the call of God in his life? Left the comfort of Ur and embarked on a journey into the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable; was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of obedience – giving up his only son –

What did Moses have to lay aside in order to be an effective leader for God's people? All of the comforts and good food and pleasures of life in the royal palace in Egypt

What did Christ have to lay aside in order to fulfill the will of the Father?

What have you been unwilling to lay aside that weighs you down and makes you a weaker player in the Christian life?

Might be some previous relationships that are not helping you draw close to Jesus

Might be some possessions that you value too much

Might be some pleasures that consume too much of your time

2. Entanglements that Trip us Up – Immoral Hindrances – the Fetters
“and the sin which so easily entangles us,”

Long robes down around your ankles that would trip you up.

Primarily the sin of Unbelief, of trusting in the flesh instead of having all of our dependence focused on Jesus Christ

Each of us is wired in such a way that there tends to be a particular sin, a particular area of struggle and temptation, that proves especially difficult to overcome.

But for all of us, the key is living a life of faith and walking by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What are we experiencing of victory in the Christian life – a victory that God gives us by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ

C. Endurance that is the Key to Victory

“and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,”

1. Speaks to Active Participation

We have not been called to sit on the sidelines. We have not been called to take it easy and just meander through life. We have been called to run a marathon race. Can't be passive; can't be a spectator cheering on some super gifted Christian leaders

2. Speaks to Agonizing Participation

The race is described as an *“agony”* – not something easy; no bed of roses; struggle, fight; What is your expectation regarding the difficulties you will face?

1 Timothy 6:12 *Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

2 Timothy 4:7 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;*

Amos 6:1 – *Woe to those who are ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria*

3. Speaks to Athletic Participation

Requires discipline, training, self control

MacArthur: The competition of the Christian life, of course, is different from that of an athletic race in two important ways. First, we are not to compete against other Christians, trying to outdo each other in righteousness, recognition, or accomplishments. Ours is not a race of works but a race of faith. Yet we do not compete with each other even in faith. . . Second, our strength is not in ourselves, but in the Holy Spirit, otherwise we could never endure.

4. Speaks to **Authentic Participation**

The race is personal – God’s will for our life and ministry; must define who you really are; you can’t be hypocritical about this; others should be able to observe the race you are running and commend you for your endurance; your focus on the goal; your value system and priorities; you can’t be a phony

TWO CRITICAL WAYS TO PERSEVERE IN OUR FAITH JOURNEY

II. (:2-3) KEEP FOCUSING ON JESUS

A. (:2) Focus Your Vision on Jesus – Where are you looking for help?

“fixing our eyes on Jesus,”

look at the example of Moses **11:27** *“He endured as seeing one who is unseen”*

Why is Jesus our All Sufficient Resource:

1. Jesus Fuels Our Faith

“the author and perfecter of faith,”

Kent: As the Leader and Completer of the faith, Christ has blazed the trail for us and has completed the course.

Mohler: Jesus is the One on whom our faith is founded. He is both the cornerstone and the capstone. He is the unshakable ground on which our hope and salvation rest. Without him, our faith is futile and we have no basis for belief.

2. Jesus Anticipates Our Joy

“who for the joy set before Him”

3. Jesus Surpasses Our Perseverance

“endured the cross, despising the shame,”

4. Jesus Secures Our Victory

“and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Psalm 16:8-9 *“I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely.”*

B. (:3) Focus Your Mind on Jesus – What are you thinking about?

1. A Model Worth Emulating – Don’t Get Distracted

“For consider Him”

Mohler: he means to hold up Christ as a model and to constantly look to him for inspiration and encouragement. Jesus shows his followers how to be found faithful in the end.

Satan wants to get our focus off of Jesus

- Look at your own weaknesses in the flesh – Paul says I will glory in my weakness
- Look at the impossibility and difficulty of your situation – What proved to be too difficult for Jesus?

Analyze, weigh in the balance – this is a command
Consider attentively; think about carefully

2. A Fight Won Convincingly – Don't Get Overwhelmed -- Our Fight is Easier
“*who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself,*”

Satan attacks us in a variety of ways – especially through people who have the capability to hurt us – emotionally and physically

We do not have it as bad as Jesus had it

3. A Danger Ever Lurking – Don't Quit the Fight

Satan constantly tries to discourage us

- a. Discouragement – Growing Weary Physically
“*so that you may not grow weary*”

- b. Discouragement – Losing Heart Emotionally
“*and lose heart.*”

CONCLUSION:

Remember Peter stepping out of the boat to walk on the water and come to Jesus ...
Started out well ... but then lost his focus on Jesus; started looking around at the impossibility of the task and quickly started to sink

- KEEP RUNNING YOUR RACE
- KEEP FOCUSING ON JESUS

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some implications for your life of the Christian journey being long and difficult and potentially wearisome?
- 2) What weights can you cast off that would help you to run the race of faith more effectively?
- 3) How can you in a practical sense keep your focus on Jesus Christ? Try reading a portion of the gospel accounts each day to remember how Jesus lived. Ask yourself what would Jesus do in your situation.
- 4) How are you going to actively combat spiritual weariness and discouragement this week?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grace Fellowship Church (Timonium, MD 10/23/83): How to Run with Enduring Faith

In concluding his discussion of “faith” in Hebrews 10-11, the author of Hebrews addresses the problem of spiritual weariness in Hebrews 12:1-3. He seeks to encourage and exhort his readers about how to keep on exercising faith when the struggle in the Christian life keeps going on and on and on and on. Using the analogy of a runner running in a race in a great stadium, the author tells us how to exercise faith in an enduring way. He exhorts us to avoid the trap of spiritual weariness that disqualifies so many Christians from continuing to run the race of faith.

Big Idea: We can run with enduring faith if we’ll take off the fat and fetters and take up the fixed focus.

I. We should be encouraged to run with endurance as we look around the stadium and see all the former runners (12:1a)

A. The surveying of the stands reveals “*so great*” (emphatic words) a number of the formerly faithful that they appear like a heavenly “*cloud*”.

B. These former runners are “*witnesses*” not so much of our performance as they are “*testifiers*” to the value of the life of enduring faith.

C. The author’s conclusion (“*Therefore, since . . .*”) is that these great runners for the faith should encourage us to run as we recall the highlights of their races in Hebrews 11.

In light of the great example of the former runners, we must take specific steps to insure that we’ll run with enduring faith. In fact, the main exhortation of this passage (at the end of v.1) exhorts us to “*run with endurance the race that is set before us.*” Before we run, however, we must make specific preparations that insure success.

II. OUR PREPARATION: We can run with enduring faith if we’ll take off the fat and fetters (12:1b)

A. We must first take off the Fat = a weight not a wing

1. Using a clothing analogy, the writer exhorts us to prepare to run by taking off “every encumbrance” (bulk, weight, mass, or burden)

2. This “fat” is not sinful, just weighty and impedes my running with enduring faith because it helps tire me out.

B. We must also take off the Fetters = will trip you up

III. OUR PARTICIPATION: We can run with enduring faith if we’ll take up the fixed focus (12:2-3)

A. Our fixed focus is upon Jesus and His values (12:2)

Are you willing to make the same trade-offs of future joy/reward in exchange for present shame/persecution?

B. This fixed focus has specific results in our lives (12:3)

Bill Fay: Who are We Watching and Who is Watching Us?

I. Who is Watching Us?

II. How are We Running?

Christian life is a long course filled with obstacles

Patience = remain firm under pressure

III. Who are We Watching? Fix your eyes on the goal

Our purpose is to become more like Jesus and to please Him and serve Him on earth

George Zemek: Three Essentials of the Christian's Spiritual Olympics

I. The Contestants

A. Our Stamina

B. Our Incentive

C. Our Preparation

D. Our Example

II. The Competition

III. The Course

MacArthur: Various Aspects of the Christian Race

- The Event itself
- The Encouragement to run
- The Encumbrances that hinder us
- The Example to follow
- The End of the race

Constable: One writer observed a **chiastic structure** in verses one and two.

"Therefore we,

[A] having seated around about us such a cloud of witnesses,

[B] setting aside every weight and every clinging sin ...

[C] with patient endurance ...

[D] let us run the race that is set before us

[E] keeping our eyes on Jesus
the pioneer and perfecter of the faith,

[D"] who for the joy that was set before Him ...

[C"] patiently endured the cross ...

[B"] despising shame ...

[A"] and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

[Note: **Estella B. Horning**, "Chiasmus, Creedal Structure, and Christology in Hebrews 12:1-2," *Biblical Research* 23 (1978):41.]

Steven Cole: Faith to Run the Christian Marathon

To run the Christian marathon with endurance, faith focuses on Jesus, who endured the cross and received the reward.

1. The Christian life is a difficult marathon that we must run.

The Christian life is a lifelong, grueling race that entails some long hills to climb and some swampy marshes to plod through. To make it to the end, you need self-discipline to get into good shape, you will need to maintain your motivation, and you will need sustained effort. No one enters a marathon with the thought of dropping out after a mile. Finishing well is everything. In this race, you are not competing with other believers. We're all on the same team. We're competing against the enemy of our souls, who opposes God's kingdom and wants us to drop out.

2. To run the Christian marathon, we must get into shape and stay in shape.

The primary thing, as I said, is self-discipline motivated by the goal of finishing well. But it specifically involves two things:

A. WE MUST LAY ASIDE EVERY ENCUMBRANCE.

The word means *weight*. It can refer to physical weight (obesity), or to unnecessary baggage. Ancient Greek runners would actually run naked so as not to be encumbered. Olympic athletes in our day wear some pretty skimpy outfits. They don't want anything to slow them down or drain their energy. . .

Encumbrances are distinguished here from sins. They include things that are not intrinsically wrong, but they're wrong because they keep you from running as you should. If you got rid of those heavy hiking boots and put on some jogging shoes, you'd run better. If you dropped the pack and dressed in shorts and a tank top, you might finish the race.

B. WE MUST LAY ASIDE EVERY SIN THAT SO EASILY ENTANGLES US.

In biblical times people wore long robes. You can't run with a long robe entangling your legs. You must either pull it up and tuck it in your belt or cast it totally aside. In the case of sin, you must totally get rid of it if you want to run the Christian race.

This doesn't refer only to certain besetting sins, but to all sins. Sin always begins in the mind, and so we must judge all sin at the thought level. Pride, lust, envy, greed, anger, grumbling, selfishness—all of these things originate in our thought life. If you cut it off there, it goes no farther. If you entertain these things, they incubate and develop into sinful words and actions (**James 1:14-15**). But the author's point is, you can't run the Christian race if you keep tripping over your sins.

3. To run the Christian marathon, we must run with endurance the course set before us.

Note two things:

A. GOD SETS THE COURSE.

To finish the Christian marathon, it's important to keep in mind at all times that the Sovereign God sets the course. You may not like parts of the course. You may be prone to grumble, "Why did the course have to go over this hill, or through this swamp?" The answer is, "Because the Sovereign God planned it this way." You won't be able to run by faith unless you submit your

will to His will.

B. WE MUST RUN WITH ENDURANCE.

Running with endurance requires adopting a certain mindset. If you have in mind that you're running a 400-meter race, you're not going to do well when the pack keeps going after 400 meters. When you learn that the race has barely begun, you're going to quit with a bad attitude. This is what Jesus meant when He talked about counting the cost of following Him (**Luke 14:28-33**).

4. The encouragement to keep running comes from those who have run before us, but primarily from Jesus Himself.

A. THE GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES ENCOURAGES US TO KEEP RUNNING.

B. JESUS HIMSELF IS THE MAIN MOTIVATION TO KEEP RUNNING.

(1). JESUS IS THE AUTHOR OR CAPTAIN OF FAITH.

We encountered this word in **Hebrews 2:10**, which stated that God perfected the author (or, captain) of our salvation through sufferings. It is also used in **Acts 3:15** (you "*put to death the Prince of life*") and **Acts 5:31** ("*whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and Savior*"). It can mean *author* or *originator*, in the sense that Jesus is the source of life, salvation, and faith. It also refers to the *leader* or *captain*, the one who goes before the troops, showing them the way. All of these senses of the word apply to Jesus with regard to our faith. No sinner is capable of believing in Christ for salvation unless He grants it (**Acts 5:31; 11:18; Eph. 2:8, 9; Phil. 1:29**). But, also, He blazes the trail of faith for all who follow Him. He goes before us, showing us how to live by faith in God alone.

(2). JESUS IS THE PERFECTER OF FAITH.

This means that He finished the course of faith perfectly, showing us how to finish well. But also, He brings our faith to completion, as Paul states (**Phil. 1:6**), "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*"

(3). JESUS SHOWS US THE MOTIVATION TO ENDURE BY FAITH.

"*Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.*" The reason that Jesus could endure the horrible prospect of bearing our sin was that He focused on the joy set before Him. This joy included the joy of "*bringing many sons to glory*" (**2:10**; see also, **Isa. 53:10-11**). But also, the greatest joy was that of glorifying the Father by completing the work that the Father gave Him to do (**John 17**). When Jesus returned to heaven, triumphant over Satan, sin, death, and hell, the angels rejoiced. The marriage supper of the Lamb will be a time for us to "rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him" (**Rev. 19:7**). Keeping that glorious joy in view enabled Jesus to endure the agony of the cross.

(4). JESUS SHOWS US THE GREATEST EXAMPLE OF ENDURANCE BY FAITH THROUGH THE MOST DIFFICULT TRIAL EVER.

"*He endured the cross, despising the shame.*" He "*endured such hostility by sinners against Himself.*" No one has ever endured a greater trial than the cross. Others have been crucified and others have been tortured in indescribably horrible ways. But only Jesus knew the glory and joy of perfect fellowship with the Father in heaven before coming to this earth. Only Jesus knew the

perfect holiness of His divine nature. To leave heaven and take on the form of a servant and be obedient to His death on the cross as the substitute for our sins, is unmatched in human history.

(5). JESUS SHOWS US THE FINAL REWARD OF FAITH.

He “*has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” He is in the most exalted place in the universe, the place of all rule and authority. The holy angels bow before Him in adoration and reverence. While Jesus is unique, His exaltation to the right hand of the throne of God shows us a glimpse of His glory that we will share throughout eternity, if by faith we run with endurance.

5. We run with endurance by fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Note four things:

A. FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS REQUIRES TAKING OUR EYES OFF OF OURSELVES.

B. FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS REQUIRES TRUSTING ALL THAT HE IS FOR US.

Paul often refers to our being “*in Christ.*” Baptism pictures the fact that we are totally identified with Him in His death, burial and resurrection (**Rom. 6:3-5**). When Satan tempts us with guilt over past sins, we take refuge in Christ’s shed blood (**Eph. 1:7**). All of God’s promises are yes in Christ (**2 Cor. 1:20**). We are even seated with Christ in the heavenly places (**Eph. 1:20**)! Focus on these truths by faith!

C. FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS MEANS TRUSTING HIM WHEN SINNERS WRONG US.

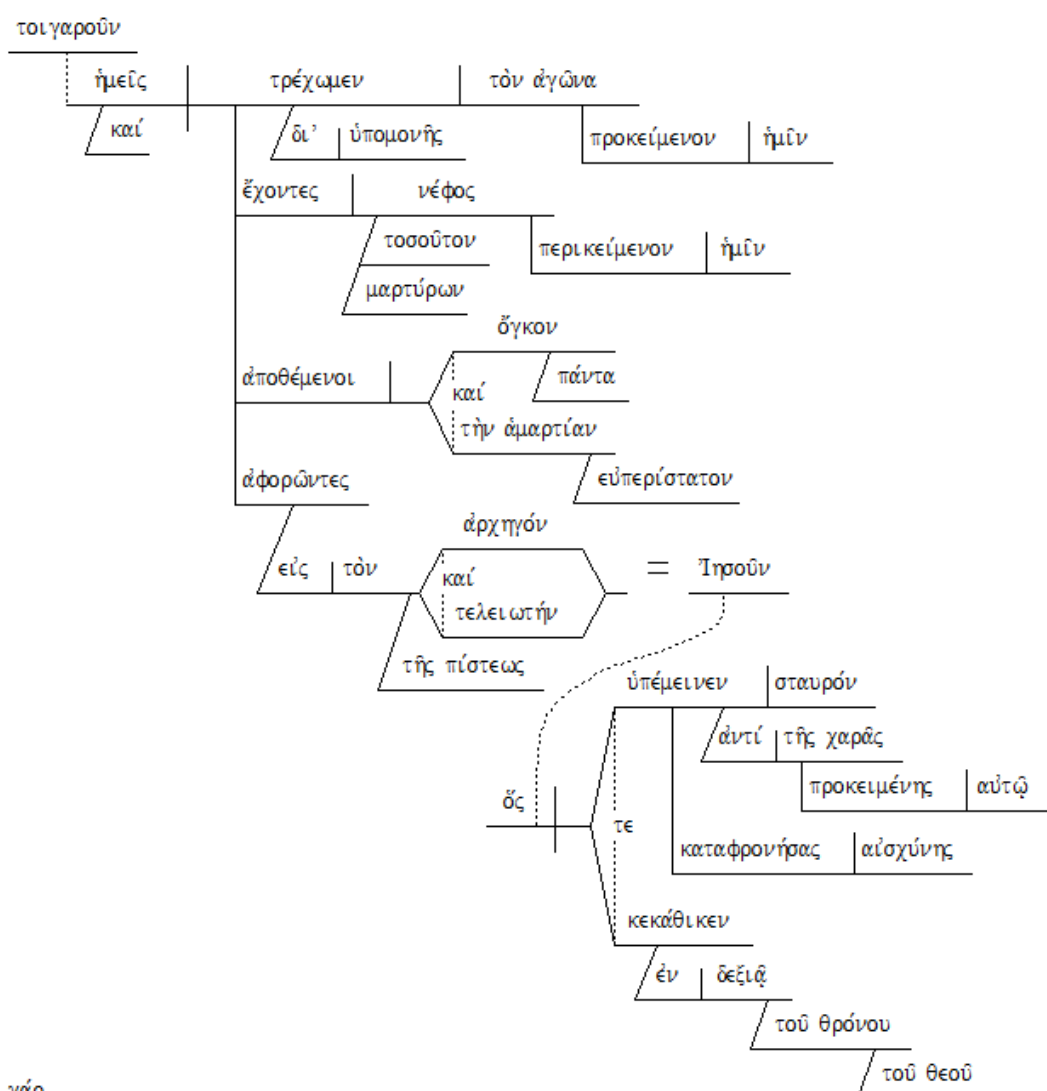
The author tells us to “*consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself.*” *Consider* (used only here in the N.T.) means to calculate. Just as Jesus balanced the joy set before Him against the cross, so we must consider the fact that the more committed we are to Jesus, the more those who oppose Him will oppose us, no matter how nice we try to be (**John 15:20**). But we calculate that the joy of knowing and obeying Jesus is greater than all of the rejection, anger, ridicule, or anything worse that we might have to bear for His sake.

D. FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS IS THE KEY TO NOT GROW WEARY AND LOSE HEART.

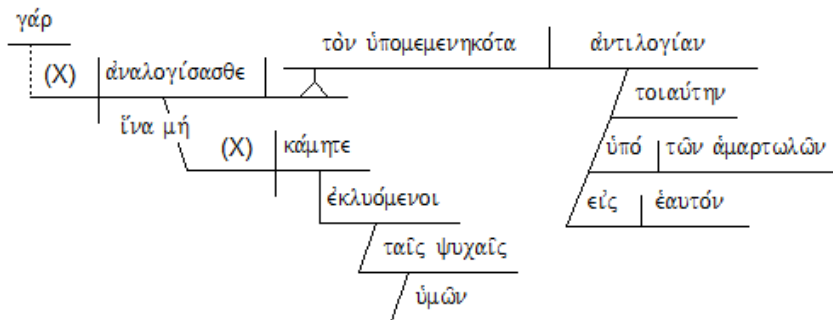
The literal rendering is, “*that you not fail through weariness, fainting in your souls.*” Spiritual failure happens gradually from continuous weakening (**B. F. Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews** [Eerdmans], p. 398). Just as a runner who is not in excellent condition gradually slows down and finally collapses, so the believer who does not keep looking with faith to Jesus will eventually collapse. We call it “burn out” today, and it seems that there are many who are weary in their souls in the Christian marathon. The remedy is to fix our eyes on Jesus.

GREEK DIAGRAM ANALYSIS

Heb 12:1-2



Heb 12:3



TEXT: Hebrews 12:4-11

TITLE: *BENEFITING FROM DIVINE DISCIPLINE*

BIG IDEA:

DIVINE DISCIPLINE (IN THE FORM OF SUFFERING) COMES FROM THE HAND OF OUR LOVING FATHER FOR OUR GOOD

INTRODUCTION:

The age old problem of suffering is addressed here in the context of family discipline from a loving heavenly Father. False professors of faith in Christ will respond poorly to such pressure and fall away in apostasy. But true sons of God must understand the purpose behind such discipline and see the benefit of promoting holiness and righteousness. We need to endure, but not with a kind of stoicism, but with the expectation that God is conforming us to the image of His dear Son. Therefore, we should not be surprised by such suffering or lose heart and become discouraged. Instead we need to submit to *the Father of lights* and live by faith.

Deffinbaugh: In our text in Hebrews, the author wants us to know several important truths about suffering:

- Suffering comes ultimately from the hand of God, for our good.
- Suffering in the life of the Christian should thus be viewed as divine discipline.
- Suffering should be patiently endured as something that is designed to produce righteousness.
- Suffering, because it is divine discipline, should be viewed as an indication of God's love, and that we are a part of His family.

The discipline we experienced in our human family should be instructive. We should realize that if the discipline administered to us by our (fallible) earthly fathers was beneficial, then surely the discipline administered by our heavenly Father will be infinitely more profitable.

All discipline is painful for the moment, but it produces peace and righteousness which is profitable for eternity.

I. (:4-7a) 4 REMINDERS REGARDING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

A. (:4) Level of Suffering Caused by Discipline is Not Excessive

“You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;”

Spurgeon: you have not shed your blood for Christ yet, for these are not martyr days, so can you be wearied and faint? If you run with the footmen, and they weary you how will you contend with horses? We ought to be ashamed of ourselves if we grow weary in a race that is so easy compared with that of the men and women who laid down their

lives for Christ's sake It has never come to a bloody sweat with you as with him, nor to death upon a cross, as in his case. Shall the disciple be above his master or the servant above his lord? Our trials are little compared with those of the martyrs of the olden times. Courage, brethren, these are small matters to faint about! Moreover, our chastenings are love tokens from God, let us not be alarmed at them.

