

## THE Author

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## THE Book

The Letter to the Hebrews is a book that speaks about Jesus Christ and all that he has accomplished. Its aim was to encourage people who were in danger of giving way to the appeal of culture and to the pressures which came upon them.

It was written to a situation far removed from our own, yet the answers to the questions in the first century are still relevant to men and women of the twenty-first century. Jesus Christ in the new covenant confirmed by his death is the substance of all that was but shadow under the old covenant. And faith, now as then, knows the substance.

The writer has given us a simple summary of the Letter to the Hebrews. This work should be a valuable addition to other commentaries and will prove useful not only to thoughtful scholars and students but also to those whose aim is simply to get to the substance.

The Shadow  
and the Substance  
IAN PENNICOOK

# The Shadow and the Substance

*A Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews*



New Creation Publications Inc.



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IAN PENNICOOK

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Baptism of John  
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Power in the Church  
The Riches of His Grace  
The Story of the Acts of God

*The*  
***Shadow***  
*and the*  
***Substance***

A Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews

Ian Pennicook

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## *Contents*

INTRODUCTION	vii
What Is 'Hebrews'?	viii
The Author	ix
The Readers	x
Date	xii
OUTLINE OF HEBREWS	xiii
COMMENTARY	vii
Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	9
Chapter Three	23
Chapter Four	30
Chapter Five	39
Chapter Six	47
Chapter Seven	59
Chapter Eight	72
Chapter Nine	80
Chapter Ten	97
Chapter Eleven	113
Chapter Twelve	135
Chapter Thirteen	152

## *Introduction*

For a number of reasons, the Letter to the Hebrews presents the modern reader with a variety of difficulties. Actually, the difficulties we face have been shared by readers since the earliest days of the church<sup>1</sup>. Doubtless, the first difficulty is encountered when we try to read the letter. The argument does not seem to ‘flow’, compared, for example, with that of the letter to the Romans. To follow the reasoning in Hebrews requires disciplined reading. Furthermore, unless we are reasonably familiar with the Old Testament, and in particular the Pentateuch, much of the imagery and, indeed, the force of the argument is lost on us.

Further difficulties arise when we ask such questions as ‘What is Hebrews?’ ‘Who wrote it?’ and ‘To whom was it written?’. There are simply no clear answers to these and similar question. One writer has complained that ‘far too much of the study devoted to the ‘Letter to the Hebrews’ has dealt with questions whose answer eludes us’<sup>2</sup>, and William Barclay concluded that when

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh, 1957) pg. ix, xvii-xviii.

<sup>2</sup> F. V. Filson, *Yesterday - A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13*, S.B.T. Second Series No. 4, (London, 1967) pg. 9.

dealing with these questions, ‘we can only guess and grope’.<sup>3</sup>

While we recognise the difficulties in answering these questions there is still a sense in which to avoid them is to limit our appreciation of the letter and possibly to make our understanding of the issues presented to us a little less precise. Besides this, we must not forget that the revelation which God has given is firmly rooted in history (see Heb. 1:1) and that the language used was the language of real people in real situations as the Holy Spirit led them to write the things which we, too often take for granted (Pet. 1:20–21).

### What is ‘Hebrews’?

Although commonly called a ‘letter’ (or ‘epistle’)<sup>4</sup>, Hebrews, along with 1 John, does not begin like a normal letter. The customary opening identification and greetings are absent although, unlike 1 John, Hebrews does close with personal references and greetings (13:19, 22–24). But, internally, the characteristics of letters are replaced by what the writer himself calls ‘my word of exhortation’ (13:22).

The theological argument, so carefully developed, has a strong practical purpose. This is obvious when

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<sup>3</sup> Barclay, *Op. cit.* p. xvii

<sup>4</sup> It may surprise some readers to discover that occasionally a distinction is drawn between a ‘letter’ and an ‘epistle’. Generally, an epistle is regarded as ‘a conscious literary effort designed for publication’, whereas a letter ‘is private in character, written for a specific occasion and certainly not designed for posterity’. For a fuller discussion of this subject, see E. F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (London, 1964) pp. 241–3. Hebrews would doubtless be more an epistle if these distinctions are valid, though see Harrison pg. 34.

we observe that following the descriptions of Jesus as superior to angels, to Moses etc. there are substantial sections which apply the practical implications of what has gone before, for example 1:1–14 is followed by 2:1–4, 6:13–10:18 by 10:19–39 etc.

Having said this, we ought to be more specific and try to determine the purpose of the exhortation – Who wrote it, to whom and why?

### THE AUTHOR

Hebrews is anonymous. However, it is quite clear from the closing greetings that the recipients knew who had written to them, otherwise ‘Pray for us’ (13:18) is meaningless. But who is ‘us’? Uncertainty at this point has dogged the church since earliest times. Parts of the Christian world, especially the West (that is, Rome) were very slow to accept Hebrews into the canon of Scripture because its apostolic authorship was seriously questioned. The East (for example Alexandria) on the other hand readily accepted it as coming from the pen of the apostle Paul and finally, in the latter part of the fourth century, the West also accepted it as Pauline.

But there has never been universal agreement that Paul was the author, and today probably very few, conservatives or liberals, would suggest that Paul wrote it. This change in thinking can be seen in the heading given to Hebrews in the Authorised Version (1611), ‘The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews’ compared with most later translations which omit all reference to authorship.

As early as Tertullian (c. 200 A.D.) Barnabas was seriously put forward as a possible alternative to Paul.

Others have suggested Luke, Silas and even Lazarus as candidates. The German scholar A. Harnack suggested that Hebrews was written by Priscilla and Aquila and that the authorship was suppressed because a woman's name would hinder the work's acceptance. Apollos has been a particularly attractive possibility, especially since he was an Alexandrian Jew, 'an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures' (Acts. 18:24). The writer of Hebrews was likewise skilful in his use of the scriptures, and the way the scriptures are used is very close to the method associated with Alexandria, as seen for example, in the writings of the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo.

Whether or not the author was Apollos, it does appear that the writer was familiar with the Old Testament as it is found in the *Codex Alexandrinus*—a Greek version—and that he had no immediate knowledge of any Hebrew version<sup>5</sup> which almost certainly indicates someone living outside Judea.

### THE READERS

Although there is not total agreement, it seems reasonably sure that the people to whom Hebrews was originally sent were Jewish Christians. Initially, the church was comprised of practicing Jews who saw no contradiction, for example in continuing to worship in the Temple (Acts 3:1). Many of the early Christians

were in fact priests (Acts 6:7) and the first