Wuest: The readers are reminded of the fact that the persecutions they were enduring, had not yet entailed the shedding of their blood, as was the case of Messiah, who became obedient to God the Father to the extent of death, yes, to such a death as that upon a cross. Their striving against sin was their battle against the temptation of renouncing their professed faith in Messiah in order that they might be relieved of the persecution which they were enduring. His striving against sin was His submitting to the death of the Cross, with all that that involved, His becoming sin for us, the breaking for the time of the fellowship between the Father and the Son, and all the intense and awful physical agony of crucifixion.

B. (:5) Value of Discipline Reflects its Significance

“and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprovved by Him;’”

Leon Morris: Suffering comes to all; it is part of life, but it is not easy to bear. Yet it is not quite so bad when it can be seen as meaningful. The author has just pointed out that Christ endured His suffering on the Cross on account of the joy set before Him (He 12:2). His suffering had meaning. So for Christians all suffering is transformed because of the Cross. We serve a Savior who suffered, and we know He will not lead us into meaningless suffering. The writer points to the importance of discipline and proceeds to show that for Christians suffering is rightly understood only when seen as God's fatherly discipline, correcting and directing us. Suffering is evidence, not that God does not love us, but that He does. Believers are sons and are treated as sons.

Bruce Hurt: Forgetfulness causes a lot of unnecessary problems and heartaches. Our greatest need is not for new light from God, but for paying attention to light we already have. When God's Word is neglected it is forgotten. Sometimes the answer or the help we need is in a truth we learned a long time ago but have let slip away.

These believers were upset about their afflictions partly because they had forgotten God's Word. In the Old Testament God not only had spoken to them about suffering and discipline, but He had spoken to them as sons. They had forgotten more than simply divine truths, they had forgotten the exhortation of their heavenly Father. Turning to Scripture is listening to God, for Scripture is His Word. For believers, it is the Word of their Father.

Charles Stanley: The writer of Hebrews knew all too well our tendency not to take the discipline of God as seriously as we should. So he warns us, *“Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord.”* In other words, the potential severity of God's discipline should

be enough to keep us in line. One of the reasons we fall into sin so easily is that we forget God will discipline us when we step out of bounds. We have forgotten that His complete knowledge of sin and its destructive consequences compels Him to take drastic measures with us. As much as He must disdain using adversity to remind us to live a righteous life, the fact is that He will if He knows that is what it takes.

C. (:6) **Necessity of Discipline Tied to the Love of the Father**

*“For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
And He scourges every son whom He receives.”*

Barclay: HERE the writer to the Hebrews sets out still another reason why men should cheerfully bear trouble and affliction when it comes to them. He has urged them to bear it because the great saints of the past have borne it. He has urged them to bear it because anything we have to bear is a little thing compared with that which Jesus Christ had to bear. Now, he says that we must bear hardship and affliction because they are sent to us as a discipline from God and no life can have any value apart from discipline.

D. (:7a) **Purpose of Discipline = Endurance**

“It is for discipline that you endure;”

Wuest: The writer is not saying "grin and bear" it as if we can **endure** in our own strength. The last thing our old man, the fallen flesh, wants to do is **endure** divine discipline. We can **endure** only as we choose to rely on the Spirit of God *"Who gives **perseverance** (hupomone the noun form of hupomeno) and encouragement" (Ro 15:5+)*. The point is that the things that God demands of us He gives us the supernatural power to carry out. **Perseverance** is *hupomone* which describes the ability to abide under or bear up under a "load" with a courageous attitude in the face of the real suffering experienced. **Morris** says: "It is the attitude of the soldier who in the thick of battle is not dismayed but fights on stoutly whatever the difficulties." This is clearly not NATURAL but a SUPERNATURAL work of God's Spirit (**Ro15:13+**). If something happens in your life that is hard and painful and frustrating and disappointing, and, by grace, your faith looks to God's Word and to Christ and to His power and His sufficiency and His fellowship and His wisdom and His love, and you don't give in to bitterness and resentment and complaining, then you endure. As someone has well said it is better to go through the storm with Christ than to have smooth sailing without Him.

Kent: Recognizing that God is in ultimate control of all conditions, and that He is using even adverse situations as part of the *"all things"* that work together for good to His children (**Rom. 8:28**), the believer is thus encouraged not to despair, compromise, or apostatize in the face of persecution.

II. (:7b-10) 3 ANALOGIES BETWEEN THE DISCIPLINE OF OUR EARTHLY FATHER AND OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

A. (:7b-8) Our Family Identity

1. (:7b) Identity of Legitimate Sons Confirmed by Discipline

*“God deals with you as with sons;
for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”*

2. (:8) Identity of Illegitimate Sons Exposed by Lack of Discipline

*“But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers,
then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”*

B. (:9) Our Attitude

1. Attitude towards Our Earthly Father in the Context of Discipline

*“Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us,
and we respected them;”*

2. Attitude towards Our Heavenly Father in the Context of Discipline

*“shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits,
and live?”*

Hewitt: *“father of spirits”* – The phrase is simply used to bring out in vivid contrast the authors of men’s physical existence to whom submission is given under discipline and the Author of spiritual beings to whom greater submission should be given, for not merely physical life but spiritual and eternal life come from Him.

C. (:10) Their Motivation

1. Motivation of Our Earthly Father in the Context of Discipline

“For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them,”

2. Motivation of Our Heavenly Father in the Context of Discipline

“but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.”

III. (:11) 2 IMPACTS OF DISCIPLINE

A. Immediate Emotional Impact

“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful;”

B. Long Term Behavioral Impact

*“yet to those who have been trained by it,
afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”*

Hewitt: genitive of apposition – the fruit which consists of righteousness

Kent: God always disciplines in accord with what is profitable, and His methods are always wise. God’s goal is that we may partake of His holiness. Holiness is the basic characteristic of God’s nature, and because He has shared His nature with us by regeneration, it is incumbent upon believers to reflect increasingly His holiness in their lives (**1 Peter 1:15, 16**). The particular aspect of holiness in view here is probably “the

goal for which God is preparing His people = that entire sanctification which is consummated in their manifestation with Christ in glory.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can you tell whether God is disciplining you for specific sin or presenting difficulties and trials to develop your character?
- 2) What type of loving discipline did you experience in your home growing up and what lessons have you learned from that example? If you did not have that benefit, how have you been able to implement loving discipline in your home?
- 3) In the past, how have you specifically regarded too lightly the discipline of the Lord in some circumstance?
- 4) How can you discern the purpose of discipline in a specific instance?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: The key word of **Hebrews 12:4-11** is discipline, used both as a noun and a verb. It is from the Greek *paideia*, which, in turn, comes from *pais* ("child") and denotes the training of a child. The word is a broad term, signifying whatever parents and teachers do to train, correct, cultivate, and educate children in order to help them develop and mature as they ought. It is used nine times in these eight verses. The figure changes from that of a race to that of a family. Christian living involves running, working, fighting, and enduring. It also involves relationships, especially our relationship to God and to other believers. The emphasis of this passage is on the heavenly Father's use of discipline in the lives of His children....If we do not understand our problems as being discipline that the Lord sends for our good, we cannot profit from them as He intends. Our reactions cannot be right if our view of what is happening is not right. The spiritual weakness mentioned in this verse is not that of taking our problems lightly but of taking the Lord's discipline through them lightly. It is usually because we take our problems too seriously that we take the Lord's discipline too lightly. Our focus is on the experience rather than on our heavenly Father and on what He wants to do for us through the experience.

Wuest: *paideia* was used of the whole training and education of children. It speaks also of whatever in adults cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions. It speaks also of instruction which aims at the increase of virtue. The word does not have in it the idea of punishment, but of corrective measures which will eliminate evil in the life and encourage the good. Here, the persecutions were used of God in an effort to clarify the spiritual vision of the readers as to the relative merits of

the First Testament and the New Testament, warning them against returning to the temple sacrifices and urging them on to faith in the Messiah as High Priest. The readers, in their action of leaning back towards the First Testament and by their avowed purpose of returning to it in order to escape the persecution, had forgotten the lesson of Proverbs.

Ray Stedman: The passage from **He 12:4-11** develops the true point of view Christians must have toward hardship and opposition. **He 12:4, 5, 6** put it succinctly, saying, in effect: Remember, it isn't as bad as it could be! (You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.) Don't forget, behind the difficulties you must go through is a Father's loving heart! (You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons.)...discomfort, hardship and deprivations, borne for the sake of Christ, are viewed as privileges and blessings, sent by a loving Father to prepare us to be worthy heirs of the incomparable glories yet to come. They are not a sign of His displeasure, but a sign that He regards us as genuine children...(**Hebrews 12:9, 10, 11**) adduce a second reason for patient endurance: our earthly fathers disciplined us when we were children, even though they doubtless made mistakes. Yet we respected them for their efforts which we recognized were meant for our good. How much more should we accept the discipline of our God, Who makes no mistakes and Who aims at enabling us to share His own perfect character! The trials, disappointments, hardships and even physical attacks which sometimes constitute God's discipline may be painful to bear. No one enjoys such experiences. As **C. S. Lewis** notes, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to arouse a deaf world." But the pain is not the whole story. There is always a later on which follows. There is a harvest of righteousness and peace which invariably will come for those who have been trained by it (the discipline).

Bruce Hurt: Divine Discipline is not delightful but is necessary and also comes with five significant benefits to believers which are discussed in **Hebrews 12:5-11**.

- 1) God's discipline is evidence of His love for us (**Hebrews 12:6**)
- 2) God's discipline assures us that we are His spiritual children, genuine members of His family (**Hebrews 12:7-8**)
- 3) God's discipline enhances our spiritual life (**Hebrews 12:9**)
- 4) God's discipline enables us to share His holiness (**Hebrews 12:10**)
- 5) God's discipline yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (**Hebrews 12:11**).

Steven Cole: God's Loving Discipline – Heb. 12:4-6

The subject of God's loving discipline of His children is one of the most practical truths in the Bible for you to understand and apply. If you do not understand it, you will not persevere when trials hit, as they certainly will. As we've seen, the author of Hebrews is trying to prepare his readers to endure by faith what seems to be a looming persecution.

They have already “*endured a great conflict of sufferings,*” which included public reproach, imprisonment, and the unlawful seizure of their property (10:32-34). But, they still had need of endurance (10:36). After exhorting them to “*run with endurance the race that is set before us*” (12:1), by fixing their eyes on Jesus and His suffering, he now explains the process of God’s loving discipline of His children.

To endure the Christian struggle against evil, we must understand what Scripture teaches about God’s loving discipline.

1. The Christian life is an intense life or death struggle against the forces of evil (12:4).

When the author says that the Hebrews had not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood, he meant that none of them had as yet become martyrs. He says this against the backdrop of Jesus, who shed His blood on the cross. The implication is that they may be facing that ultimate test shortly. But whether they literally died for their faith or not, the imagery is clear: the Christian life is an intense life or death struggle against powerful forces of evil that could result in martyrdom. The author personifies sin as our opponent. It opposes us in two ways:

A. SOMETIMES THE ENEMY IS THE EVIL IN THE WORLD, OPPOSED TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

B. SOMETIMES THE ENEMY IS THE EVIL IN ME, OPPOSED TO THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

C. MY RESPONSIBILITY IS TO RESIST AND STRIVE AGAINST ANY SOURCE OF EVIL, EVEN IF IT MEANS SHEDDING MY BLOOD.

D. TO ENDURE THE STRUGGLE AGAINST EVIL, PUT YOUR TRIAL IN PERSPECTIVE.

E. THE MOTIVATION FOR STRIVING TO THE POINT OF SHEDDING BLOOD IS TO CONSIDER THE SAVIOR WHO DIED FOR ME.

The author has just said, “*Consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart*” (12:3). Jesus did not deserve any suffering, much less death, in that He had no sin. By way of contrast, all of us deserve far more suffering than we actually receive, were God to repay us for every sin that we commit. So rather than complaining or shaking your fist at God for what you’re suffering, consider Jesus, who suffered innocently on your behalf. Consider what you deserve, if God were to give you perfect justice. Endure by faith what God has allowed you to suffer, looking to Jesus.

Where do we gain the understanding that we need to endure God’s loving discipline? The author goes on to show us that...

2. The Scriptures are given to us as God’s children to enable us to endure the hardships of the struggle (12:5a).

A. WE CANNOT APPLY AND LIVE BY SCRIPTURE UNLESS WE ARE GOD’S CHILDREN THROUGH THE NEW BIRTH.

B. WE CANNOT APPLY AND LIVE BY SCRIPTURE THAT WE DO NOT KNOW OR THAT WE HAVE FORGOTTEN.

C. SCRIPTURE IS GOD SPEAKING TO US AS HIS CHILDREN FOR OUR ENCOURAGEMENT AND CORRECTION.

3. Scripture teaches that out of love, God disciplines all of His children (12:5b-6).

Note four things about God’s discipline:

A. TO APPLY GOD’S DISCIPLINE PROPERLY, WE MUST UNDERSTAND HOW IT DIFFERS FROM HIS PUNISHMENT.

God’s punishment stems from His *wrath* against sin, whereas His discipline stems from His *love* for His children. Punishment is God acting as *Judge*; discipline is God acting as *Father*. The Greek word for *discipline* means *child-training*. Under punishment, the sinner pays for his sins. Under discipline, Christ paid for our sins. Punishment is God’s demand for justice. Its aim is not to restore. Under discipline, justice is not in view, since Christ paid it. Rather, God intends to correct our faults and sins and to develop holiness in us.

Sometimes, God’s discipline is directly related to a specific sin in His children. But at other times, it is not the consequence of a specific sin, but rather is to develop growth and maturity. While discipline does not necessarily remove the consequences of our sin—we still reap what we sow—God often tempers it with grace if we repent. If we do not repent, His discipline can be very severe (“*scourging*”), even to the point of physical death (**1 Cor. 11:29-31**). The sinning child of God may lose rewards, but he will not lose his salvation (**1 Cor. 3:14-15**).

B. TO APPLY GOD’S DISCIPLINE PROPERLY, WE MUST NOT REGARD IT LIGHTLY.

C. TO APPLY GOD’S DISCIPLINE PROPERLY, WE MUST NOT FAINT WHEN HE REPROVES US.

To faint under God’s discipline is to grow weary of it and lose heart. To faint is to become depressed and hopeless, as if God has abandoned us. As the author goes on to show, our trials are actually *evidence that God loves us* and that we are His children. But the person who faints has lost sight of this. He is self-focused, absorbed with his trials to the extent that he can’t see God’s purpose and perspective. All that he can see

is, in Jacob's words, "*all these things are against me*" (**Gen. 42:36**). But actually, God was working all these things *for* Jacob. Joseph's perspective when his brothers hated him and sold him into slavery was the godly view: "*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive*" (*Gen. 50:20*). Finally,

D. TO APPLY GOD'S DISCIPLINE PROPERLY, WE MUST REMEMBER THAT HE ALWAYS TREATS WITH LOVE, EVEN WHEN HE MUST DEAL SEVERELY WITH US.

Steven Cole: Responding to God's Discipline – Heb. 12:7-11

I grant that it is difficult to understand how God can be both good and omnipotent, and yet allow the horrible suffering that we see in the world. But to cease to believe in God on account of suffering does not make God cease to exist, and it does not resolve the problem. To "*run with endurance the race that is set before us*" (**12:1**), we need to know how God wants us to respond to His loving discipline. Our text teaches that...

To respond properly to the Father's discipline, submit to it and grow in holiness through it.

That word, **submit**, grates on many souls. I have read Christian psychologists who say that those who grew up in "dysfunctional" homes have a problem with authority figures. They urge such persons to "find an authority figure and disagree with him" in order to assert their own authority! I would not recommend that approach! A "*Frank & Ernest*" cartoon expressed it well. The two bunglers are standing at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter has a scowl on his face. Frank whispers to Ernie, "If I were you, I'd change my shirt, Ernie." Ernie's shirt reads, "Question Authority."

God is the Ultimate Authority! Whether you like His program for your life or not, it is not wise to rebel against it. As **verse 9** tells us, if we submit to the Father of our spirits, we will live. **Bishop Westcott** (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 402) puts it, "True life comes from complete self-surrender." The author of Hebrews gives us three reasons why we should submit to God's loving discipline:

1. We should submit to the Father's discipline because it is an essential aspect of the father-son relationship (12:7-8).

2. We should submit to the Father's discipline because He perfectly administers it for our eternal good, that we may share His holiness (12:9-10).

A. IF THE IMPERFECT DISCIPLINE OF OUR EARTHLY FATHERS WAS BENEFICIAL, HOW MUCH MORE BENEFICIAL IS OUR HEAVENLY FATHER'S PERFECT DISCIPLINE.

The author's point is that the discipline of our earthly fathers was beneficial, even though it was flawed by human shortcomings. We respected them for it because we can

see how we benefited from it. But God's discipline is absolutely perfect.

B. THEREFORE, WE SHOULD SUBJECT OURSELVES TO THE HEAVENLY FATHER'S DISCIPLINE AND LIVE.

The important thing with regard to God's discipline is the spirit in which we respond. If we resist and harden our hearts, we will miss the purpose of the discipline. If we are truly God's children, this will result in more discipline. God's intention is that we respectfully submit to it (**12:9**). It's possible to submit like the defiant little boy whose mother told him to sit in a chair until he calmed down. He clenched his teeth and said, "I'm sitting on the outside, but I'm standing on the inside!" That's not true submission!

The psalmist reflected true submission when he proclaimed, "*I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me*" (**Ps. 119:75**). We should submit to God because He has the sovereign right to do with us as He pleases. That is the point of the Book of Job. Even though Job was the most godly man on earth, God had a perfect right to take away everything Job treasured. No man has a claim against Almighty God. One of the most stunning instances of this was when God told the prophet Ezekiel that He was about to take the desire of his eyes (his wife) with a blow. But, God told the prophet not to mourn or weep, as a spiritual object lesson to Israel. So, the next day Ezekiel's wife died and he did as God had commanded (**Ezek. 24:15-24**). Wow!

The prophet had learned a basic lesson that we all need to learn: *God is God and I am not God*. If the Sovereign of the universe wants to take my wife, my children, my possessions, my health, or my life, that is His prerogative. Faith eventually arrives at saying, as **A. W. Pink** put it (*An Exposition of Hebrews* [Ephesians 4 Group software], p. 977), "The trial was not as severe as it could have been. It was not as severe as I deserve. And, my Savior suffered far worse for me." And so faith submits to the Father's discipline, trusting that He administers it perfectly for His eternal purpose and for my eternal good.

3. We should submit to the Father's discipline because although it is difficult for the present, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to all that are trained by it (12:11).

A. ALL DISCIPLINE SEEMS DIFFICULT FOR THE PRESENT.

The key is, in the midst of the trials and the tears, to focus on the goal: the peaceful fruit of righteousness. If we keep in mind what God is doing in light of eternity, then we can endure with inner joy and peace, while at the same time admitting the pain and sorrow. As Paul wrote (**2 Cor. 6:10**), though we are sorrowful, we are yet always rejoicing, knowing that God is for us and that He is working all our trials together for our good (**Rom. 8:28-36**).

B. ALL DISCIPLINE IS DESIGNED TO PRODUCE THE PEACEFUL

FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The phrase means, “*the peaceful fruit that consists in righteousness.*” “*Righteousness*” (12:11) is synonymous with “*holiness*” (12:10). Both terms mean godliness or conformity to Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of godliness (Rom. 8:29). He shows us what it means to be a righteous person in thought, word, and deed. True holiness or righteousness is not just external, but begins at the heart or thought level. A truly righteous person has godly motives. He seeks to glorify God in everything.

Righteousness and peace always go together. You cannot have *true* righteousness without peace, or *true* peace without righteousness. I emphasize *true* because sometimes people mistake relief from trials as God’s peace, even though they disobeyed God to gain that relief. A Christian brother once told me, with a peaceful smile on his face, that God had told him to divorce his wife, and that he felt such a peace in his heart since he made that decision! It took me several hours to convince him that he was *not* feeling God’s peace, because his decision was *not* righteous. He was only feeling relief at the thought of getting away from a woman who, I admit, was not pleasant to live with!

God’s discipline produces the peaceful fruit of righteousness in many ways. Here are seven:

(1). GOD’S DISCIPLINE PRODUCES THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY TEACHING US THE TERRIBLE DEVASTATION CAUSED BY SIN.

(2). GOD’S DISCIPLINE PRODUCES THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY STRIPPING US OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AND PRIDE.

(3). GOD’S DISCIPLINE PRODUCES THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY HELPING US SHIFT OUR FOCUS FROM THIS LIFE TO ETERNITY.

(4). GOD’S DISCIPLINE PRODUCES THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY UNCOVERING HIDDEN SINS AND BLIND SPOTS.

(5). GOD’S DISCIPLINE PRODUCES THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY STRENGTHENING OUR FAITH AND DRIVING US CLOSER TO CHRIST.

(6). GOD’S DISCIPLINE PRODUCES THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY DEVELOPING COMPASSION AND HUMILITY.

(7). GOD'S DISCIPLINE PRODUCES THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY DEVELOPING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IN US AND THUS MAKING US MORE USABLE IN HIS SERVICE.

C. FOR DISCIPLINE TO BE EFFECTIVE, WE MUST SUBMIT TO THE TRAINING PROCESS.

Derek Thomas: Discipline – No Pain, No Gain

1) Discipline is Necessary

And the writer of Hebrews is saying, 'The very fact that you are being disciplined, the very fact that you find yourselves in trouble is not evidence that God doesn't care, but on the contrary it is evidence that God is your Father and He loves you and He's concerned about you.' He's writing to a people who were facing persecution from Jewish quarters because they had become Christians. And many of them were tempted to think that the smart move would be to go back to Judaism again, to go back to the synagogue, to throw everything aside. And he's saying to them, 'No! Endure this trial; endure this suffering, because it's evidence. Do you see that there is a relationship here between you and your Father? Suffering is to be expected. Discipline is to be expected. Discipline is necessary in the Christian life; it is to be valued and prized. Everyone who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution,' Paul says.

2) Discipline is Painful

And I wonder, my friend, if that's how you feel tonight, in the providence of God as though His hand was upon you and pressing you down. Or sickness...pain can be our teacher. Pain can be our teacher. One of the Puritans said that, "The life of God's children is like a bell, and the harder you hit it, the better it sounds."

George Whitefield once said that, "God puts burrs or thorns in our bed, lest we should fall asleep like the disciples at Gethsemane, rather than watch and pray." Lest we fall asleep...lest we fall asleep God sends painful, hard trials to keep you awake. He sends a winter, not this warm, humid air—and some of you are struggling with keeping your eyes open—but a cold, north wind blowing through the sanctuary of our souls to keep us awake. Isn't that the testimony of the Psalmist in **Psalm 119**, "*Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word.*"

3) Discipline is for our Own Good

That's why God disciplines us: because He wants to make us holy. He needs to mold us and shape us and fashion us after the image of Jesus Christ and there are many, many things that need to be cut off. Before we shine and sparkle like a diamond in glory there needs to be a lot of polishing first, a lot of polishing.

4) Discipline can make us Lose Heart

TEXT: Hebrews 12:12-17

TITLE: *RESPONSE TO DIVINE DISCIPLINE*

BIG IDEA:

ENCOURAGE THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY:

- **TO PERSEVERE IN RUNNING THE RACE AND**
- **TO PURSUE PEACE AND PURITY**

INTRODUCTION:

This passage continues the same context as the previous section which focused on Divine Discipline – not so much for addressing specific sin – but suffering and persecution which tests and builds character. Here the emphasis is on the proper response to that chastening work of the Lord. And the application includes both a personal focus and a corporate focus. There must be an mutual encouragement in both the areas of continuing to run the race of faith as well as to pursue peace and sanctification.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Christian's walk in this life is not a solitary one. It may feel that way sometimes, it may feel like we are alone in that walk. But a Christian's walk is not a solitary walk. We cannot go on in the Christian life without mutual support. We all, at times, need Christian friends to bolster flagging faith.

I. (:12-13) PERSEVERANCE IN RUNNING THE RACE PROMOTES A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A. (:12-13a) The Command (Action) – Encourage Perseverance in Running the Race

1. (:12) Shore Up the Weak Links (Isaiah 35:3)

*“Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak
and the knees that are feeble,”*

Get your second wind and get going

Richard Phillips: Like runners who see the finish line ahead, the readers of Hebrews are to take heart, lifting up their arms and legs to run the race to the end.

MacArthur: The writer of Hebrews got his metaphor from Isaiah. The faithful in Israel had been through a lot. They had many evil kings, some false prophets, generally disobedient and stubborn fellow Israelites, powerful enemies who threatened them, and seemingly no prospect of ever living in their own land in peace. They were discouraged and despondent, ready to give up. So the prophet reminds them of the coming kingdom, when *"the wilderness and the desert will be glad" and "they will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God" (Isa. 35:1-2)*. Then he counsels them to counsel each other: *"Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious*

heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you" (**Isa 35:3-4**). In other words, "Don't give up now. A better day is coming. Look to that and you will have the encouragement and strength you need. Victory is ahead!" The emphasis of **Hebrews 12:12** is the same as that of **Isaiah 35:3-4**. We are not told to strengthen **our** hands or our weak and feeble knees, but the hands and the knees, regardless of *whose* they are. In other words, we are not to concentrate on our own weaknesses but to help strengthen other Christians in theirs. One of the surest ways to be encouraged ourselves is to give encouragement to someone else, "*encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near*" (**Heb. 10:25**). One of the best ways to keep continuing is to encourage others to continue.

Kent: the main thrust of the admonition here is toward fellow believers, inasmuch as the local church seems to be primarily the sphere of the author's reference in **verses 13 and 16**.

Leon Morris: The writer is mindful of the fact that Christians belong together. They must have consideration for the weak among their members, i.e., the "*lame*". . . By taking care of the defective members of the congregation, the stronger members can help them along the way. Where the Christian life is in any way "*out of joint*," steps should be taken to revitalize it.

2. (:13a) Stay in Your Lane (Proverbs 4:26)
"and make straight paths for your feet,

Spurgeon: We are to make straight paths because of lame people. You cannot heal the man's bad foot, but you can pick all the stones out of the path that he has to pass over. You cannot give him a new leg, but you can make the road as smooth as possible. Let there be no unnecessary stumbling blocks to cause him pain. The Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, evidently cares for the lame ones. The charge he gives is a proof of the concern He feels. He bids us to be considerate of them, because He Himself takes a warm interest in their welfare.

Mohler: Should we fail to clear our paths, we will not find healing and will remain out of joint. It is what the second half of **verse 13** teaches. It is common sense, but we have a hard time obeying this command. Rather than making our paths straight and running after Jesus, we avoid opportunities for accountability and entertain our sin just enough to keep it alive. The danger in this, of course, is that we are never healed, remain crippled in our sin, and eventually turn away from the Lord. Clearing our paths and following Jesus, on the other hand, will spiritually restore us.

B. (:13b) The Consequence (Goal) – Healthy Christian Community

*"so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint,
but rather be healed."*

MacArthur: He's saying, "Look, there's no reason to run out of gas now; you're to be renewed every day. Lift up our hanging arms, pump those feeble knees."

What he's really saying in athletic metaphor is get your second wind. Sure, the outward man is perishing, but what did Isaiah say? "*But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their*" – what? – "*their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*" That's a promise of God.

Well, these poor Hebrew Christians had become tired and weary and listless. Oh, they were under the persecution. Did you ever meet a Christian like that? "Ohhh." You know? Everything is such a disaster. They've completely run out of gas. And instead of taking the weights in front of them and lifting them up and building their muscles, they were collapsing at the very sight of them. Instead of hurdling the hurdles and building strength, they were falling apart at the face of - looking in the face of any kind of obstacle at all; they were collapsing.

Ron Latulippe: In **verses 12 and 13**, we are **shown a picture**. It is the picture of a runner who has **run hard** but is **now exhausted and discouraged**. This runner is exhausted and discouraged after running a tough race but he knows the race is still not over. He is sitting by the road and wondering if he can finish the race or if he should just quit the race and go home. The race has been difficult so far and **his physical, and especially his mental energy is spent**. In Hebrews chapter 12 the author is exhorting this runner to endurance, **to get up and to keep running the race** unto the end and not to give up.

II. (:14-17) PURSUING PEACE AND PURITY GUARDS AGAINST DEFILEMENT AND DISQUALIFICATION

A. (:14) The Command (Action) – Pursue Peace and Purity (Holiness / Sanctification)

1. Pursue Peace

"Pursue peace with all men,"

Phillip Hughes: We are to strive with peace with all men. This we are to do not merely so that we may enjoy a peaceful existence, but so that the blessing of God's peace may flow through us into the lives of men.

2. Pursue Purity

"and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."

Ron Latulippe: **Verses 14 to 17** teach us that God wants His people to get **better not bitter**. Better means peace with others, and holiness before God. We run the race of faith in **community**, at least that is how it should be run. We are in the local church and should not live our Christian life in isolation. In community God uses **circumstances and people** to make us holy. As we endure the race of faith we encounter the hostility of sinners and we experience the discipline of God. Both the hostility of sinners and the

discipline of God mean that people will attack us, upset us, rebuke us, correct us, hurt us and be hurt by us, offend us and be offended by us, forgiven and asked for forgiveness, rub us the wrong way, show up our pride, humble us and so on. **In community opportunity abounds for hostility and bitterness to grow.** God wants us to learn to love one another and to be at peace with everyone, and in the process to become a holy people in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Richard Phillips: Holiness is necessary for us to be saved. It is not necessary as a **condition** of our acceptance with God, since we are justified by faith in Christ alone, apart from works. But it is necessary as a **consequence** of our acceptance with God.

B. (:15-17) The Consequence (Goal) – Avoid Defilement and Disqualification

1. (:15) Avoid Defilement

a. Defilement by a Works Mentality

“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God;”

b. Defilement by Allowing Bitterness

“that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;”

Kent: At **verse 15** the writer begins his transition to the warning passage which actually starts at **12:18**. It is the Christian reader’s responsibility to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of the whole congregation, seeing to it that no one be excluded from the grace of God. The reference is to those who may have made a beginning in the Christian community, but may through fear of persecution or faintheartedness in suffering be tempted to defect and thus fall short of true salvation.

Leon Morris: it is possible for a seed of bitterness to be sown in a community and, though nothing is immediately apparent, in due time the inevitable fruit appears. It will certainly “*cause trouble.*” The effects of bitterness cannot be localized: it “can poison a whole community” (JB).

2. (:16-17) Avoid Disqualification

a. (:16) Disqualification by Immoral Behavior or Godless Mindset

“that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.”

Mohler: the author of Hebrews appropriately identifies Esau as irreverent, unfaithful, and unworthy of our emulation.

Leon Morris: He could not recognize its true value. His insistence on the gratification of his immediate needs led him to overlook the importance of his rights as the firstborn. For a small immediate gain, he bartered away what was of infinitely greater worth. So with the apostates.

- b. (:17) Disqualification by Divine Rejection for Worldly Regret
*“For you know that even afterwards,
when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected,
for he found no place for repentance,
though he sought for it with tears.”*

Mohler: Esau stands as an example of someone who regrets what he has done but does not truly repent of his wrongdoing. There is a crucial distinction between regret and repentance. God never rejects true repentance, but he has no interest in worldly regret (**2 Cor 7:10**). Esau does not respond in such a way that communicates genuine repentance over his offense. He simply regrets that he has lost his birthright and his blessing as the firstborn. It is not repentance that Esau seeks with tears, it's only what he's lost to Jacob: his father's blessing.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What makes your **arms hang down** and your **knees wobble** in running the Christian marathon?
- 2) How can you deal with **weariness** in the Christian race and the temptation to give up?
- 3) How seriously do we take our **corporate responsibility** to provide for the spiritual health and vitality of our local church and guard against defilement from immorality or bitterness?
- 4) What types of things cause you to have a **bitter spirit**?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: Fail Not to Obtain the Grace of God

Since the fatherly love of God designs your pain for your good and your holiness . . .

- therefore (**verse 12**) *“strengthen your weak hands and feeble knees . . .”*
- therefore (**verse 13**) *“make straight paths for your feet”* and don't meander around in the Christian life; run the straight race . . .
- therefore (**verse 14**) *“Pursue peace and sanctification;”* that is, pursue the holiness that God is pursuing in you by his discipline! . . .
- therefore (**verse 15**) *“don't fall short of the grace of God; don't let a root of bitterness spring up and defile . . .”* God is working grace for you through

- discipline; don't miss it.
- therefore (**verse 16**) don't be like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal and after that could not repent. Don't trade the pain of God's discipline for the delights of the world.

So here is the sum of the matter: **Hebrews 12:1** tells us to run the race of the Christian life no matter how hard the course. To that end, lay aside every encumbrance and every sin. Pursue peace. Pursue holiness. Don't let your suffering discourage you and make you fall or tempt you to leave the race track. Don't forget that in all your suffering your Father is in charge and loves you and designs for you and in you the very things he is calling you to pursue. Don't be like Esau who would not lay aside even a single meal, but traded away his soul.

Steven Cole: Perseverance, Peace and Purity – Hebrews 12:12-14

The author of Hebrews was concerned that some of his readers were about to drop out of the race because they were fainting under God's discipline. "*Therefore*" (**12:12**) points back to what he has just said about the need to endure God's discipline because it stems from His love and it is designed "*for our good, so that we may share His holiness*" (**12:10**). It also points back to our need to look to the greatest example, Jesus, "*who for the joy set before Him endured the cross*" (**12:2**). So the author is exhorting them (and us) to persevere in the Christian marathon, to stay in the race to the end, in spite of weariness or whatever injuries we may have sustained. He tells us that...

To finish the Christian race, persevere in the pursuit of peace and purity.

1. We must persevere to finish the Christian race: Don't quit (12:12-13)!

A. PERSEVERANCE IS A MARK OF EVERY TRUE BELIEVER.

B. TO PERSEVERE, WE MUST DEAL WITH WEARINESS AND INJURIES IN THE RACE.

Weariness and injuries are inevitable in this lifelong race. The implication is, it's *not* going to be easy to finish the course. The crucial question is, "Will you drop out because of the hardships or will you deal with the problems and keep running?" If you drop out, you need to examine whether you are truly saved.

C. TO PERSEVERE, WE MUST HELP EACH OTHER IN RUNNING THE RACE.

2. We must pursue peace and purity to finish the Christian race: Stay on course (12:14)!

The link between pursuing peace *and* sanctification shows that we must not pursue peace at any cost. As Paul puts it (**Rom. 12:18**), "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*" His words imply the reality of living in this fallen world,

that sometimes it is not possible to be at peace with everyone. Sometimes the other person clings to bitterness and hatred, and you can't do anything more than you've done to be reconciled. At other times, to make peace would require compromising obedience to God, either morally or doctrinally. You can't sacrifice personal holiness or commitment to God's truth for the sake of peace. But, whenever you can do so without compromise, the race set before us includes pursuing both peace with others and purity before God.

A. PURSUE PEACE WITH ALL MEN.

B. PURSUE THE PURITY WITHOUT WHICH NO ONE WILL SEE THE LORD.

Deffinbaugh: It seems to me that the author's exhortation is two-fold. First, I believe that he is exhorting his readers to individually take courage because of the saving work of Christ and because they have been reminded that their troubles come from a loving heavenly Father for their good. The individual application is most evident in **Proverbs 4:26**. But it should also be observed that in **Job 4:3-4** and **Isaiah 35:3-4**, the exhortation is to encourage and strengthen fellow-Israelites. Knowing that God will bring His people back from captivity to enjoy His promised blessings in their land, and that God will pour out His wrath on those who have oppressed them, the people of God are to take courage, and they are to encourage one another.

I believe that the individual and the corporate applications are inter-related. Consider Paul's words to the Corinthians about their suffering:

3 Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow toward us, so also our comfort through Christ overflows to you (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

As our loving Father, God makes us stronger through our afflictions, not only for our benefit, but for us to be a blessing to others. Having been strengthened by God's grace through our afflictions, we can now strengthen and encourage those who undergo similar adversity.

Steven Cole: Finishing the Race Together – Hebrews 12:15-17

We are not running as individuals, competing against each other, but as a team. We have a responsibility toward one another, to help the entire team to finish the race. He's saying,

In the church we're responsible to help each other overcome the hindrances that could cause us to drop out of the race.

1. The ministry of oversight belongs to the entire church.

But probably it is you, not one of the elders, who needs to come alongside your brother, because you have the relationship with him. Spiritual help almost always is most effective when it flows through existing loving relationships. So, “see to it” is directed to you! It means that *you* are in the ministry! You have a responsibility to come alongside to encourage and strengthen other members of the team who may be in jeopardy of dropping out of the race.

2. There are several common hindrances that can cause Christians to drop out of the race.

A. WE MAY DROP OUT OF THE RACE BECAUSE WE COME SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

It is a warning to those in the Hebrew church who were tempted to abandon Christianity and return to Judaism. They would come short of God’s grace in the gospel.

The point is, make sure that neither you nor anyone you know fall short of God’s grace by trusting in their own works or “goodness.” We want every person in this church to trust in God’s grace in Jesus Christ as his or her *only* hope for heaven.

B. WE MAY DROP OUT OF THE RACE BECAUSE WE BECOME BITTER BECAUSE OF TRIALS, POISONING OTHERS AROUND US.

The last part of **12:15** refers to **Deuteronomy 29:18**. In the context, Moses is warning Israel about the danger of idolatry. He doesn’t want there to be any in Israel “*whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.*” So the “*root of bitterness*” refers primarily to a bitter person in the church who has turned away from God and will cause trouble and defile many if he goes unchecked.

This person has probably doesn’t like the way that the true God has treated him. He is going through severe trials, and God doesn’t seem to be delivering him. Rather than submitting to God’s discipline in the trial, he is growing bitter against God, thinking, “I don’t deserve this kind of treatment!”

C. WE MAY DROP OUT OF THE RACE BECAUSE WE INDULGE IN SEXUAL IMMORALITY.

At first glance, the text indicates that Esau was immoral and Jewish tradition supports that contention. But the Bible never says that he was immoral, unless marrying three pagan women qualifies (**Gen. 26:34-35; 28:8-9**). Since Scripture never says that Esau was immoral, it is probably best to understand “*immoral*” in our text to stand alone, and to understand “*godless*” as describing Esau.

D. WE MAY DROP OUT OF THE RACE BECAUSE WE DEVELOP A
GODLESS OUTLOOK ON LIFE.

Esau is described as a “*godless person ... who sold his own birthright for a single meal.*” The Bible portrays Esau as a man who succeeded admirably in everything that the world has to offer, but he failed miserably in the things of God. Esau was a likeable “man’s man.” He was a skilled hunter and outdoorsman. He was a natural leader, who raised up a band of over 400 men who followed him. He had beautiful women as his wives and fathered sons who became leaders of tribes in their own right. His fame continued after him for centuries. So he succeeded in his family life, he succeeded financially and materially, and he succeeded by becoming politically powerful. But he failed where it matters most: He failed with God.

E. WE MAY DROP OUT OF THE RACE BECAUSE WE SEEK THE
BLESSINGS, BUT WE DON’T DESIRE GOD HIMSELF AS THE
BLESSING.

“*Afterwards*” (12:17) should send shivers down your spine! Some decisions have irrevocable consequences! God will forgive all of our sins if we truly repent, but you cannot undo some consequences from former sins. Some sins have a searing effect on our consciences. When Esau lost the blessing, at first he felt bad. He wept about it. But, he got over it. He moved on in life and became successful. In later years, he probably thought, “At the time, I thought that losing the blessing was a tragedy, but, I recovered. Life is good now.”

Probably “*sought for it*” refers to the blessing, not to repentance. Esau was not seeking repentance with tears; he was seeking the blessing with tears (**Gen. 27:38**). In other words, he wasn’t sorry about his sin of despising God. He was sorry that he didn’t get the blessing. In other words, he couldn’t care less about seeking God for the joy of knowing God. He only wanted what God could give him to make this life more enjoyable. . .

Our author is telling his readers that they are their brother’s keeper. I use the term “brother” in its broadest sense because I believe that this includes both believers and unbelievers who are in the church. The one who is like a “*bitter root*” who “*springs up and causes trouble*” might be a true believer, but it seems more as though here it may be an unbeliever. The “poisonous root” in **Deuteronomy 29:18** is the person who introduces others to idol worship. And if there is any doubt that some of those in the church may be unbelievers who corrupt others, the author turns to Esau as an example of an “*immoral and godless person*” in **verses 16 and 17**. . .

First, we should assume that nearly every church has at least one Esau in their midst. He was a descendant of Abraham (and Isaac, of course). He was thus living in close proximity to those whom God would favor with the blessings promised Abraham and his descendants. But in the end, living in close proximity to God’s blessings is not the same as entering into them. Every church should be alert to the possibility that some

who worship among them have never truly come to faith. I believe that the author is not merely warning the Hebrews about such people, but is exhorting the church to seek to win them to faith.

Second, Esau's sins are typical of the sins of an unbeliever, and in particular they are typical of our culture. Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of stew. In today's language, we might say that he traded God's blessings for a Big Mac, or heaven for a Happy Meal. Esau is a man who forsakes eternal blessings for momentary pleasure. In this sense, he is the exact opposite of Moses, and of those listed in the hall of faith in **chapter 11**. . .

Some are troubled by the fact that Esau is called an immoral man here, when there are no clear indications of this in the Old Testament. I don't find it troubling at all. Any man who puts immediate pleasure ahead of eternal blessings is headed for trouble. If Esau would trade his birthright for a single meal, why would he not trade eternal blessings for a moment of passion? And let us not forget that Esau married Canaanite women who were readily available, rather than to marry a wife from distant Mesopotamia.

Third, Esau's sin is typical of the sin some of the Hebrews were considering. Esau was a man who was born into the Hebrew community to a father who was heir to the covenant promises God made to Abraham. He personally benefited from the blessings which God poured out on Isaac. And yet as close as he was to people of faith, he did not enter into this faith. Instead, he considered his birthright of little value or significance, and so he rejected it for a moment's pleasure at the dinner table. . .

When our author speaks of Esau and his unbelief, he is speaking directly to his audience, some of whom had not accepted Jesus, and some of whom were toying with the possibility of forsaking the faith in order to escape from the suffering that loomed on the horizon. Esau was just the person to use as an example of a "bitter root." Going back to Judaism was just like Esau trading off his birthright. And, as our author points out, there is a point of no return, a point at which one cannot reverse the decision they have made.

J. Ligon Duncan: A Call to Holiness

I. Brace yourselves and move straight ahead: don't look back. (vs. 12-13)

First, if you look at **verses 12 and 13**, you are going to see Hebrews give a call for us to be resolute in our walk in Christ and to be consistent in that walk. I think we could summarize the message of these verses in these words, "Brace yourselves and move straight ahead. Don't look back. Brace yourselves." You are going to go through some discipline, some trials. Get ready for it. But move ahead and don't look back.

Having called us individually in **verses 1-11** to perseverance, the author of Hebrews is now telling us to help one another in that fight of faith. Notice the words: "*Therefore*

strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble.” In other words, we are not only ourselves, to brace ourselves to be ready to persevere, we are to be looking around us at our brothers and sisters and asking the question, “How can I bolster their faith? How can I help them along as they face the fight of faith?”

That is stressed not only in **verses 12 through 13**, but again in verses 15-17. Our eyes turn to the brethren and we make sure that certain things are not happening in their lives.

Now much of the language right here in **Hebrews 12:12 and 13** is from the Old Testament. In fact, there are two passages in the Old Testament where you will find it. Turn to **Isaiah 35:3**, you will see in the first passage that this exhortation is drawn from. We read, “*Encourage the exhausted and strengthen the feeble.*” Now the author of Hebrews is drawing on that idea when he says “*strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble.*”

Look at the second half, “*straight paths for your feet,*” and you will find that in **Proverbs 4:26**. “*Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established.*” I’d like to look at both sides of that first phrase in **Hebrews 12:12 and 13** because they are both very important. The first exhortation is a call for us to help brace weaker brethren for their trials with a view to them persevering, with a view to them getting through those trials. This reminds us of the need for our own spiritual resolution and for the need for us to assist our brothers and sisters in their trials and difficulties.

Donald Guthrie says this: “The words here are vivid with encouragement. Drooping hands and weak knees are typical of people with low spirits. They portray persons who have become incapable of action through sheer exhaustion.” The author is saying to look around at the brethren and if you see brethren who are in that condition, you do your best to strengthen them. You be concerned that they go on in the faith and get through their trials.

The second half of the phrase in **verse 13** is an exhortation for us to help them stay on the way or the path of Christianity. You know that often in both the Old and the New Testaments, our walk with God is described in terms of a path, road, or a way. Even the description “a walk with God” to talk about our relationship with Him draws on that metaphor of a road or a path or a way.

In this passage, we are being called to keep them on the straight way. Listen again to what Wilson says, “No advance in the Christian way is possible while the community halts between two opinions. They cannot follow the straight path of grace until they make a final break with Judaism.” All along in this book we have said there have been some in this congregation who thought about going back to Judaism. And you can see the picture of this. Here are people who are exhausted, they are tired, their joints are weak. In fact, some of them have sustained injuries to their limbs. Now what kind of a road do they want to walk on? Do they want a road with ruts? Do they want to ride on a wagon on a road with ruts or do they want to be on a highway that is straight, with no

twists and turns and no potholes?

Obviously, if you have weak and injured limbs, you want to be on a straight path. And the author of Hebrews is saying, “Look, for you to constantly be being jerked back and forth as to whether you are going to follow Christ or whether you are going to go back to Jerusalem, it’s going to injure those limbs that are already weak. So you need to be on a straight way. You not only need to be helping them to be braced for their trials, but you need to keep them on the path. The picture here is the help that a smooth road would be to someone whose legs are already tired and frail and injured.

II. Be at peace with the world and at war with the world simultaneously. (vs. 14)

A well-rounded Christian perspective requires that we both desire to be a blessing to others and that we be utterly different because we have been made like our God through His grace at work in our hearts. This holiness is an essential requirement if we are going to enter into the presence of God.

III. Be your brother’s keeper: spiritual concern for the whole church. (vs. 15-17)

A person who is a bitter root; and by the way, this isn’t just talking about a person who is struggling with bitterness, this is talking about a person who is a personified bitter root, they are angry with God, they are angry at the world, they have no saving faith. They may be a professing Christian in the context of the congregation, but they are going to poison the whole body. . .

In the first two verses of this passage, **verses 12 and 13**, we are positively told to encourage the brethren. In the last two verses we are said to be on the lookout for negative things in the lives of the brethren that could hurt everybody else.

So in this passage, the author of Hebrews calls us to show concern for professing Christians who lack the signs of regeneration, for us to deal with those who are bitter and cutting and call to account those who are immoral and worldly.

So in this way we are to pursue sanctification, not just as individuals, but with a concern for everybody in Christ’s church.

TEXT: Hebrews 12:18-29

TITLE: WARNING #5: GREATER PRIVILEGES MEAN GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY

BIG IDEA:
THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT BRINGS GREATER JUDGMENT IF WE FAIL HEED GOD'S WARNINGS

INTRODUCTION:

What a contrast the author paints between the terrifying / unapproachable nature of the God of the Old Covenant and the welcoming / approachable entrance to God we have under the New Covenant through our perfect mediator Jesus Christ. But we must choose to persevere in our faith and heed God's warnings because He continues to be a God of the same nature = a consuming fire. We will find solace and rest in His function as Judge if Jesus Christ is our sacrifice for sins; but there will be nothing but doom and gloom for those who must give an account apart from Christ. God's kingdom is unshakeable and the heavens and earth as we see them today will be utterly shaken and destroyed. Make sure your foundation is firm and serve God with gratitude and reverence.

Mohler: Those who endure in the faith come to Zion, the mountain of God's new and better covenant mediated through Jesus Christ. His blood satisfies God's wrath and permits God's people to enter God's presence freely and confidently.

Hewitt: The Epistle now reaches a climax in a passage both graceful and ingenious (**verses 18-24**), in which is seen the surpassing attractiveness and supremacy of the new covenant as compared with the old. The author's aim in this is to show that higher privileges carry with them greater responsibilities.

Deffinbaugh: the spectacular and the sensational do not strengthen our faith and produce endurance as much as suffering does.

Brian Bell: The Lord seems to believe a picture is worth a 1000 words. Here the writer downloads 2 pictures for us, comparing: 2 different mountains. 2 different covenants. 2 historic people. 2 important principles. Note all the words that are contrasted when we read: Sinai/Zion; heaven/earth; new/old covenant; terror/joy; shake/unshaken; not come/come; distance/closeness; law at Sinai/grace & glory at Zion.

I. (:18-24) SUPERIORITY OF MOUNT ZION TO MOUNT SINAI

A. (:18-21) Mount Sinai was Unapproachable and Terrifying

1. (:18) Terrifying Sights Associated with Mount Sinai

a. Physically imposing to the senses

"For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched"

Hewitt: The word “*tangible*” implies that the terrifying manifestations of burning fire, whirlwind, darkness and storm through which God revealed Himself to the Israelites were felt by the senses. The readers when they became Christians had no experiences of any such visible and repellent phenomena. What they experienced was entirely spiritual and gracious.

- b. Burning
“and to a blazing fire,”
- c. Darkness
“and to darkness and gloom”
- d. Chaotic
“and whirlwind,”

2. (:19) Terrifying Sounds Associated with Mount Sinai

- a. Trumpet Blast
“and to the blast of a trumpet”
- b. Unspeakable Words
“and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them.”

3. (:20-21) Terrifying Testimony Associated with Mount Sinai

- a. (:20) Testimony Regarding the Execution of Animals
*“For they could not bear the command,
‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.’”*

Mohler: The congregation was even commanded to stone to death any animal that touched the mountain (**Exod 19:12-13**). The severity of this command demonstrated the costliness of uncleanness in the midst of God’s holy presence. The Israelites feared for their lives. The author of Hebrews uses the command to execute animals to show just how incomprehensibly terrifying God’s presence on Sinai was for the people of Israel. It was so fearsome that even Moses was afraid.

- b. (:21) Testimony Regarding the Fear of Moses
*“And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said,
‘I am full of fear and trembling.’”*

Kent: Although the word “*mountain*” does not appear in our oldest and most reliable texts, it is clear that the incident at Sinai recorded in **Exodus 19:10-25; 20:18-21**; and **Deuteronomy 4:10-24** is in view. That was a day unequalled in Jewish history, when God demonstrated His awesome power in conjunction with His giving of the law. The rugged heights of Sinai rocked with thunder and crackled with lightning which set the mount aflame. God’s presence descended upon the mountain in fire and smoke

accompanied by an earthquake. The smoke doubtless produced the darkness (**Exod. 20:21**) and gloom, and the mighty flames would cause strong air currents that would produce a most frightening storm.

The sound of a trumpet, possibly blown by an angel, grew louder and louder (**Exod. 19:19**); and when Moses spoke, God answered him with a sound of words (**Deut. 4:12**). These words were so terrifying that the Israelites begged Moses henceforth to act as God's spokesman rather than have God address them directly (**Exod. 20:19**).

John Piper: In other words, the experience there was one of fearful, divine holiness without a mediator and with a voice so terrible that the people begged that the voice would stop. Then he goes on and contrasts the Christian reality since the cross (**verse 22-24**).

S. Lewis Johnson: the Sinaitic revelation is the revelation of the sheer majesty of God, the absolute inapproachability of God, the sheer terror of the presence of the Lord God apart from the blood of sprinkling of the Cross of Calvary. That's so important for us to remember because it's a marvelous picture of how our sin and our judgment, and the fact that apart from Jesus Christ we should experience the lost-ness of eternal life, of eternal judgment.

B. (:22-24) Mount Zion is Welcoming and Saving

1. (:22a) Welcoming City of God

a. *"But you have come to Mount Zion"*

Kent: As Mount Sinai symbolized God's dealings with men under the Mosaic covenant, and particularly its fearsome, earthly, and temporal aspects, so Mount Zion symbolizes the final grace and blessing in salvation, the accomplished realities in contrast to types and shadows.

Mohler: He paints this terrifying picture of Sinai for his readers in order to make the contrast with the radiant, glorious, and gracious new covenant. The awful terror of Sinai, which is not the mount to which we have come, shows the radical mercy of Zion. At Zion God embraces us with his grace and administers to us a covenant where he does not merely write the law on tablets of stone but on the tablets of our hearts. . .

A proper reading of **verses 22 and 23** requires that we interpret them through the lens of the already-not-yet tension we find throughout the New Testament. . . We've already come to the city of the living God in one sense, but that reality is not yet fully consummated.

b. *"and to the city of the living God,"*

c. *"the heavenly Jerusalem,"*

2. (:22b) Welcoming Angels
“and to myriads of angels,”

3. (:23a) Welcoming New Testament Saints
a. “to the general assembly”

b. “and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven,”

Kent: The church appears to be a reference to living New Testament believers. They are viewed as still on earth, but their names are registered in heaven (cf. **Luke 10:20**); and thus they will also inhabit the heavenly Jerusalem. This is in harmony with **13:14**, where it is stated the present believers still await certain aspects of the city which is “to come.” They are firstborn ones, enjoying the rights of firstborn sons, because of their union with Christ, the Firstborn (**Col. 1:15**). These Jewish Christian readers were a part of this church.

4. (:23b) Welcoming Judge
“and to God, the Judge of all,”

Richard Phillips: Of course, if this is the City of God, then God himself must be there. And to him the writer draws our attention: “*You have come . . . to God, the judge of all.*” This was also something the Israelites found on Mount Sinai: a judging God, a law-giving God, a God who gave the Ten Commandments upon the mount. For sinners, this is a sight that chills even the warmest welcome. Yet this is clearly not the meaning here.

Indeed, the point is quite the opposite of condemnation. For here we see God as judge, yet the fire and smoke and dark and gloom, the threatening blare of trumpets – all the trappings of condemnation – are gone! Indeed, what we see with this judging God is not hell but heaven, not those arrested and punished, but “*the spirits of the righteous made perfect*” (**Heb. 12:23**). The host around this God and Judge have been acquitted in his court; they are judged righteous and are made perfect. This is the host to which we belong, if we have come through faith in Christ. **Philip Hughes** writes, “This Judge is also the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose perfect sacrifice is . . . the first ground of our acceptance and justification . . . To him the Christian believer comes gladly and with confidence, knowing that what is for others a throne of judgment is for him a throne of grace” (**Heb. 4:16; 10:22**).

For this host God stands as judge, not to condemn, but to vindicate. Indeed, the very fact that he is the Judge increases our comfort all the more, for he will be righteous in accepting us in Christ, who already paid the entire debt of our sin. This is what Paul was getting at in **Romans 8:31-34**.

5. (:23c) Welcoming Old Testament Saints
“and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,”

Mohler: There will be no one who is imperfect in heaven. No unrighteous or imperfect person will be in the heavenly assembly. We will not be righteous or perfect by our own accord. Our righteousness and perfection depends entirely on the imputed righteousness of Christ. His perfection is our perfection. His righteousness is our righteousness. There is no human righteousness in Zion. There is only Christ's righteousness.

6. (:24a) Welcoming Mediator of a New Covenant
“and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,”

7. (:24b) Welcoming Blood of New Covenant Sacrifice
“and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”

[2 possible interpretations: the blood of Abel himself as he was slain or the blood of Abel's animal sacrifice.]

Lane: It may also have been the writer's intention to evoke the whole history of redemption, from the righteous Abel to the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus, mediator of the new covenant.

MacArthur: The sprinkled blood of Jesus far surpasses the sacrifice of Abel (**Heb. 11:4**) and speaks better than the blood of Abel. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God because it was offered in faith, but it had no atoning power—not even for Abel, much less for anyone else. Jesus' blood, however, was sufficient to cleanse the sins of all men for all time, to make peace with God for whoever trusts in that blood sacrifice.

II. (:25-29) THE SERIOUS NATURE OF GOD'S WARNINGS

A. (:25-27) Listen to God's Warnings about Coming Judgment

1. (:25) Take God's Warnings Seriously

a. Don't Reject God's Warnings

“See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.”

Hewitt: A final warning in **verses 25-29** brings to a conclusion the writer's argument that greater privileges carry with them greater responsibilities. If the Israelites with a partial and limited revelation became liable to God's judgment because of disobedience, an incomparably severer punishment would fall upon the readers who rejected this new revelation of God and its accompanying blessings.

Leon Morris: Earthly, material things (things that can be “*shaken*”) will not last forever. By contrast, God's kingdom is unshakable, and the author uses the contrast as an exhortation to right conduct. He has made it plain that God will not trifle with wrongdoing. The persistent sinner can reckon only on severe judgment. God will bring all things present to an end. Accordingly, the readers should serve him faithfully.

b. No Escape for Ignoring God's Warnings

“For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.”

2. (:26-27) Take God’s Promised Judgment Seriously

a. (:26) Cosmic Future Judgment

“And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.’”

Encompasses both the earth and the heavens

Piper: The motivation is that one day everything that is unstable and precarious and dangerously volatile - anything that makes us feel insecure - will be removed. And all that will be left will be the rock-solid unshakable kingdom of God.

b. (:27) Constant Unshakeable Realities

“And this expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.”

Leon Morris: points out the decisive significance of the things of which he is writing. There is an air of finality about it all. This is the decisive time . . . This physical creation can be shaken, and it is set in contrast to what cannot be shaken. These are the things that really matter, the things that have the character of permanence. The author does not go into detail about the precise nature of the ultimate rest. But whatever it may be, it will separate the things that last forever from those that do not.

Constable: The warning proper is found in **Hebrews 12:25-29**. The readers are called to heed Yahweh, for an eschatological shaking is coming in which the earthly material order will pass away, leaving only an eternal kingdom. The faithful readers who endure will have a part in the eschatological kingdom-the millennium and the New Jerusalem as "companions" of Jesus, the Messiah-King (**Hebrews 1:9; Hebrews 1:13-14**). This kingdom will become an eternal kingdom.

Ray Stedman: there are some things which cannot be shaken and which will remain forever. That which is shaken and removed is so done in order that what cannot be shaken may stand revealed. Such an unshakable thing is the kingdom of God into which those who trust in Jesus have entered. It is present wherever the King is honored, loved and obeyed. The present active participle (“*are receiving*”) indicates a continuing process. We enter the kingdom at conversion, but we abide in it daily as we reckon upon the resources which come to us from our invisible but present King. Such unbroken supply should arouse a continuing sense of gratitude within us and lead to acceptable worship of God. What renders such worship acceptable is the sense of God as incredibly powerful and majestic in person, and yet loving and compassionate of heart.

B. (:28-29) Receive God's Kingdom with Thanksgiving and Reverence

1. (:28a) Stand Firm in God's Kingdom

"Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken,"

Leon Morris: The "*kingdom*" is not a frequent subject in this epistle (the word occurs in a quotation in **1:8** and in the plural in **11:33**). This is in contrast to the synoptic Gospels, where the "*kingdom*" is the most frequent subject in the teaching of Jesus. But this passage shows that the author understood ultimate reality in terms of God's sovereignty. This reality contrasts with earthly systems. They can be shaken and in due course will be shaken. Not so God's kingdom! The author does not simply say that it will not be shaken but that it cannot be shaken. It has a quality found in nothing earthly. The kingdom is something we "*receive*." It is not earned or created by believers; it is God's gift.

Richard Phillips: this world is not what ultimately matters. If it did, then our commitment to Christ might well be secondary. But God, who shook the earth when he descended on Mount Sinai, is going to shake the heavens and the earth – all things – when Christ comes again in glory and power. The day will come when everything that is of this world will pass away, and those who have their hopes and dreams, their security and their salvation rooted in this world, will find themselves brought to utter ruin with it.

2. (:28b) Show Gratitude to God

"let us show gratitude,"

Hewitt: Therefore, the author concludes, in the light of the permanency, stability and superiority of Christianity. . . let us be **grateful**. A thankful recognition of the higher privileges, which have been bestowed upon Christians, is a certain remedy for discouragement, which is displeasing to God, and a strong encouragement to the worshipper to offer with reverent fear and awe a service well-pleasing to Him.

[Alternate view: "Let us hold on to God's grace."]

3. (:28c) Serve God with Reverence and Awe

"by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;"

4. (:29) Seek Shelter from God's Wrath

"for our God is a consuming fire."

Constable: The reference to **fire** in **Hebrews 12:29** completes an *inclusio* begun with another mention of **fire** in **Hebrews 12:18**. The whole section that these references to fire enclose deals with how important it is to respond properly to God.

Leon Morris: God is not to be trifled with. It is easy to be so taken up with the love and compassion of God that we overlook his implacable opposition to all evil. The wrath of

God is not a popular subject today but it looms large in biblical teaching. The writer is stressing that his readers overlook this wrath at their peril.

Kent: God's fiery holiness was demonstrated to Israel at Sinai, was reiterated in New Testament times (**Luke 3:16, 17**), and must not be forgotten by Christians. Believers need not be filled with terror at God's coming judgment, but its prospect should instill in them a healthy respect for His absolute holiness. Surely any temptation to refuse God's final revelation in Christ should be most soberly weighed in the light of this warning.

Hewitt: constant expression is given throughout the Epistle to the writer's belief that the God of the old covenant is also the God of the new. A further and deeper reason why this aspect of God's character, so frequently found in the Old Testament (cf. **Ex. xxiv. 17; Dt. v.4; Is. xxxiii. 14**), is stressed is to warn the readers against a false acceptance of the Christian faith. At the second advent of Jesus Christ, just as the material and transitory will disappear and the eternal and permanent will remain, so what is false and vile will be revealed in the fire of God's holiness and those whose characters are such will be consumed by the fire of His judgment.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do we know that seeing is not necessarily believing?
- 2) What type of tension exists between the degree to which we enjoy new covenant blessings right now and the consummation of the kingdom which we will fully enjoy in the future?
- 3) Are we giving proper attention to the severity of God's consuming wrath?
- 4) How does this glorious picture of the superiority of Mount Zion and all of its associated blessings motivate you to persevere in faith?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mohler: This paragraph is the crescendo of the book of Hebrews. It reminds us in both poetic and prosaic terms that we are not going to that old mountain ever again. Sinai has been displaced and the old covenant has been fulfilled. We've come to a new mountain and better covenant. We've come to Zion. God does not call us to a mountain we're not allowed to touch. He calls us to a Savior, the same Savior who told Thomas to place his finger in the holes of his hands and to place his hand on the wound in his side (**John 20:27**). In Christ, the old law has been annulled and a new one has been ratified. This new law does not condemn or judge us. Rather, by Christ's better blood, it

guarantees for us an eternal inheritance and secures final forgiveness of sins. His blood brings us to Zion and into the glorious presence of the living God. These are better things indeed.

Steven Cole: Great Privileges, Great God, Great Responsibilities (12:25-29)

God's warning of eternal judgment for those who reject the gospel is the most perilous warning in the world. The author of Hebrews was concerned that some of his readers, who had professed faith in Christ, were in danger of abandoning Christ under threat of persecution for the more comfortable old Jewish rituals. And so he issues a repeated, final warning to urge them to persevere in their professed faith in Christ. His message is really a repeat of what he said in **Hebrews 2:1-3**.

These are arguments from the lesser to the greater, and that is the force of our text. If those under the old, inferior covenant incurred God's judgment for their disobedience, how much more will we be judged if we neglect God's provision in Christ? If the signs of God's presence were frightening when He shook Mount Sinai, how much more frightening will it be when He shakes the entire creation? But "since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken," and since "our God is a consuming fire," the only proper response is to persevere in faithful, reverent service to Him.

In light of our great privileges and our great God, we must serve Him with obedient, grateful, and reverent hearts.

We have great privileges; we have a great God; and therefore, we have great responsibilities.

1. God has given us great privileges.

Throughout this epistle, the author has repeatedly shown the superiority of Christ and the new covenant over Moses and the old covenant. If you possess something of superior quality, why would you want to give it up and go back to something of inferior quality? We can sum up our privileges here under two headings:

A. GOD HAS SPOKEN TO US FROM HEAVEN THROUGH JESUS' BLOOD.

B. GOD GIVES US A KINGDOM WHICH CANNOT BE SHAKEN.

2. God is a great God.

The God who speaks to us through the gospel is the same God who spoke to Israel at Mount Sinai. Two themes bring out God's greatness in our text:

A. GOD IS GREAT BECAUSE HIS VOICE WILL SHAKE BOTH THE EARTH AND HEAVEN.

B. GOD IS GREAT BECAUSE HE IS A CONSUMING FIRE.

3. We have great responsibilities: to be careful to serve Him with obedient, grateful, and reverent hearts.

There are four responsibilities here:

A. WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO REFUSE HIM WHO IS SPEAKING.

B. WE MUST SERVE GOD WITH OBEDIENT HEARTS.

C. WE MUST SERVE GOD WITH GRATEFUL HEARTS.

D. WE MUST SERVE GOD WITH REVERENT HEARTS.

Deffinbaugh: An Unshakeable Kingdom

A number of churches seem to have been influenced by this attraction to the sensational. No longer can we expect the lack-luster plainness of church as we once knew it. In some churches, one can expect smoke machines, movie set lighting apparatus, incredible sound and speaker systems, and who knows what all to attract and dazzle those who attend. I couldn't help but wonder how much equipment it would take to create a spectacular reenactment of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. The question we would have to ask is this: "How effective is the spectacular in bringing people to faith in Jesus and in making disciples of them?" I believe our text speaks to this question, providing us with an answer that might significantly reduce some church budgets.

Mount Sinai is something like Jacob's stew, while Mount Zion is like Esau's birthright. The birthright and its blessings were vastly better, but these were future and thus as yet "unseen." The revelation of God to Israel at Mount Sinai was seen, heard, smelled (the smoke), and felt (the earthquakes). The law that was given set forth God's conditions for Israel's enjoyment of an earthly kingdom. Judaism clung to Sinai, Moses, and the Old Covenant because it seemed to offer a more immediate (albeit inferior) and more visible kingdom.

Mount Zion, on the other hand, represents a spiritual city (*"the heavenly Jerusalem,"* **verse 22**) and thus a spiritual kingdom. Mount Zion represents all that Christians hope for in the next life and that for which they are willing to make great sacrifices in this life. Just as Esau had to make a choice between a bowl of stew and God's promised blessings, so the readers must choose between a present, earthly, Jewish kingdom (Mount Sinai) with its earthly temple, or God's promised eternal kingdom (Mount Zion).

So what is it about Mount Sinai that our author wants us to grasp? The sensory events accompanying the giving of the law were numerous, spectacular, and impressive. One could not ask for more impressive or substantial proof, not only of God's existence, but

of His majesty, power, and holiness. In spite of their immediate impact on the Israelites, these awesome manifestations of God's power and holiness did not produce faith or obedience. God miraculously (and spectacularly) humbled the "gods" of Egypt and then parted the Red Sea for His people to pass through. Shortly after this, He gave Israel His law, accompanied with a grand display of His awesome holiness at Mount Sinai. But after all this, the Israelites still murmured and grumbled and rebelled against God. While they were still at the base of Mount Sinai and Moses was still on the mountain, they had Aaron fashion a golden calf, which they worshipped like the heathen (see **Exodus 32**).

The Hebrew Christians are told that they have not come to Mount Sinai; instead, they have come to Mount Zion...

The Father is referred to as "*the Judge of all*." This is not the designation I would have expected, and yet it makes perfect sense. The revelation of God at Mount Sinai highlighted His holiness, which prompted the Israelites to shrink back in fear. At Mount Zion, God is present as well, and with some of the same evidences of His holiness: (**Revelation 4:2-6a**).

And yet men do not shrink away in fear. Why is this? It is because the Father's wrath has been satisfied by the sacrifice of the Son. . .

They are to hear and to heed what God has spoken through His Son. And they are to learn from Mount Sinai just how serious the consequences are for rejecting God's Word. The author argues here from the lesser to the greater. If God dealt severely with the Israelites for rejecting the warnings He uttered from Mount Sinai, how much greater will the consequences be for rejecting Him (Jesus), who warns us from heaven?

I believe that one of the temptations the Hebrew believers faced was to forsake the simplicity of the gospel and New Testament worship for the splendor and ceremony of Old Covenant worship in the temple at Jerusalem. Little did they realize (though Jesus had clearly told His disciples) that the temple and Jerusalem were soon to be destroyed.

Do these Hebrew saints have a strong attraction to Jerusalem and to Herod's temple? Does there appear to be little glory in the simplicity of New Testament worship – often meeting in houses, and with its symbols being bread and wine? Mount Zion is ahead! And the glory of Mount Zion far surpasses that of Sinai. And Mount Zion will be an "unshakable" kingdom, which will never pass away or diminish in its glory. So, if our kingdom – Mount Zion – is a greater kingdom, with greater glory, and it is "unshakable," then the readers of this great epistle should not be so easily "shaken" by the trials and tribulations of their day, or even of the greater difficulties that are soon to come their way. Looking for an "unshakable" kingdom should produce unshakable saints.

John Piper: You Have Come to Mount Zion --

The Way You Act When You Trust that God is Acting for You

Last week we saw that **verses 12-17** were an exhortation to be strong (**verse 12**) and run a straight race (**verse 13**) and pursue peace and holiness (**verse 14**) and by all means not to be like Esau, who looked at his birthright and gave it up for a single meal (**verses 16-17**). We saw that these commands were based on what God was already doing in us and for us by his loving discipline in **verses 4-11**. Because God is at work for our holiness (**verse 10**) and our peace (**verse 11**) therefore don't fail to obtain this grace (**verse 15**), but "submit" (**verse 9**) to God and pursue the very peace and holiness and strength he is working in you and for you by his loving discipline.

So the exhortations are not ways of getting God to act, but ways you act when you trust that God is already acting for you. So **verses 4-11** (God's action for us) are the basis for **verses 12-17** (our actions in pursuit of peace and holiness). This is so important for your everyday life. It means that the Biblical way to be stirred up to do what you ought to do is to think or consider things about God and his action for you - past, present and especially future. This entire book of Hebrews is written to give you truth about God to think about so that you will not be like Esau who failed to persevere, and did not obtain the grace of God, but was lured into the death trap of short term pleasure - a single meal. . .

Now let me try to paint this big picture again in broad strokes. If you look at the whole chapter, there are what you might call four peaks and four valleys. The peaks are exhortation (or right-doing), and the valleys are motivation (or right-knowing) - reasons to act this way. Let me summarize the four peaks of exhortation.

- Exhortation peak #1 (**verse 1**): Throw off everything that hinders and . . . run with perseverance the race marked out for you. Then comes the valley of motivation in **verses 2-11**.

- Exhortation peak #2 (**verses 12-17**): Be strong, make a straight path, pursue peace and holiness, and don't be like Esau who sold his inheritance for a single meal. Then comes the second valley of motivation in **verses 18-24**.

- Exhortation peak #3 (**verse 25a**): See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. That's what Esau did. Don't do it. Trust God. Don't spurn his grace. Then comes the third valley of motivation in **verses 25b-27**.

- Finally, exhortation peak #4 (**verse 28**): Be thankful for God's promise of an unshakable kingdom and in that grateful hope worship God - serve God - with reverence and awe. Because - and this is the last small but explosive valley of motivation, **verse 29** - because our God is a consuming fire.

William Barclay: To enforce the considerations already urged, the apostle introduces this sublime comparison between the old and new dispensations; **Hebrews 12:18-24**. The object, in accordance with the principal scope of the Epistle, is, to guard them against apostasy. To do this, he shows that under the new dispensation there was much more to hind them to fidelity, and to make apostasy dangerous, than there was under the

old. The main point of the comparison is, that under the Jewish dispensation, everything was adapted to awe the mind, and to restrain by the exhibition of grandeur and of power; but that under the Christian dispensation, while there was as much that was sublime, there was much more that was adapted to win and hold the affections. There were revelations of higher truths. There were more affecting motives to lead to obedience. There was that of which the former was but the type and emblem. There was the clear revelation of the glories of heaven, and of the blessed society there, all adapted to prompt to the earnest desire that they might be our own. The considerations presented in this passage constitute the climax of the argument so beautifully pursued through this Epistle, showing that the Christian system was far superior in every respect to the Jewish. In presenting this closing argument, the apostle first refers to some of the circumstances attending the former dispensation which were designed to keep the people of God from apostasy, and then the considerations of superior weight existing under the Christian economy.

TEXT: Hebrews 13:1-6

TITLE: 3 PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS REGARDING SOCIAL DUTIES

BIG IDEA:

OUR LOVE AND REVERENT SERVICE TO GOD MUST BE COUPLED WITH CULTIVATING:

- **AGGRESSIVE LOVE TOWARDS THE BRETHREN**
- **MARITAL FIDELITY AND**
- **CONFIDENT CONTENTMENT**

INTRODUCTION:

How do we behave towards our Christian brethren? How do we treat our spouse? What is our perspective towards wealth and material possessions? All of these are practical areas where the reality of our faith is tested. If we start to lower our standards and slide away from the truth in these critical social duties, we make ourselves susceptible to falling away from the faith. These are all areas where we need to be purposeful to cultivate and maintain Christ like love and dependence.

F. F. Bruce: What follows in **Ch. 13** resembles the usual assortment of ethical and practical admonition and personal information with which New Testament epistles tend to close. Why this document should end like an epistle although it does not begin like one is a general problem of introduction.

I. (:1-3) PRACTICAL EXHORTATION TO AGGRESSIVE LOVE

A. (:1) Summary: Love for the Brethren

“Let love of the brethren continue.”

Speaking of brotherly love (*philadelphia*)

Hewitt: the action of some readers in neglecting the assembly for Christian worship and fellowship revealed a danger of the Christian bond of love being severed, and so the exhortation to continue was of special importance.

J. Ligon Duncan: He’s talking about a Gospel-based love for one another because you’re brothers and sisters in Christ, and that means loving people who are not like you but who are part of your church family and part of your Christian family and we ought to be deliberate in that.

F. F. Bruce: If a weakening of faith and resolution among the recipients of this epistle led to a weakening of the bonds that united them to their fellow-Christians, this would add urgency to the plea that brotherly love should *continue* among them.

S. Lewis Johnson: You’ve heard people say, “I love all the saints; but some I love better

at a distance.” Well, that’s not Christian love. “I love them all, but there are some I don’t like.” Well, that’s not Christian love either. Those may be facts about our human experience, but they’re not Christian expressions. It certainly is not the ideal. “Let brotherly love continue.” In fact, we all know that the only way in which we can love brethren is by the divine love that is in our hearts by virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit. And so we all need to call upon the Holy Spirit within to enable us to love our Christian brethren and sisters.

Lists 3 specific cases where we need to be reminded to persevere in our love for the brethren – these are cases where we might easily overlook our responsibilities

B. (:2) Love for Strangers

1. Reminder

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,”

The primary reference (since the context is brotherly love within the body of Christ) was probably to itinerant Christian ministers or other Christian brethren who were travelling for business or other purposes.

F. F. Bruce: Inns throughout the Roman Empire were places of doubtful repute . . . and would provide very uncongenial company for Christians.

David Guzik: Hospitality is an important virtue, and often it is commanded of Christians and leaders (**Romans 12:10-13; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7-8; 1 Peter 4:9**). In the ancient world, “motels,” where they did exist, were notorious for immorality. It was important for traveling Christians to find open homes from other Christians. This was simply a practical way to let brotherly love continue. Because of the free offer of hospitality, Christians had to watch out for people just masquerading as Christians so they could leech off the generosity of God’s people. As time went on, Christian leaders taught their people how to recognize these kind of deceivers.

2. Reason = Opportunity

“for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Gen. 18-19; Matt. 25:44-45

Kent: The author does not mean that Christians should entertain strangers chiefly with the hope of being honored with supernatural visitors, but he has mentioned this feature to show how God is pleased when this sort of love is displayed.

C. (:3a) Love for Prisoners

1. Reminder

“Remember the prisoners,”

Mohler: In the first century, prisons were not places one was sent to for any length of time. Prison was a place where one was held for trial or for debts. If you were in prison, you were most likely there because of your failure to repay a significant debt.

Jesus's parables make this clear. You were more or less incarcerated until you could come up with enough money to buy your release. Otherwise, you would eventually be sold into slavery.

2. Reason = Identification and Empathy
“as though in prison with them,”

Kent: The passage may reflect the tendency of some in times of persecution to show indifference to their persecuted brethren, and thus escape suffering themselves. This would be especially tempting to Jewish Christians who were toying with the idea of reverting to Judaism.

Pulpit Commentary: The Hebrews were to “remember” the saints who might be in prison. They were to do so “as bound with them;”—a beautiful expression, breathing the aroma of true Christian sympathy. They were to pray earnestly for them, if possible visit them, minister to their wants, and strive to secure their liberation. Brotherly kindness would lead them to conceive of themselves as occupying the position of the sufferers. It would cause them to realize the “bonds” of their brethren as an affliction personal to themselves, just as the elder Brother’s love does (**Acts 9:4**). But, since imprisonment is not the only calamity to which believers are exposed, the apostle proceeds to bespeak sympathy for all who in any way “*are evil entreated*” for Jesus’ sake. We ourselves are liable to the same adversities which our brethren endure. Let us, therefore, identify ourselves with them. It is not enough that we contribute to public charities. Neither do we discharge all our duty when we employ some person as our proxy to care for the sufferers. True Christian sympathy requires that we bring ourselves into personal contact with them. Strength is often received from the glance of a sympathizing eye, or the grasp of a loving hand, or the utterance of a tender word of holy comfort

D. (:3b) Love for the Mistreated

1. Reminder
“and those who are ill-treated,”

In the text, this exhortation is combined with the one above relating to love for prisoners; but I have broken it out separately because it follows the same pattern of **Reminder** followed by **Reason**

These are brethren who have been persecuted or otherwise mistreated because of their faith in Jesus Christ

2. Reason = Family Empathy
“since you yourselves also are in the body.”

Kent: they were still in a physical body and thus susceptible to similar treatment. There is no warrant for understanding *en somati* as though it meant “*the body of Christ,*” as that idea is not as clear in this passage as the explanation above.

II. (:4) PRACTICAL EXHORTATION TO MARITAL FIDELITY – ADDRESSING LOVE WITHIN THE CONFINES OF MARRIAGE

A. Command

*“Let marriage be held in honor among all,
and let the marriage bed be undefiled;”*

you need to have a high view of the sanctity of marriage as an institution ordained by God

F. F. Bruce: Here is no exaltation of celibacy as something inherently superior to marriage; the marriage union is divinely ordained, and its sacred precincts must not be polluted by the intrusion of a third part, of either sex.

Kent: the order to keep marriage honorable and the marriage bed undefiled by any act of unfaithfulness implies that marriage is inherently pure unless sin sullies it. Thus ascetic views which impugn the sanctity of marriage are also ruled out by this passage, even though that was probably not the chief purpose of the writer at this juncture.

Kent Hughes: Christian sexual morality was unique in the pagan world and a source of wonder. And it has become increasingly so today in a world that considers adultery irrelevant, purity abnormal, and sex a “right” (however and with whomever one may get it) and that has invented the egregious term “recreational sex.” We Christians are called to be outrageously pure—to be a source of wonder and even derision to this glandular world. From the beginning to the end of Hebrews, the abiding concern of the author has been to so instruct the tiny Hebrew church that it would stay afloat on the increasingly hostile seas of first-century Roman culture. Their ship was a microscopic dot on the massive billows of the official pagan/secular enterprise—and eminently vulnerable. It appeared to outside eyes that the external forces could sink it at will. But the author knew that the internal threat to the church was far more deadly. In fact, he knew that it could ride out any storm if things were right on the inside. He knows that nothing will sink a church faster than moral wavering in respect to sex, materialism, or mental outlook. Here is intimate advice regarding how to keep our ship afloat. It is so essential that any church that ignores it will founder and possibly even sink.

B. Warning

“for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Society would do well to take this admonition seriously; you might think that your indiscretions are not detected, but God will judge in the end.

MacArthur: God is serious about sexual purity--very serious. You may fool around with illicit sex, you may fool around outside your marriage, and you may get away with it from the judgment of man standpoint, but you'll never get away with it from the judgment of God.

Ray Stedman: Nonconformity to the world must certainly involve these areas. The loose sexual standards of our generation and the intense materialistic spirit of this age constitute a constant peril to our hearts, and we must beware of them. We must realize that God has undertaken to sustain the sacredness of marriage and that He unceasingly, unrelentingly judges violations of it. Therefore, we dare not heed the fine sounding declarations being made today about a "new morality," as though we had passed beyond the ancient standards and they no longer had significance.

As this writer reminds us, God judges the immoral and adulterous. He does not mean that God looses lightning bolts from heaven against them, or that he causes terrible diseases to come upon them; these are not the forms of judgment. But we can see the judgment of God in the terrible tempest of mental pressures and crackups which sweep like a plague across this land. They are due to the breakdown of moral standards. The certain deterioration of life is the judgment of God when sex standards are violated. It is the brutalization of humanity, so men become like animals and live on the level of animals. This is so apparent in our day.

III. (:5-6) PRACTICAL EXHORTATION TO CONFIDENT CONTENTMENT -- ADDRESSING THE LOVE OF MONEY

A. (:5a) Command

*"Let your character be free from the love of money,
being content with what you have;"*

Hewitt: The Christian's habits of thought and life in connection with money are a touchstone of his character. Such habits must be free from covetousness and avarice, for the love of money can be as detrimental to a man's spiritual life as sensuality.

Kenneth Wuest: The word "*content*" is the translation of *arkeo* "to be possessed of unfailing strength, to be strong, to suffice, to be enough," finally, "to be satisfied, contented." The underlying thought is that one should be satisfied with that which meets our need, and not desire a superfluity. The cognate noun of this verb is compounded with the personal pronoun "self" in **Philippians 4:11** to mean "self-sufficient." This latter word was used by the Stoics to express the favorite doctrine of the sect, that man should be sufficient to himself for all things, able by the power of his will to resist the shock of circumstance. Paul was self-sufficient because he was Christ-dependent. The word "*content*," therefore, in our Hebrew passage means more than "satisfied." It refers to the ability of the Christian dependent upon the Holy Spirit, to be independent of outward circumstances.

Donald Guthrie: Contentment means more than passive acceptance of the inevitable.

B. (:5b-6) Encouragement

1. (:5b) God's Promise

"for He Himself has said,

'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,'”

Kent: Encouragement is found in the promise of God made to Joshua, and recorded in **Deuteronomy 31:6, 8:** *I will never desert you, nor ever abandon you.* The same promise was cited by David to his son Solomon (**1 Chron. 28:20**). The assurance of God’s personal presence and care should prevent materialistic notions that wealth alone can solve our problems.

2. (:6) Our Confidence

*“so that we confidently say,
‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?’”*

Mohler: The source of our contentment is not the security and comfort we get from owning enough things; it’s that we serve a God who takes care of us. We serve a God who will never leave or forsake us.

J. Ligon Duncan: if God is the one who is my helper, sovereign God, what can man do to me? So for those reasons, for the presence and the providence of God, for the character and the sovereignty of God, we don’t love money.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is distinctly Christian about brotherly love?
- 2) What hospitality have you shown to complete strangers?
- 3) How has the sexual content of TV and movies undermined the sanctity of marriage and contributed to the overall “sexual revolution” in our culture?
- 4) What are some practical things we can do to make sure that we keep ourselves free from the love of money and trusting for our security in the Lord’s care for us?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

A. W. Pink: "*let... continue*" includes the idea of enduring in the face of difficulties and temptations. That which is enjoined is perseverance in a pure and unselfish affection toward fellow-Christians. Brotherly love is a tender plant which requires much attention: if it be not watched and watered, it quickly wilts. It is an exotic, for it is not a native of the soil of fallen human nature—*“hateful and hating one another”* (**Titus 3:3**) is a solemn description of what we were in our unregenerate state. Yes, brotherly love is a very tender plant and quickly affected by the cold air of unkindness, easily nipped by

the frost of harsh words. If it is to thrive, it must needs be carefully protected and diligently cultivated... Yes, a most needful exhortation is this: not only because hatred so largely sways the world, but also because of the state of Christendom. Here is a searching question which each of us should honestly face: Is my love for the brethren keeping pace with my growing (intellectual) knowledge of the Truth? "Let brotherly love continue." What a solemn word is this! Is the reader startled by that adjective?—a needful and humbling one, but scarcely a "solemn." Ah, have we forgotten the context? Look at the verse which immediately precedes, and remember that when this epistle was first written there were no chapter-breaks: **Heb 12:29** and **Heb 13:1** read consecutively, without any hiatus—*our God is a consuming fire: let brotherly love continue!* The fact these two verses are placed in immediate juxtaposition strikes a most solemn note.

John Owen: Brotherly love is very apt to be impaired if we do not endeavor continually to preserve it. It is a part of the wisdom of faith to consider aright the occasions of the decay of mutual love, and the means of its preservation. Without this we cannot comply with this caution and injunction in a due manner.

I. The CAUSES OF THE DECAY OF THIS LOVE, whence it doth not continue as it ought, are —

1. Self-love.
2. Love of this present world.
3. Abounding of lusts in the hearts of men.
4. Ignorance of the true nature, both of the grace and the exercise of it, in its proper duties.
5. Principally, the loss of a concernment in the foundation of it, which is an interest in gratuitous adoption, and the participation of the same spirit, the same new nature and life. Where this is not, though conviction of truth and the profession of it may for a season make an appearance of this brotherly love, it will not long continue.

II. THE OCCASIONS OF ITS DECAY AND LOSS ARE —

1. Differences in opinion and practice about things in religion.
2. Unsuitableness of natural tempers and inclinations.
3. Readiness to receive a sense of appearing provocations.
4. Different, and sometimes inconsistent secular interests.
5. An abuse of spiritual gifts, by pride on the one hand, or envy on the other.
6. Attempts for domination, inconsistent in a fraternity; which are all to be watched against.

III. THE MEANS OF ITS CONTINUANCE OR PRESERVATION ARE —

1. An endeavour to grow and thrive in the principle of it, or the power of adopting grace.
2. A due sense of the weight or moment of this duty, from the especial institution and command of Christ.

3. Of the trial which is committed thereunto, of the sincerity of our grace, and the truth of our sanctification. For “by this we know that we are passed from death unto life.”
4. A due consideration of the use, yea, necessity of this duty to the glory of God, and edification of the Church; and —
5. Of that breach of union, loss of peace, disorder and confusion, which must and will ensue on the neglect of it.
6. Constant watchfulness against all those vicious habits of mind, in self-love, or love of the world, which are apt to impair it.
7. Diligent heed that it be not insensibly impaired in its vital acts; such as are patience, forbearance, readiness to forgive, unaptness to believe evil, without which no other duties of it will be long continued.
8. Fervent prayer for supplies of grace enabling us thereunto, with sundry others of a like nature. And if we judge not this duty of such importance as to be constant in the use of these means for the maintenance of it, it will not continue.

Deffinbaugh: Keeping the Faith

It should be relatively easy to see that brotherly love was vitally important to these Hebrew saints. The question, then, is this: “What does brotherly love look like?” What are the practical outworkings of brotherly love in the context of the church? This is what **verses 2-6** spell out for us. Brotherly love practices hospitality toward strangers, remembers those in prison and those suffering persecution for their faith, honors marriage, and maintains a lifestyle that is free from the love of money, trusting rather in God. Let’s consider each of these aspects of brotherly love in greater detail.

Steven Cole: Let Love Continue – Heb. 13:1-3

We must focus on loving fellow believers, being hospitable, and helping those who suffer because of their faith.

1. We must focus on loving fellow believers (13:1).

The Greek word, *philadelphia*, focuses on the natural love that exists between brothers and sisters in a family. There is not a great difference between it and the more commonly used *agape*. Next to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, biblical love is the supreme mark of the Christian. It is mandatory for every Christian to grow in love! Note four things:

A. BIBLICAL LOVE REQUIRES ATTENTION AND EFFORT.

Sometimes we think that love should be spontaneous and effortless. But biblical love is not automatic! If you don’t focus on it and work at it, it easily flows away. Did you give any thought last week as to how to love your mate and children? Did you pray that God would increase your love for that difficult person in your family or at church or at work (see **Phil. 1:9**)? I recommend that you put **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** on a card and read it over so often that it guides all of your relationships. Don’t let love flow away!

B. BIBLICAL LOVE IS FOUNDED ON GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR US IN THE GOSPEL.

C. BIBLICAL LOVE WILL NOT CONTINUE UNLESS WE FIGHT AGAINST THE COMMON HINDRANCES TO LOVE IN OUR OWN HEARTS.

The Hebrews had been doing well in this area, but now the author exhorts them to continue in it. Otherwise, it will easily flow away. There are many hindrances to love, but note these five:

- (1). WE MUST FIGHT AGAINST SELF-LOVE AND SELFISHNESS.
- (2). WE MUST FIGHT AGAINST PRIDE.
- (3). WE MUST FIGHT AGAINST IMPATIENCE AND INTOLERANCE OF OTHERS' IMPERFECTIONS.
- (4). WE MUST FIGHT AGAINST THE LOVE OF THE WORLD.
- (5). WE MUST FIGHT AGAINST A SECTARIAN SPIRIT.

D. BIBLICAL LOVE MUST BE DEVELOPED.

- (1). GROW TO BE LIKE JESUS.
- (2). SEEK TO SERVE, NOT TO BE SERVED.
- (3). DEVELOP A GENUINE INTEREST IN OTHERS.

2. We must focus on being hospitable (13:2).

3. We must focus on helping those who suffer because of their faith in Christ (13:3).

Steven Cole: Cultivating Contentment – Hebrews 13:5-6

Though rare, contentment is not just nice for believers. The participle implies a command: "*Be[ing] content with what you have.*" To grumble about our circumstances is to challenge the love and goodness of our heavenly Father. To be discontented implies that He has not provided us with what we need. Discontent was the sin of Israel in the wilderness. God had just miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt and He was miraculously meeting their needs, yet they grumbled about their hardships and threatened to return to Egypt.

The exhortation of our text may stem from what the author said in 10:34, where he reminded them that in the former days (10:32), "you ... accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting

one.” But now they needed endurance (10:36). Perhaps after their property had been unlawfully seized, anxiety had set in. Some of them now were focused on regaining their possessions, no matter what it required. But, pursuing material things can easily cross the line into loving them. And the love of money or things (13:5) is opposed to the love of the brethren (13:1). So the author calls them to contentment and shows them how to cultivate this rare, but essential, Christian jewel.

Contentment is cultivated by pulling the weeds of greed and by building your life on God and His promises.

1. Contentment must be cultivated.

A. THE WORLD CONSTANTLY SEEKS TO MAKE US FEEL DISCONTENTED.

B. CONTENTMENT DOES NOT GROW WITHOUT CULTIVATION AND MAINTENANCE.

2. Contentment is cultivated by constantly pulling the weeds of greed.

A. TO PULL THE WEEDS OF GREED, ACKNOWLEDGE GOD’S OWNERSHIP OF ALL THAT YOU HAVE.

B. TO PULL THE WEEDS OF GREED, PUT YOUR TREASURE WHERE YOU WANT YOUR HEART TO BE.

C. TO PULL THE WEEDS OF GREED, LIVE IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY.

D. TO PULL THE WEEDS OF GREED, MAKE IT YOUR AIM TO GIVE MORE, NOT TO ACCUMULATE MORE.

3. Contentment comes by building your life on God and His promises.

A. CONTENTMENT COMES THROUGH BUILDING YOUR LIFE ON GOD HIMSELF, NOT ON SOMETHING YOU WANT HIM TO GIVE YOU.

B. CONTENTMENT COMES THROUGH BUILDING YOUR LIFE ON GOD’S CERTAIN PROMISES.

(1). BUILD YOUR LIFE ON GOD’S PROMISE NEVER TO DESERT OR FORSAKE YOU.

(2). BUILD YOUR LIFE ON GOD’S PROMISE TO BE YOUR HELPER.

Conclusion

Henry Kissinger observed, “To Americans usually tragedy is wanting something very badly and not getting it. Many people have had to learn in their private lives, and nations have had to learn in their historical experience, that perhaps the worst form of tragedy is wanting something badly, getting it, and finding it empty” (cited by Swenson, p. 196).

So, where do you begin to cultivate contentment that will never disappoint? You have to start in the right place. **A. W. Tozer** had it right when he said, “The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One” (*The Pursuit of God* [Christian Publications], p. 20). A Puritan sat down to his meal and found that he had only a little bread and some water. His response was to exclaim, “What? All this and Jesus Christ, too!” **George Muller** used to say that the first business of every day is to be truly at rest and happy in God (Pierson, pp. 257, 315). Start there! And make sure to spend some time each day pulling the weeds of greed.

TEXT: Hebrews 13:7-17

TITLE: PRACTICAL EXHORTATION REGARDING RELIGIOUS DUTIES

BIG IDEA:

SUSTAINING PERSEVERANCE REQUIRES:

- **STABILITY IN GRACE AND FAITH**
- **SACRIFICES OF PRAISE AND GOOD WORKS AND**
- **SUBMISSION TO OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS**

INTRODUCTION:

This closing section of practical exhortations that center around religious duties as compared to our social obligations seems on the surface to be very random. Yet we can immediately see structure from the parallel opening and closing injunctions to pay heed to our spiritual leaders – both to those that initially led us and faithfully taught us the Word as well as to those who are currently in that role of authority and shepherding. One must view these instructions from the overall perspective of the book as a whole. These are critical components to maintaining our perseverance in the faith. They build upon the doctrinal exposition of the superiority of the New Covenant with its superior sacrifice, priesthood and sanctuary. These Jewish believers must be committed to a life of separation – of fully leaving behind the types of Levitical worship with its special dietary instructions and its system of feasts and ceremonial cleansings, in order to go outside the camp and bear the reproach of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross to provide spiritual cleansing and future access to the city of God.

Mohler: To the casual observer, this final section of Hebrews might seem somewhat disjointed, in much the same way that those who read a military briefing from World War II today might find that account disjointed. In a military briefing, a commanding officer informs troops about the battle plan, provides tactical information, makes clarifications, and gives personal instruction. Troops receiving such a briefing would certainly see the instructions as coherent, but we, being so far removed from the original situation, would find it perplexing. This is why these concluding commands in **Hebrews 13** might seem disconnected to us. **Hebrews 13:7-14** is a commanding officer's last order of business with his troops. It was a word they needed to hear then, and it is a word we still need to hear now.

I. (:7-9) SUSTAINING PERSEVERANCE REQUIRES STABILITY IN GRACE AND FAITH CENTERED IN THE IMMUTABILITY OF JESUS CHRIST

A. (:7) Stability Imitates the Faith of Our Former Godly Spiritual Leaders

1. Appreciate Faithful Spiritual Leaders

a. Their Leadership

“Remember those who led you,”

Mohler: The command to “remember” is a call to look back.

- b. Their Teaching
“*who spoke the word of God to you;*”

2. Aspire to Imitate Their Faith

- a. Their Life
“*and considering the result of their conduct,*”
- b. Their Faith
“*imitate their faith.*”

Kent: Present leaders are referred to in **verse 17**. . . It was their first leaders who had brought to these readers the word of God. They needed to remember the results of those early days, how a real work of God’s grace had been accomplished through the ministry of their faithful leaders. Eventually these leaders had passed from the scene. It need not be inferred that they had all died martyrs’ deaths, although some may have. The real importance was that all had been faithful to the end. None had wavered and given up faith in Christ. Let these readers continue imitating that steadfast example. May not even one fail to arrive at the goal.

F. F. Bruce: Those who planted this community of Christians and fostered it by the ministry of the word of God and the example of a life of faith had run the race unwavering to the end; what they had done their followers could also do. It is not necessary to suppose that they had suffered martyrdom; but like the heroes of **Chapter 11** they “*died in faith.*”

B. (:8) Stability Centers in the Immutability of Jesus Christ

“*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.*”

Why is it relevant to consider the faithful lives of our former spiritual leaders and to ground ourselves in the traditional Christian doctrine which they taught? Because of the immutability of Jesus Christ. Our spiritual walk should be consistent with theirs and our doctrine should be the same as theirs. We serve an unchanging Savior. The Old Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant with its focus on the sacrifice of Christ and His eternal priesthood. Jesus Christ will never be replaced.

F. F. Bruce: Yet they died; they lived on in the memory of those who had known them, but they were no longer available for consultation and wise guidance as they had once been. Jesus Christ, by contrast, was always available, unchanging from year to year. . . He never needs to be replaced, and nothing can be added to His perfect work.

Leon Morris: Earthly leaders come and go, but he is always there.

1. Unchanging in His Person

Images of immutability and stability:

a. Jesus as our **Anchor** in the midst of any storm

- our hearts are prone to wander – set our hope completely on the promises of God about our salvation in Jesus Christ – **Heb. 6:19-20** “*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*” We need an emotional anchor

- in terms of doctrine and truth, we are easily blown around by counterfeit teachings and the philosophy of the world – **Ephes. 4:14** “*As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming*” – We need a doctrinal anchor

b. Jesus as our **Rock**, our fortress, our high tower, our place of refuge and protection

Herman Bavink (Dutch theologian): The doctrine of God’s immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, in him alone, for only he is pure being and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture God is often called the Rock . . .

Jesus is the Rock we can depend upon with confidence because His attributes never change – they remain the same. He continues steadfast in His love for His sheep. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. He is a rock in that sense. He continues steadfast in His goodness in His dealings with us – **James 1:17** “*Every good thing given and ever perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.*” That is because God is a steadfast Rock.

c. Jesus as our **Sure Foundation**, which will never be shaken

J. I. Packer: Examine God’s two disclosures of His “*name*” in the book of Exodus. God’s revealed “*name*” is, of course, more than label; it is a revelation of what He is, in relation to men. In **Exodus 3**, we read how God announced His name to Moses as “*I am that I am*” (**verse 14**) – a phrase of which “*Yahweh*” (Jehovah, “*the LORD*”) is, in effect, a shortened form (**verse 15**). This “*name*” is not a description of God, but simply a declaration of His self-existence, and His eternal changelessness; a reminder to mankind that He has life in Himself, and that what He is now, He is eternally. In **Exodus 34**, however, we read how God “*proclaimed the name of the LORD*” to Moses by listing the various facets of His holy character. “*The LORD, the LORD (Yahweh), a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children . . .*” (**verses 5 ff RSV**). This proclamation supplements that of Exodus 3 by telling us what in fact Yahweh is; and that of **Exodus 3** supplements this

by telling us that God is forever what at that moment, three thousand years ago, He told Moses that He was. God's moral character is changeless.

2. Unchanging in His Purposes

a. The **Call to Discipleship**: *“Deny yourself; take up your cross daily and **Follow Me**”* –

Our Relationship to the Lord Jesus --

- Involves a call to Wholehearted Commitment – *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; -- **Luke 10:27***

- Involves a call to Holiness – *“Be ye holy, for I am holy”* – (**1 Pet. 1:15-16**)

- Involves a call to Humility – *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus”* (**Phil. 2**) -- the path of a servant is the one Jesus trod

b. The **Call to Evangelism**: *“**Follow Me** and I will make you Fishers of Men”*

Our Relationship to the Lost --

- must have compassion for the lost – you have to love to fish – book title: “I’m Glad You Asked”
- must go where the fish are – look at the effort fishermen put into scoping out a good spot
- must use attractive bait – sufficiency of the Word of God
- must be patient and persevere
- must trust God for the results – look at the disciples – fished all night and caught nothing; but when Jesus told them to cast their nets into the waters again, the nets could not contain the catch; fields are white unto harvest

The message of the gospel has not changed – many false gospels out there ... but only one has the power to deliver from sin and from hell

c. The **Call to Security**: *“Fear not for I am with you”*

Our Relationship to Self --

Great Commission – Go and *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age”*
Financial security, emotional, physical, etc.

Is. 46:9-11 *“Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure; Calling a bird of prey from*

the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.”

Packer: It is true that there is a group of texts (**Gen. 6:6 f.; 1 Sam. 15:11; 2 Sam. 24:16; Jonah 3:10; Joel 2:13 f.**) which speak of God as **repenting**. The reference in each case is to a reversal of God’s previous treatment of particular men, consequent upon their reaction to that treatment. But there is no suggestion that this reaction was not foreseen, or that it took God by surprise, and was not provided for in His eternal plan. No change in His eternal purpose is implied when He begins to deal with a man in a new way.

3. Unchanging in His Promises

a. Jesus, **the Bridegroom of the Church**, returning to enjoy the wedding feast with His beloved

1) Preparation of the Groom: **John 14:1-4** “*I go to prepare a place for you*”

2) Preparation of the Bride: **Rev. 19:7-10** “*Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.*”

Is the bride getting herself prepared? Are we alert and watching?

We had better not be found to be adulterers, to be unfaithful; “*Friendship with the world is enmity to God*”

b. Jesus, **the Faithful Judge** – the one who will reward each according to what he has sown; the one who sees all; the one to whom we are accountable

The Father has committed all judgment to the Son; we don’t have to agonize over trying to get a fair shake in this life – this life is not fair; but the Righteous Judge will settle all accounts

“*as a man sows, so shall he also reap*” = universal harvest principle

How should we live in light of the urgency of the Judge standing at the door, ready to enter His courtroom?

c. Jesus, **the Reigning King** – just as He fulfilled in every detail, the promises of His First Coming as the precious Lamb of God; we look forward to Him returning as the reigning King over all

“*God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him, the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,*

to the glory of God the Father.” Phil. 2:9-11

1) History Will Accomplish God’s Kingdom Purposes

2) There is Victory in Jesus

We will have the privilege of reigning with Him; sharing in His inheritance forever

Amazing Grace lyrics:

*“When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise Than when we first begun.”*

C. (:9) Stability Feeds on the Grace of God Consistent with Traditional Christian Doctrine

1. Avoid Being Misled by Strange New Teachings

“Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings;”

Richard Phillips: The charge of novelty was leveled against the Protestant Reformers by the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. The Reformers took the charge seriously, acknowledging that if it were true, it would condemn their teaching. They were eager to show, and did so effectively, that theirs were not new but rather the old and original doctrines of Christianity. The truths of the Reformation were found in the writings of the early church fathers and derived from the apostles and prophets in the Bible.

2. Absorb the Healthy Nourishment of Grace

a. Grace Strengthens

“for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace,”

b. Other Foods are Not Healthy

“not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited.”

Kent: It is not by observing distinctions about meats that men grow strong spiritually. It is by grace – God’s favor bestowed upon believers in Christ – that Christians are brought to maturity. The readers needed greater stability in doctrine.

Richard Phillips: The warning here does not seem to be about abstention but rather about eating sacramental means that supposedly provide spiritual benefit. . . The point is that spiritual strength does not come to us by what we eat, but by grace, which is received through faith.

II. (:10-16) SUSTAINING PERSEVERANCE REQUIRES SACRIFICES OF PRAISE AND GOOD WORKS AS WE IDENTIFY WITH THE REPROACH OF CHRIST AND FOCUS ON THE CITY TO COME

A. (:10-14) Identify with Christ

1. (:10-12) Appreciate the Superior Sacrifice of Christ

a. (:10) Superior Altar in the New Covenant System

“We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.”

Bruce Hurt: What the writer is saying is that the Levitical priests (who hold to the Old Covenant sacrificial system) have no right, no permission, to "eat" at our altar (the Cross of Christ). While what it means to "eat" is debated, don't miss the point that the Levitical priests cannot place their faith in both the Old Covenant of the Law and also the New Covenant of Grace. If they hold to the old system, they have no part, no right, to partake of the new system.

So in this section, the writer again takes up his central theme of the sacrifice of Christ, which contrasts with and is superior to the Levitical (animal) sacrificial system. Recall that he had just exhorted his readers to ***"be strengthened by grace not by foods"*** (Heb 10:9) and now proceeds to continue the thought by making an allusion to eating, albeit in the present context it is not eating literal foods, but "eating" the "spiritual food" provided by Christ.

b. (:11) Significance of Suffering Outside the Camp under Levitical System

“For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp.”

c. (:12) Significance of Jesus Suffering Outside the Gate under the New Covenant System

“Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”

Mohler: what makes Jesus's suffering outside the gates far superior to that of the Old Testament animals is what his suffering accomplishes: Jesus suffers outside the gates *“so that he might sanctify the people by his own blood.”* His blood actually makes believers holy. This astonishing reality once again reveals that the old covenant sin offerings pointed to the better new covenant offering of Jesus Christ's blood.

F. F. Bruce: the sacrifice of Christ is a better sacrifice, not only because the spiritual antitype is superior to the material type, but also because those who enter the heavenly sanctuary *“by the blood of Jesus”* (Ch. 10:19) know that the One who became their perfect sin-offering is permanently available as the source of their spiritual nourishment and refreshment, as they feed on Him in their hearts by faith.

2. (:13-14) Identify with the Reproach of Christ and Focus on the City to Come

a. (:13) Identify with the Reproach of Christ

*“Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp,
bearing His reproach.”*

Hewitt: no longer must the readers look for salvation in the old forms of Judaism; they must come outside of it to Jesus who cannot be found in Judaism. They must bear His reproach by coming to His cross of shame, which was an object of disgust to the Gentiles, and to the Jews the place of a curse, since they regarded every crucified person as “*accursed of God*” (**Dt. xxi. 22, 23; Gal. iii. 13**). And they must then be prepared to bear the reproach of Christ even if it should lead to excommunication or martyrdom.

Kent: Those who have professed Christ to be their Lord have obligated themselves to follow Him. For Hebrew Christians, that posed some momentous decisions. Jesus had been rejected by Judaism, both literally by crucifixion at the demand of Jewish leaders and symbolically by suffering outside the gate analogous to the sin offering repudiated and burned outside the camp. Were these Jewish Christian readers actually willing to join Jesus outside the camp? Were they willing to accept his reproach as they faced rejection from family, friends, and their religious traditions? The stirring challenge let us go out left them no alternative. The old system had been superseded in the program of God. They must leave the camp of Judaism and come wholeheartedly to an identification of themselves with Christ.

Richard Phillips: The writer of Hebrews has referred to this, our heavenly situation, as being within the veil (**6:19; 10:20**). We are brought near to God, with Christ in his heavenly dwelling, as God’s children, his people, his flock. Therefore by faith we see that outside the camp is truly within the veil with Christ.

b. (:14) Focus on the City to Come

*“For here we do not have a lasting city,
but we are seeking the city which is to come.”*

Kent: Doubtless the chief culprit in the struggle faced by the readers was the attractiveness of the earthly system which they had known all their lives. Judaism had its physical worship center, its visible priests, its tangible sacrifices, and its ancestral traditions which were not easily cast aside. They must be reminded that all Christians (whether Jewish or Gentile) are strangers and aliens on earth (**11:13**), and have no continuing city – that is, no permanent associations with organizations that are only earthly. Rather we must be like Abraham and have our gaze fixed on the one to come (**11:10, 16**). Eternal and spiritual verities must occupy our thoughts and constitute our goal in place of earthly institutions, however honorable may have been their function.

B. (:15-16) Offer Sacrifices of Praise and Good Works

1. (:15) Offer Sacrifices of Praise

*“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise
to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”*

Kent: Through him occupies the emphatic position in this statement, stressing that it is through Christ alone, not through any Levitical mediation, that worshipers truly come to God. No longer are animal sacrifices necessary, but this does not mean that Christians offer no sacrifices at all.

Richard Phillips: In terms of Old Testament Judaism, this sacrifice refers to the thank offering, which was offered not to make atonement for sin but in gratitude for salvation and for the many gifts God has given. . . This was the highest expression of religion in Judaism, an occasional and special mark of piety, but now it is to characterize the whole of our lives as children of God. . .

Jesus said that the Father is seeking worshipers to worship him in spirit and in truth (**John 4:23-24**). It is for this that we are saved, to live sacrificially unto him, to offer a lifestyle of worship, for the blessing of others and for the glory of his name.

2. (:16) Offer Sacrifices of Good Works

*“And do not neglect doing good and sharing;
for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*

Hewitt: Moffatt rightly points out that the three great definitions of worship or religious service in the New Testament (here, and in **Rom. xii. 1 f.** and **Jas i. 27**) are all inward and ethical.

F. F. Bruce: Christianity is sacrificial through and through; it is founded on the one self-offering of Christ, and the offering of His people’s praise and property, of their service and their lives, is caught up into the perfection of His acceptable sacrifice, and is accepted in Him.

III. (:17) SUSTAINING PERSEVERANCE REQUIRES SUBMISSION TO OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS AS THEY KEEP WATCH OVER OUR SOULS

A. Responsibility of the Flock – Obey and Submit

*“Obey your leaders,”
and submit to them;”*

Hewitt: In **verse 7** the readers were exhorted to remember those spiritual leaders who had passed on, and especially their consistency in life and doctrine. They are now urged to obey those spiritual leaders who were still in their midst, and to submit themselves to their authority, for in them the same consistency in life and doctrine is found.

B. Responsibility of the Shepherds -- Oversight

*“for they keep watch over your souls,
as those who will give an account.”*

C. Responsibility of the Flock – Support a Profitable Outcome

*“Let them do this with joy and not with grief,
for this would be unprofitable for you.”*

Kent: Parishioners who are spiritually sluggish, or rebellious, or who lack the vision to move forward in the exercise of their Christian privileges, or who become enamored with every doctrinal innovation promoted by some spellbinding advocate, cause much heartache to those charged with their spiritual care.

Richard Phillips: Six reasons are given for this obedience and submission.

- The first is found in the word “*leaders*,” which may also be translated as “guides.” True spiritual leaders are those who go before the flock into the Word of God, into prayer, and into the Christian life.
- Second, because their authority comes from Christ.
- Third and fourth, these leaders “*are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.*” They are gifted by God for rule and Christian teaching.
- Fifth, our obedience is what makes spiritual leadership a joy and not a burden.
- Finally, this verse concludes that it is no advantage to us for our ministers to be burdened by division and strife and unbelief in the church.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Who are some former spiritual leaders that provided a good example for you to follow?
- 2) How difficult is it for you to bear the reproach of Christ and identify with Him to the point of participating in the fellowship of His sufferings?
- 3) What are some of the strange and new teachings offered up today in the context of evangelical Christianity that must be avoided?
- 4) What are some of the nuances of differences between obedience and submission to spiritual leaders in the church?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

A. W. Tozer: Mal. 3:6 “*For I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*”

Now there is in God no mutation possible. As it says in James, “*with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (1:17) – there is no variation due to change . . . Incidentally, He’s the only One in the universe that can say that, And He did say it!

He simply says that He never changes, that there is no change possible in God. God never differs from Himself. If you get a hold of this, it can be to you an anchor in the storm, a hiding place in danger. There is no possibility of changing in God. And God never differs from Himself.

Grudem: If we stop for a moment to imagine what it would be like if God *could* change, the importance of this doctrine becomes more clear. For example, if God could change (in his being, perfections, purposes, or promises), then any change would be either for the better or for the worse. But if God changed for the better, then he was not the best possible being when we first trusted him. And how could we be sure that he is the best possible being now? But if God could change for the worse (in his very *being*), then what kind of God might he become? . . . How could we ever trust such a God who could change? How could we ever commit our lives to him? Our faith and hope and knowledge all ultimately depend on a person who is infinitely worthy of trust – because he is absolutely and eternally unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises.

J. I. Packer: Where is the sense of distance and difference, then, between believers in Bible times and ourselves? It is excluded. On what grounds? On the grounds that God does not change. Fellowship with Him, trust in His word, living by faith, “standing on the promises of God”, are essentially the same realities for us today as they were for Old and New Testament believers. This thought brings comfort as we enter into the perplexities of each day: amid all the changes and uncertainties of life in a nuclear age, God and His Christ remain the same – almighty to save. But the thought brings a searching challenge too. If our God is the same as the God of New Testament believers, how can we justify ourselves in resting content with an experience of communion with Him, and a level of Christian conduct, that falls so far below theirs? *If God is the same, this is not an issue that any one of us can evade.*

Howard Parnell:

1. Health may fail us -- but His strength is made perfect in our weakness.
2. Adversity may crash upon us -- but He draws closer than a brother and whispers, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."
3. Friends may desert us, so that we end up saying with Paul, "No man stood with me." -- But we can also say with him in the next verse, "Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me."
4. And even when death draws near He assures us, "I am the resurrection and the life."
- E. I take great comfort in knowing that my Saviour is referred to in Isa. 9:6 as "the everlasting Father" and as One with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning.

Clark Tanner:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday. He is the eternal Word of God, Who from eternity past has been the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature. And again our hearts can rejoice when we think that from the ages of eternity past, He who exists at once from eternity to eternity, knew us intimately. He knew every sin we would ever commit; every foolish thought; every ungodly word we would speak. He

looked down from the vast corridors of Heaven, before ever speaking even the light into existence, and could see clearly the blackness of our rebellion and the full depths of the chasm of our fall, and knowing all, determined to temporarily lay aside the independent exercise of His own divine attributes, take on the form of a servant, become obedient to the point of death (even death on a cross), and as we're told in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, was made to 'become sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him'. . .

Just as He did not change when he took on flesh, and did not change when He raised in glory from the dark tomb, and did not change when He blessed his apostles and was received by a cloud into Heaven to sit at the Father's right hand, so He will not be a different Jesus Christ, who comes on a white horse, to judge and wage war; His eyes a flame of fire and many diadems on His head, and clothed with a robe dipped in blood and on his thigh written, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS"!

Spurgeon: The Immutability of Christ -- Jan. 3, 1858

It is well there is one person who doesn't change; Think of the changes that have taken place in your life this past year and caused you grief; Think of changes on the world scene; the world is growing old; they shall perish; but blessed be Him who forever will be the same and for whose years there is no end;

I. Word of Explanation

- A. The same in His Person – as loving, as approachable, as generous, as kind
- B. The same in regard to His relationship to His Father – His well-beloved
- C. The same to His people forever – has never failed us once;
- D. The same to Sinners – Come and try Him!
- E. The same in the Teachings of His Word – People say we need a different style of preaching than what was effective for Bunyan, etc.; the gospel is the same; "Hold fast the form of sound words"; preaching of Paul must be the preaching of today; we may advance in our knowledge of it; but it stands perfect; mongrel mixture of Arminianism and Calvinism is preached today; election and perseverance not mentioned

II. Answer Objections

Incredulity and Unbelief cries out: "How can that be true?"

Yesterday Christ was all sunshine to me; today He is causing me distress???

The sun is the same always even though we see clouds at times

We change; not God

The fact that you have troubles is a proof of His faithfulness

You will find that the flame has not hurt you; just consumed your dross

III. Application – If Christ be always the same . . .

- A. Don't set your affections on those things of this world that changes and soon will pass away;
- B. Endeavor to imitate Christ so that you will not change despite your outward circumstances
- C. Rejoice in your security

Steven Cole: The Antidote to False Teaching – Hebrews 13:7-14

The author was concerned that his readers would be "*carried away by varied and*

strange teachings” (13:9), including returning to Judaism. So he calls them to remember the godly teachers who had spoken the word of God to them (13:7). Even though these men had now died, Jesus Christ, whom they preached, is the same yesterday, today, and forever (13:8). His grace (13:9) and His sacrificial death on the cross (13:10-12) are at the center of sound doctrine. Jesus and His death on the cross have become our altar, which supersedes and replaces the Jewish altar in the temple. Therefore, we must turn our backs on Judaism and every other religion and hold firmly to Christ and the cross (13:13). If such faith leads to hardship, rejection, persecution, or even death, keep in mind that we are not living for rewards in this life, but for the reward He has promised us in heaven (13:14). That is the flow of thought here, as I understand it. He is saying,

To avoid being carried away by false teaching, imitate the faith of godly leaders and hold firmly to the centrality of Jesus Christ, His sacrificial death, and the promise of heaven.

1. False teaching is a perpetual danger for God’s people.

The main point to note here is that Satan has always infiltrated the church with false teaching that invariably dilutes or digresses from God’s grace in Jesus Christ. If we buy into the modern idea that doctrinal truth is a personal preference of minimal importance, we join these early Hebrews, in danger of being “*carried away by varied and strange teaching.*” To deny the vital importance of sound doctrine makes us prime targets for the enemy’s attacks.

2. To avoid being carried away by false teaching, imitate the faith of godly leaders.

3. To avoid being carried away by false teaching, hold firmly to the centrality of Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death.

Verse 8 seems out of context, but I believe the author put it here in a somewhat abrupt manner to make a point:

A. GODLY TEACHERS COME AND GO, BUT JESUS CHRIST REMAINS THE SAME FOREVER (13:8).

B. GOD’S GRACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST IS AT THE HEART OF SOUND DOCTRINE (13:9).

C. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH CENTERS ON JESUS CHRIST AND HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS (13:10-12).

D. JESUS CHRIST DEMANDS EXCLUSIVE ALLEGIANCE (13:13).

The author applies this by saying, “*Let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.*” To the original readers the message was clear: You must leave Judaism to follow Jesus Christ. You can’t hang onto your old religion and just “add Jesus” to the

mix. You must leave the old and turn exclusively to Jesus, even if it means suffering reproach.

Paul wrote (**1 Cor. 1:18**), *“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* A few verses later (**1:23-24**), he added, *“but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

People are not offended if you remove the cross from Christianity. It's a good system of morals. Everyone can get behind good works and loving others. But the cross confronts and offends human pride. Sinners don't like to hear about the necessity of shed blood. But without Christ's shed blood, without the cross outside the camp of man's religion of works, there is no salvation.

4. To avoid being carried away by false teaching, hold firmly to the promise of heaven.

TEXT: Hebrews 13:18-25

TITLE: *CLOSING PERSONAL INSTRUCTIONS*

BIG IDEA:

THE DYNAMICS OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER AND ENCOURAGING FELLOWSHIP SUPPORT OUR GOAL OF TRUSTING OUR GREAT SHEPHERD TO EQUIP US TO DO THE WILL OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Finally we come to the miscellaneous closing sections of the book. Some of the great themes of the epistle are mentioned again (covenant, blood sacrifice of Christ, etc.) and new themes such as the resurrection are introduced for the first time. We see many of the elements that you would expect in a New Testament epistle – appeal for personal prayer, benediction, final personal greetings, etc. The writer maintains his testimony of ministry integrity and appeals to the blood of the eternal covenant and the grace of God to sustain believers on their pilgrimage of perseverance in the faith. But his central focus remains on the magnificent person of the Lord Jesus – that great Shepherd of the Sheep.

I. (:18-19) CLOSING REQUEST FOR INTERCESSORY PRAYER

A. (:18) Grounds for the Prayer Request

1. Beneficiaries of the Prayer Request

“Pray for us,”

Pray for the author of the epistle and his associates; if these accomplished Christian ministers needed prayer, how much more do we?

Wuest: the prefixed preposition *pros* gives (*proseuchomai*) the idea of definiteness and directness in prayer, with the consciousness on the part of the one praying that he is talking face to face with God...(thus *proseuchomai*) speaks also of the consciousness on the part of the one who prays, of the fact of God’s presence and His listening ear.

2. Basis of the Prayer Request = Integrity

*“for we are sure that we have a good conscience,
desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.”*

Bruce Hurt: “conscience” -- The Greek noun *suneidesis* is the exact counterpart of the Latin con-science, “a knowing with,” a shared or joint knowledge. It is our awareness of ourselves in all the relationships of life, especially ethical relationships. We have ideas of right and wrong; and when we perceive their truth and claims on us, and will not obey, our souls are at war with themselves and with the law of God. . .

To have a "*clear conscience*" does not mean that we have never sinned or do not commit acts of sin. Rather, it means that the underlying direction and motive of life is to obey and please God, so that acts of sin are habitually recognized as such and faced before God (**1Jn 1:9**).

A "*clear conscience*" consists in being able to say that there is no one (God or man) whom I have knowingly offended and not tried to make it right (either by asking forgiveness or restoration or both).

Think of the train wrecks we have witnessed when Christian ministers have disgraced the name of Christ through immoral or unethical behavior and so cast off the precious testimony of a good conscience.

Kenneth Osbeck: The conscience has been described as the “rudder of the soul” or the believer’s “principle within.” One of the prime responsibilities of Christian living is to keep the conscience clear as to the things of God so that we might live worthy lives before our fellowmen. But the conscience must be continually enlightened and developed by an exposure to God’s Word if it is to serve as a reliable guide for our lives. A conscience that is allowed to become hardened and insensitive to sin will ultimately lead to spiritual and moral disaster. We must allow God to develop our consciences and then our consciences are able to develop us.

B. (:19) Goal of the Prayer Request

1. Reinforcement of Request for Prayer

“And I urge you all the more to do this,”

Leon Morris: A short appeal for prayer reveals both the writer’s conviction that prayer is a powerful force and his hope that he will soon see his correspondents again. Following immediately on the reference to the leaders, this leads a number of commentators to see the writer as one who had once been a leader in the group. His desire to “**be restored to you**” (v. 19) shows clearly that he had once worked among them in some capacity. . . it seems that the readers have been accusing the writer of some fault. . . The writer protests that he has a clear conscience and that this is a reason for asking for their fellowship in prayer.

2. Reunion

“that I may be restored to you the sooner.”

Hewitt: No reason is given why he was detained, but there appears to have been some obstacle in the way; he believed that through their prayers this could be removed.

Steven Cole: The author asks them to pray all the more, so that he may be restored to them the sooner (**He 13:19**). We don’t know what the situation was that kept him from visiting them, but it was beyond his control. It could have been a health problem, or something else. Perhaps his critics in the Hebrew church were saying, “If he really cared about you, he would have visited here personally by now!” But the author’s heart

was to visit them, and so he asks them to pray. His request shows that God is bigger than any circumstance we face, and that prayer is our means of laying hold of God's power. Prayer is not just a polite gesture that shows brotherly concern. God has ordained prayer as one of the ways that He pours out His power and blessing on His people. Prayer shows us that we are not competent people who just need a little boost from God now and then. We are totally inadequate, unless He works, and He has chosen to work through our prayers. If more people prayed more regularly for their pastors, maybe there would be fewer church splits and fewer people leaving churches over petty matters.

*Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship our spirit finds
Is like to that above.*

II. (:20-21) CLOSING BENEDICTION FOCUSED ON THE EQUIPPING TO DO THE WILL OF GOD

A. (:20) All Sufficient God

1. Producer of Peace

“Now the God of peace,”

The God who gives or produces peace as well as the God who Himself is our peace

Andrew Murray: *The God of peace.* This is the name by which we are invited to call upon and trust our God. Peace is the opposite of enmity, of war, of care, of unrest. Where everything is finished and perfect, there is peace and rest. God hath set the Holiest open for us, in token that we may enter into His rest, and trust Him to perfect His work in us. The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, can now keep our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. Peace, an end of all care and fear and separation, has been proclaimed; the God of peace is now waiting to do His work in us.

Leon Morris: This doxology gathers up a number of the themes that have meant so much as the argument of the epistle has unfolded: the blood, the eternal covenant, the lordship of Jesus, the importance of doing his will. It also introduces some things not yet dealt with. This is the only place in the epistle, for example, where Jesus is seen as our Shepherd or where the Resurrection is specifically referred to. The whole forms a superb doxology that has meant much to Christians throughout the centuries.

2. Pastor of the Flock

a. Resurrected Through a Better Sacrifice

“who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant,”

Kent: It was the efficacy of Christ's blood sacrificed for sin at the cross that made possible the resurrection. God's justice was fully satisfied because the penalty (death)

was paid in full. The resurrection clearly demonstrated this blessed fact. This covenant is, of course, the new covenant discussed in **8:6-13** and **9:15 – 10:18**. It is eternal in the sense that it secures eternal life for its beneficiaries and will never be invalidated nor superseded.

F. F. Bruce: His resurrection is the demonstration that His sacrifice of Himself has been accepted by God and the new covenant established on the basis of that sacrifice.

Leon Morris: The Resurrection is linked with “*the blood of the eternal covenant*” (cf. **Isa 55:3; Zech 9:11**). It is interesting to see how the thought of covenant persists to the end. It has been one of the major themes of this epistle. The adjective again brings out the point that this covenant will never be replaced by another as it replaced the old covenant. It is perpetual in its validity. And it was established by blood. The author never forgets that. For him the death of Jesus is central. At the same time, his linking it with the Resurrection shows that he did not have in mind a dead Christ but one who, though he shed his blood to establish the covenant, lives for ever.

b. Reigns as Lord of All
“*even Jesus our Lord,*”

Leon Morris: Last in this verse in the Greek (and with some emphasis) comes the words “*our Lord Jesus.*” The expression is unusual outside of Acts, where it occurs a number of times. It combines the lordship of Christ and his real humanity, two themes of continuing importance.

Phil Newton: Two clear truths must stand out in our minds as we consider the power of God to raise the dead. First, the fact of the resurrection declares that God has accepted the death of Christ as sufficient for our eternal salvation. The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin. But how do we know that God accepted the blood of Christ as atonement for our sins? It is by the fact that He “*brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep*”! No other sacrificial victim was raised from the dead! All of the bulls and goats were temporary, but what Christ has done is final, complete, and eternal (**He 10:10, 11, 12, 13, 14**). Second, because the “*great Shepherd of the sheep*” has been brought up from the dead, the sheep will follow! That is why we can wait for “*a kingdom which cannot be shaken*” (**He 12:28**), and can seek “*the city which is to come*” (**He 13:14**). Christ's resurrection gives us hope, vision, and assurance of God's power to save us eternally, and to bring us finally into His presence forever.

B. (:21) All Sufficient Equipper of the Saints

1. Immediate Goal = Doing God's Will

“*equip you in every good thing to do His will,*”

Constable: “*Equip*” means to prepare for use (cf. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**). The same Greek word, *katartidzo*, describes elsewhere a doctor setting a broken bone, a general preparing his army for battle, and a fisherman mending his net (cf. **Matthew 4:21**). It was the writer's concern that his readers be ready to reign with Jesus Christ. This is the

purpose for remaining faithful to God throughout the epistle. Part of our full inheritance (full rest, full salvation) is the privilege of reigning with Him (**2 Timothy 2:12**). To attain this privilege we must continue to press on toward maturity by following Jesus Christ faithfully rather than turning from Him.

2. Motivation = Pleasing God

“working in us that which is pleasing in His sight,”

3. Mediator = Jesus Christ

“through Jesus Christ,”

4. Ultimate Goal = Glorifying God

“to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Richard Phillips: “*Benediction*” means “*good word*,” and all the New Testament letters include a benediction at the end, some more elaborate than others. A benediction is a pray to God on behalf of the readers, and that is especially appropriate here since in the preceding verses the writer has asked for their prayers for himself.

III. (:22-25) CLOSING POSTSCRIPT OF ENCOURAGING FELLOWSHIP

A. (:22) Final Exhortation to Heed this Epistle

“But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.”

Lenski: The writer confesses that he has been urging in his entire letter. He asks that the readers bear with him for doing so.

Leon Morris: The letter has had its share of rebukes and stern warnings, and the writer now softens the impact a little with this appeal and with the affectionate address “*Brothers*.”

Kent: includes the entire epistle which has taken the form of an appeal or exhortation to stand firm in their commitment to Christ, and to sever their ties with Jewish ceremonialism. . . . Even though an unconvinced reader might think the treatise was long, the author had really written briefly in view of the momentous issues under discussion.

B. (:23) Final Encouragement Regarding Upcoming Visit with Timothy

“Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you.”

C. (:24) Final Greetings

1. Greetings from the Author

“Greet all of your leaders and all the saints.”

Plurality of elder form of church government; interesting that this letter was not written to the leaders but to those within the church who would bring greetings to the leaders

2. Greetings from the Believers in Italy

“Those from Italy greet you.”

Could either be Italians living within Italy or living abroad

D. (:25) Final Benediction

“Grace be with you all.”

Richard Phillips: they were going to need God’s favor and help in every way. This is the one great and stable power to which the Christian can hold, firm and secure, an anchor within the veil – the grace of almighty God. And it is *from* Christ’s blood that grace is made available to us. It is *through* his present ministry that we find grace for the trials of the day. It is *to* him who is enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high that we offer all the fruits of this grace.

Matthew Henry: Let the favour of God be towards you, and his grace continually working in you, and with you, bringing forth the fruits of holiness, as the first-fruits of glory. When the people of God have been conversing together by word or writing, it is good to part with prayer, desiring for each other the continuance of the gracious presence of God, that they may meet together again in the world of praise.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What priority does prayer have in your daily Christian walk?
- 2) How can the God of Peace free you from a works-orientation to trying to please God in your Christian walk?
- 3) How is God equipping you right now to perform His will?
- 4) How does the ending of the book connect with the beginning of the book?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: God Our Provider – Hebrews 13:20-21

God, who has provided everything for our salvation through Jesus Christ, through Him will also provide all that we need to live for His glory.

God has promised to do everything that is in these two verses, and yet the author prays that it would be so. God has ordained that prayer is the way for us to lay hold of His promises. Prayer acknowledges that we're needy and that God is mighty to provide. When He does provide, He gets the glory because we know that He did it.

1. God has provided everything for our salvation through Jesus Christ (13:20).

The author succinctly gives five aspects of our salvation:

A. GOD HAS PROVIDED PEACE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND FALLEN SINNERS.

B. GOD HAS PROVIDED THE GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP THAT WE NEEDED.

C. GOD HAS PROVIDED BY PUTTING THAT SHEPHERD TO DEATH FOR OUR SINS.

D. GOD HAS PROVIDED BY RAISING THAT SHEPHERD FROM THE DEAD, THUS CONFIRMING HIS COVENANT.

E. GOD HAS PROVIDED JESUS, WHO IS OUR LORD.

2. **God will also provide all that we need to live for His glory (13:21).**

The verb, *equip*, is in the Greek optative mood, which expresses a desire or wish. The sense is, "*May the God of peace equip you....*" There are four facets to this:

A. GOD WILL EQUIP US IN EVERY GOOD THING TO DO HIS WILL.

B. GOD WILL WORK IN US THAT WHICH IS PLEASING IN HIS SIGHT.

C. GOD WORKS THESE THINGS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

D. GOD AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST GET ALL OF THE GLORY.

J. Ligon Duncan: Seven Things that undergird our ability to live the Christian Life – Hebrews 13:20-25

- I. The Peace of God
- II. The Power of God
- III. The Providence of God
- IV. The Propitiation provided by God
- V. Everything Good: God's good work in you makes your good work possible
- VI. Everything good: Through Jesus Christ
- VII. Everything Good: for His glory

Wiersbe: This benediction seems to gather together the major themes of Hebrews: peace, the resurrected Christ, the blood, the covenant, spiritual perfection (maturity), God's work in the believer.

- As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ died *for* the sheep (**John 10:11**).
- As the Great Shepherd, He lives for the sheep in heaven today, working on their behalf.
- As the Chief Shepherd, He will *come for the sheep* at His return (**1 Peter 5:4**).

Our Shepherd cares for His own in the past, present, and future. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Our Great High Priest is also our Great Shepherd. When He was on earth, He worked for us when He completed the great work of redemption (**John 17:4**). Now that He is in heaven, He is working in us to mature us in His will and bring us to a place of spiritual perfection. We will ever reach that place until He returns (**1 John 2:28 – 3:3**), but while we are waiting, we are told to continue to grow.

APPENDIX: WARNING PASSAGES IN HEBREWS

Joseph Fantin: Reviewing **Herbert Bateman IV**'s book: *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*—

Bateman has edited a helpful volume on a notoriously difficult portion of Scripture. The warning passages in Hebrews have troubled Bible students for centuries. This volume presents four approaches to the passages, and after each presentation, the other three writers respond. The approaches are labeled with theological titles: (1) Classical Arminian (Grant Osborne), (2) Classical Reformed (Buist Fanning), (3) Wesleyan Arminian (Gareth Cockerill), and (4) Moderate Reformed (Randall Gleason).

Bateman's introductory article is valuable (pp. 23–85). He defines the parameters of the warning passages (**2:1–4**; **3:7–4:13**; **5:11–6:12**; **10:19–39**; **12:14–29**) and classifies them as warnings that the readers should listen to God (**2:1–4**; **12:14–29**), warnings that the readers should trust and obey God (**3:7–4:13**), and the warning that is at the “heart” of the passages (**5:11–6:12**) (p. 28). These form a chiasmic structure (pp. 28, 83–84). Much of the remainder of the article is devoted to discussing the warning passages. This introductory article is intended to orient the reader to issues that will be addressed in subsequent chapters. It succeeds in this goal, but it also discusses issues such as structure that are not addressed elsewhere in the book. This approach at times makes it an uncomfortable fit within a debate format volume. However, its value outweighs this minor drawback.

Each of the essays has a moderate tone. Each author acknowledges that these passages are difficult and that a specific conclusion is maintained as the best option. There is no attempt to dismiss other views as heretical or impossible. This aspect itself makes the volume a delight to read.

In the first essay Osborne presents what is labeled a “**Classical Arminian**” position. He makes his case by carefully considering each warning passage in detail. Osborne views the Book of Hebrews as having a Roman destination, that real believers are addressed, that Hebrews 6 refers to an unpardonable sin, and that apostasy is a real danger for believers. If committed, there is no opportunity for repentance. Osborne argues that the five participles in 6:4–6 must describe believers: “*having been once-for-all enlightened*,” “*having tasted the heavenly gift*,” “*having become partakers of the Holy Spirit*,” “*having tasted the goodness of the Word of God*,” and “*having fallen away*” (pp. 111–12). He rejects the translation that makes the final participle a conditional clause (“*if they fall away*,” p. 112). These are true believers who have fallen away. Since the passage states that they cannot be brought back to repentance, Osborne maintains that this is the unpardonable sin (p. 114).

Fanning provides a “**Classical Reformed**” view of the warning passages. He sees the passages as directed toward unbelievers mixed in among Christians. Support for this includes the use of

the first and second person for exhortations and the third person for the warning passages (p. 192). The majority of Fanning's presentation is a synthetic description that traces five themes through the passages. Fanning discusses those who fall away, the nature of the fall described, the consequences of this fall, the desired response to the warnings, and encouragement about God's faithfulness. Fanning then discusses two conditional sentences in **3:6** and **3:14**. He argues that these should be seen as evidence-to-inference statements, not cause-to-effect statements as is often interpreted. Thus these statements "do not cite what will be true if they hold on, but what is already true of them, if in fact they endure" (p. 207, italics his). Fanning maintains that the author of Hebrews desires for all his readers to demonstrate their Christianity; however, if they do not and they disclaim Christ, they prove that they were never true believers.

Cockerill presents a "**Wesleyan Arminian**" view. Similar to Osborne, Cockerill says that real believers are addressed and that if they fail to heed the warnings and they apostasize, they will be eternally lost without opportunity to return to the faith. As a Wesleyan, Cockerill might be expected to allow for an opportunity for the apostate to again become a believer. But this is not the case. Cockerill emphasizes the pastoral implications of the warnings. He notes that these passages do not mean people should be viewed as "in" or "out" of God's kingdom. Rather, people should be seen as moving toward or away from God. Also Cockerill interacts (although he does not ultimately agree) with other scholars (such as Emmrich and deSilva), thereby giving the reader other options not discussed elsewhere in this book.

In his "**Moderate Reformed**" position Gleason presents the most unique presentation of all the views. The warnings, he says, were addressed to genuine Jewish believers facing persecution by other Jews before the destruction of Jerusalem. He sees "*falling away*" not as apostasy but as a "serious act of unfaithfulness toward God" (p. 354). Punishment is seen not as eternal but as physical, based on Old Testament parallels. Crucial to this case is Gleason's belief in a Jewish context and his use of Old Testament parallels. His emphasis on the historical context is commendable, and this may be an important key to understanding the passages. However, if he is incorrect about the specific context of the letter or if his use of Old Testament parallels is not methodologically sound, his argument is significantly weakened. For example concerning parallel use, in light of the Old Testament's emphasis on physical and temporal judgment, is it accurate to assume that the New Testament with its developed personal eschatology will limit its use of these Old Testament judgment texts to earthly judgment?

<https://voice.dts.edu/review/herbert-w-bateman-iv-four-views-on-the-warning-passages-in-hebrews/>

W. H. Griffith Thomas:

1. Drifting (2:1-4)
2. Doubtings (3:7-4:13)
3. Deformity (5:11-6:20)
4. Despising (10:26-31)
5. Denying (12:15-29)

MacArthur: Exhortations designed to stir the readers into action are found throughout the text. Those exhortations are given in the form of 6 warnings:

- Warning against drifting from “the things we have heard” (2:1–4)
- Warning against disbelieving the “voice” of God (3:7–14)
- Warning against degenerating from “the elementary principles of Christ” (5:11–6:20)
- Warning against despising “the knowledge of the truth” (10:26–39)
- Warning against devaluing “the grace of God” (12:15–17)
- Warning against departing from Him “who speaks” (12:25–29)

[MacArthur takes a very unique view of the warning passages (based on a mixed audience) that does not focus as much on apostasy. He takes much more of an evangelistic focus directed towards unsaved Jews who were on the brink of either committing to Christ or turning back to Judaism.]

We must understand that three basic groups of people are in view throughout this epistle. If one does not keep these groups in mind, the book becomes very confusing. If, for example, as some have said, it written exclusively to Christians, extreme problems arise in interpreting a number of passages which could hardly apply to believers. And because it so frequently addresses believers, it could not have been written primarily to unbelievers either. So it must have been written to include both. In fact three basic groups in this Jewish community are addressed.

GROUP I: HEBREW CHRISTIANS

First of all, there was in this Jewish community a **congregation of true believers** in the lord Jesus Christ. They had come out of Judaism, in which they had been born and raised. Now they were born again. . . They were in danger of going back into the standards and patterns of Judaism – not of losing their salvation but of confusing the gospel with Jewish ceremony and legalism and of thereby weakening their faith and testimony. They could not bring themselves to accept the clear-cut distinction between the gospel, the New Covenant in Christ, and the forms, ceremonies, patterns, and methods of Judaism. They were still hung up, for example, on the Temple ritual and worship. That is why the Spirit talks to them so much about the new priesthood and the new Temple and the new sacrifice and the new sanctuary, all of which are better than the old ones. . .

The book of Hebrews was written to give confidence to these floundering believers. The Lord was speaking to Christians and telling them to hold on to the better covenant and the better priesthood, and not go back into the patterns of Judaism, either to that priesthood or to that assemblage. They must steadfastly and exclusively live in, and live out, their new relationship in Christ.

GROUP II: HEBREW NON-CHRISTIANS WHO ARE INTELLECTUALLY CONVINCED

These Hebrew non-Christians, intellectually convinced but spiritually uncommitted, are the object of some of the things that the writer has to say. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah,

the Christ, spoken of in the Jewish Scriptures but they had not been willing to receive Him personally as their Savior and Lord. . .

6:4-6 – Here is a warning to the merely intellectually convinced not to stop where he is. If he stops after having received full revelation, and especially after he is convinced of the truth of the revelation, he has only one way to go. If, when a man is totally convinced that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be, he then refuses to believe, this man is without excuse and without hope – because, though convinced of the truth of the gospel, he still will not put his trust in it. He is here warned that there is nothing else God can do.

What is the greatest sin that a man can commit? The sin of rejecting Christ (**10:26**).

If a man has heard the gospel, understands it, and is intellectually convinced of its truth, but then willfully rejects Christ, what more can God do? Nothing! All God can now promise this man is “*a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries*” (v. 27) (cf. **10:29; 12:15-17**)

GROUP III: HEBREW NON-CHRISTIANS WHO WERE NOT CONVINCED

He seeks to show them clearly that Jesus is in fact who He claimed to be, and this truth is the main thrust of chapter nine . . .

The primary message is addressed to believers. Periodically there are interspersed warnings to the two unbelieving groups. In a masterful way, in a way that could only be divine, the Holy Spirit speaks to all three. He meets every one of their particular needs and their specific questions in this one supernatural masterpiece. . .

To these three groups Hebrews is a presentation of Christ, the Messiah, the Author of a New Covenant greater than the one God had made in the Old Testament. The old one was not bad or wrong; it was God-given and therefore good. But it was incomplete and preliminary. It set the stage for the new.

Peter O’Brien: The warnings of Hebrews have presented many challenges to believers throughout Christian history. And the misapplication of them has caused pastoral problems for Christians of all traditions, including the Reformed.

These warnings have troubled earnest Christians by raising doubts about their assurance of salvation, an assurance that is so clearly affirmed, for example, in **Romans 5:1-11** and **Romans 8:18-39**, and in Jesus’s promises for his disciples in **John 6:39-40, 44** and **John 10:25-30**. Even within Hebrews itself there are powerful words of encouragement and assurance based on God’s faithfulness to fulfill his promises to his people (**Heb. 2:10; 6:10-20**), and so because of the finality of Christ’s sacrifice (**Heb. 9:11-28; 10:14-18**), and his permanent high priesthood by which Jesus is able to save his people completely and eternally since he always lives to intercede for them (**7:25; cf. 9:24**).

Does Hebrews show us how we might resolve our theological and pastoral difficulties?

A key to addressing the tension between the severe warnings and the seemingly contradictory promises and words of encouragement lies, first, in recognizing the distinction Hebrews makes between “a kind of transitory faith, a form of conversion which, like the seed sown on rocky places [in the parable of the soils, **Mark 4**], has all the signs of life, but which does not persevere.” Such faith is spurious; by contrast, genuine faith is tied to perseverance.

The conditional sentences of **Hebrews 3:6** and **14** fit an *evidence-inference* category, in which “the observation of a piece of evidence leads the observer to infer a certain logical conclusion.”

We are his [God’s] house, *if indeed* we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory (**Heb. 3:6**).

We have come to share in Christ, *if indeed* we hold firmly till the end our original conviction (**Heb. 3:14**).

Accordingly, the author maintains that the listeners’ continuance in faith to the end will demonstrate that they *are* members of God’s household, not that they will become this in the future (v. 6). Similarly, holding on to their confidence will reveal the reality that they *already* share in Christ, not simply that they will share in him on the final day (v. 14).

The listeners’ perseverance is the evidence of what has taken place in the past and is an essential ingredient of what it means to be a Christian, a partaker of Christ. So Hebrews “virtually defines true believers as those who hold firmly to the end the confidence they had at first.”

This distinction between genuine and spurious faith is clearly evident elsewhere in Hebrews. This indicates that the author’s “*word of exhortation*” (**Heb. 13:22**) is addressed to a mixed audience: there are two kinds of soil with dramatically different responses to the frequent showers of God’s blessings (**Heb. 6:7-8**), two kinds of hearts (**Heb. 3:12; Heb. 10:22**), and a distinction made between “*we*” who “*have faith and are saved*,” and “*the one*” who belongs “*to those who shrink back and are destroyed*” (**Heb. 10:38-39**). Also the author has concerns for certain individuals within the community who may be in particular danger of apostasy (“*any one*,” “*someone*”: **Heb. 3:12, 13; Heb. 4:1, 11; Heb. 6:11-12; Heb. 10:24, 25, 28; Heb. 12:15-16**).

Hebrews is not alone in describing true believers as those who hold their confidence firmly to the end. In other New Testament documents there are warnings against or descriptions of spurious faith (**Matt. 7:21-23; John 2:23-25; Col. 1:22-23; 1 John 2:19; cf. 2 Pet. 1:10-11**). Our Lord’s parable of the sower (or the soils) makes a similar point (**Mark 4:1-29** and parallels). The initial growth of the seed scattered on the rocky ground and among the thorns appears to all observers, except God himself, to promise the best harvest. But it does not bear fruit. It has the signs of life but does not persevere. This spiritual life proves transitory (Carson 2000: 266).

So how does Hebrews address the audience with its warnings and encouragements?

In view of Hebrews' distinction between true and spurious faith, and its definition of genuine believers as those who hold fast their confession of Jesus Christ to the end, we consider that the images describing the audience in the warnings point to an *initial* work of grace in the lives of the congregation members.

The author knew that the audience had been exposed to the preaching of the gospel and that God had done a mighty work within the congregation (**Heb. 2:1-4**). It is evident that some had been truly converted and had genuinely appropriated Christ's saving work for themselves. How many and who they all were, the author does not know exactly. But he addresses the whole congregation on the basis of what he has observed, and urges them to hold firmly to their confession of faith in Christ, their Christian hope without wavering, and their confidence in God (**Heb. 3:6, 14; Heb. 4:14; Heb. 6:18; Heb. 10:23**).

Significantly, however, even when the author refers to those who commit apostasy he uses the third person plural rather than the second (e.g., "*those who have once been enlightened . . . and who have fallen away,*" **Heb. 6:4-6**), and does not explicitly identify them with his listeners. Though some are apparently in great danger he does not assert that they have committed apostasy. The warnings, like the divine promises, are intended to prevent this from happening. The descriptions of the audience in **vv. 4-5** ("*those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age*") point to an initial experience of the gospel. The vivid agricultural imagery of **Hebrews 6:7-8**, which is integral to the warning of **vv. 4-6** and clarifies its meaning, stands between the warning and the expression of confidence in **vv. 9-12**. It depicts *two* kinds of responses that can be made to the warning, *not simply one*, and thus fills out and completes the picture by including both those who *do not fall away* and those who *commit apostasy*.

The effects of the rain on each piece of land differ dramatically: in the case of one, the presence of fruitful crops at the end time harvest is evidence of those who had a genuine experience of salvation (**vv. 7, 9**). But the land that has been well watered and nurtured, and produces only "*thorns and thistles*" shows that it is worthless, and does not stand the test at the final judgment (**vv. 6, 8**). The faith of those represented was only transitory (cf. **Heb. 10:38-39; Heb. 12:25**). They were never true believers, whatever signs of life they may have shown initially.

What is the nature of the sin threatening the community?

From a historical perspective, the nature of the sin referred to involves reverting to Judaism. The listeners are apparently in danger of returning to a reliance on the cultic structures of the old covenant in Judaism.

Although the warning passages of Hebrews describe the sin threatening the community in a number of ways, since there are various facets to it, ultimately it is irreversible apostasy from the

living God. It is the utter rejection of an entire position and stance that had once been professed. This sin is Trinitarian in its scope, for it involves a persistent and culpable refusal to obey the voice of the living God who speaks in his Son and warns from heaven (**Heb. 1:1-4; Heb. 12:25**). It treats Jesus with utter contempt by crucifying him again, subjecting him to public disgrace (**Heb. 6:6**), and rejecting his new covenant sacrifice by which the work of atonement was completed (**Heb. 10:29**). And it arrogantly insults God's gracious Spirit through whom Christ offered himself to God and who applies the definitive forgiveness of sins to believers (**Heb. 10:29**). The fact that it is willful, persistent, and committed in view of the knowledge of the truth rules out the possibility that it is due to ignorance (**Heb. 10:26**).

Unlike other sins, offenses, and weaknesses of believers referred to in Hebrews that have been wonderfully atoned for through Jesus' new covenant sacrifice and high priestly ministry, there is no provision for the sin of apostasy. For those who utterly reject God's gracious plan of saving people and bringing them to glory "*there remains no more sacrifice for sins*" (**Heb. 10:26**). In the light of this, the special character of the sin of apostasy must be understood clearly and not confused with other sins and weaknesses of Christians, as has often been the case throughout church history. Since this offense constitutes a total renunciation of everything that is distinctively Christian and which the person had previously professed, it is not the sin of the outsider or the one who is on the edge of church life.

Those who are anxious about having committed this sin, and are troubled that God will not receive them into fellowship with his Son because they believe their sin is too great, are urged by Hebrews to come with boldness to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help in their time of need (**Heb. 2:18; Heb. 4:14-16**).

By contrast, apostates defiantly and deliberately reject the Son of God and his salvation, showing neither anxiety nor concern, since they would feel justified in their determined and fixed resolve. Given Hebrews' distinction between authentic faith as that which perseveres to the end, and spurious faith that may initially show some signs of life but does not endure, the person who commits apostasy is not an authentic Christian and never was one, whatever their first responses to the gospel may have been. And since genuine faith is tied to perseverance that endures to the end, the believer who perseveres in the race marked out for them, with their eyes fixed on Jesus (**Heb. 12:1, 2**), shows that he or she is a member of God's family and has already been a sharer in Christ.

What are the consequences of committing apostasy?

The consequences of the danger threatening the community to which Hebrews was written have been interpreted in various ways since early times, depending on the nature of the sin that is being described. Those who say this offense falls short of apostasy and is probably some kind of spiritual lethargy that has been manifested in the congregation understand the consequences to be a form of discipline resulting in physical death or the loss of rewards.

But these suggestions do not do justice to the strong language of **Hebrews 6:6** or **Hebrews**

10:26-31. A synthetic examination of the five warning passages shows that the consequences are a “*just punishment*” (2:2) or no “*escape*” (v. 3), perishing, missing out on God’s promised rest, the tragic loss of their inheritance (Heb. 4:1, 11), the impossibility of being brought back to repentance (Heb. 6:4, 6), which corresponds to the apostate being like land that is “*worthless, under a curse, and destined to be burned*” (v. 8).

This punishment is not some restorative or disciplinary process but is associated with the severity of the eschatological judgment that will consume God’s adversaries. The fourth warning describes the irreversible consequences of apostasy in terms of its severity (it is “*terrifying*” and “*a raging fire*”) and its finality (it is “*inevitable*” and “*eschatological*”). Apostates are cast as God’s enemies (v. 27) who are deserving of “*far greater punishment*” (v. 29) than what the Mosaic law prescribed for rejection of the old covenant, that is, a punishment more severe than merely physical death. Those who shrink back are destroyed which in this setting of final judgment signifies eternal destruction.

The author of Hebrews has not asserted that his listeners have committed apostasy, though he is obviously concerned that some are in significant danger of falling over this precipice. He has warned the whole congregation of the irreversible consequences of apostasy. His warnings, along with other elements in his exhortatory material, together with his doctrinal expositions that provide the presuppositions for the exhortations, are intended to prevent these disastrous consequences from occurring.

In the light of these warnings what does Hebrews exhort them to do?

The listeners are to “*hold firmly*” to their confession of Christ (Heb. 4:14; Heb. 10:23), and to respond to God and his promises in persevering faith (Heb. 6:12, 15) rather than in unbelief and apostasy that leads to destruction. They are told that they have need of endurance (Heb. 10:36), and so they are to run with perseverance the race that is set before them, fixing their eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith who *endured* the cross, and despised its shame in fulfillment of God’s will (Heb. 12:1-2).

What assurances do believers have of their eternal salvation?

The encouragements to the members of the congregation to hold firmly to their confession of faith in Christ and to endure patiently whatever trials they may face, are securely based on God’s faithfulness to fulfill his stunning promises (cf. Heb. 6:12-20). His purpose is to lead his children to glory, and to that end he has made Jesus, the pioneer of their salvation, perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10). While the exhortations for them to persevere in the context of trials, persecution, public abuse from opponents, disappointments, and the tendency to lose heart (Heb. 12:5) may seem awesome, even overwhelming, they are not left to their own devices. Christ’s once-for-all perfect offering of himself is utterly acceptable and efficacious; he has blazed the trail for his people into heaven itself, and won for them an eternal redemption. As the Son who lives forever, his priestly ministry on his people’s behalf is never ending; he is “*able to save completely and eternally those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them*” (Heb. 7:25).

Ultimately, the believer's security rests not with the believer but with the living God. His final promise in the letter, "*Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you,*" is wonderful assurance indeed. So then, "*we may say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid, What can mere mortals do to me?'*" (**Heb. 13:5, 6**).

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/warning-passages-ahead/>

John Sproule (Grace Seminary notes)

Introduction:

1. The Theme of Hebrews: Continuance in Faith is the Evidence of the Genuineness of Faith – Stated theologically, the theme is the “perseverance of the saints” (the flip side of the doctrine of eternal security).

2. Facts about the epistle that must always undergird any attempt to understand the epistle as a whole or any problem passage within it.

a. The addressees are Hebrew Christians, well-steeped in Judaism and the Levitical cultus, and the entire epistle must be interpreted in the light of this truth. Many of the thoughts in the epistle that may seem foreign to the occidental mind would be commonplace for these Hebrew Christians of the first century. (This should guard against making **primary** applications to twentieth century Christians while ignoring the original context of the epistle.)

b. The author (unknown) of Hebrews is not setting forth a series of warnings about things that cannot possibly happen (the typical hypothetical approach of many). Common sense as well as good Greek grammar demands this. The AH (author of Hebrews) is not dealing in nonsense.

c. The author gives his own illustration of the type of individual his is concerned with in the warning passages (cf. **Heb. 12:15-17**, Esau).

d. The AH makes it plain that the “*falling away*” with which he is concerned is not simply “backsliding.” Rather, it is a falling away to “*perdition*” [damnation, *apoleia*, **Heb. 10:39** – “*but we are not of those who shrink back (withdraw) to damnation but we are of faith resulting in (the) saving of the soul*”].

e. AH regards his readers as **genuine** Christians although there may be some among them who could be the type of person (unbeliever) characterized in the five warning passages (cf. **Heb. 6:9**, et al.).

f. The Hebrew Christians being addressed were wavering in their faith with evidence of a desire to return to their former Jewish religion. Not really debated.

I. Presuppositions

A. The AH is consistent throughout the epistle and therefore:

1. All warning passages have to do with the **same** type of individual(s). I.e., if unbelievers are in view in one warning passage, they are also in view in the other warning passages or vice versa. The AH is consistent even though commentators and preachers frequently lack consistency.

2. The **theology** of Hebrews must agree with the theology (esp. soteriology) of the rest of the N.T. In short, the analogy of Scripture must hold (cf. the problem of **Heb. 10:26-31**, the fourth warning, if this principle is abandoned).

B. The entire epistle is Jewish in flavor and Messianic in character (cf. Intro. 2, a.) which is consistent with the Hebrew Christians being addressed.

C. Certain soteriological terms and phrases (regeneration, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, baptized by the Holy Spirit, justification, et al.) apply only to genuine believers. Certain other soteriological terms and phrases (repentance, enlightenment, partakers, et al.) can apply to both genuine believers and unregenerate individuals. Cf. **Num. 24:2-4, 15-16; II Pet. 2:15-17, 20-22; Matt. 10:1-8; Mk. 3:13-19**, et al.

Repentance **alone** is not equal to salvation (cf. **Acts 20:21**). Enlightenment **alone** is not equal to salvation.

D. Apostates are those who depart from the Christian faith and ultimately spend eternity in hell.

E. The eternal security of the true believer and the perseverance of the true believer.

F. The view with the least problems must be accepted as the correct view.

II. The Crux Interpretum (Hebrews 6:4-6)

A. Various Views:

1. Tertullian – if you sinned after the rite of baptism ...
2. Arminian – speaking of regenerated believers becoming unsaved
3. Hypothetical – if it could happen . . .
4. Reformed – references are to real apostates who had enjoyed positions of great privilege

B. The Messianic foundational truths (**Heb. 6:1-2**) -- [attempts to define each of these phrases from the OT Messianic foundation] The foundation was fine ... but don't go back to the foundation. All of these truths reach their ultimate actualization in Christ, so AH urges his readers to "go on" in their newfound faith.

C. The Divine Determination (**Heb. 6:3**) – 3rd class conditional; subjunctive mood; mild contingency – He probably will let you go on but some He won't permit to go on . . .

D. The Characteristics of Apostates (**Heb. 6:4-6**)

E. Actions of Apostates (**Heb. 6:6**)

F. AH's Persuasion (**Heb. 6:9**)

III. Illustrations of Apostates

A. Balaam

B. Judas Iscariot

C. Esau

D. Others (current)

IV. Conclusions

A. AH is describing characteristics and actions of apostates (unregenerate) in the warning passages even though he is writing to believers.

B. One of God's ways of keeping the saints secure is by means of warnings. This is the view from the human side (perseverance of the saints). Consistent with N.T. theology elsewhere.

C. Only God knows who genuine apostates are and the impossibility of their being renewed to repentance is the result of God giving them over to darkness.

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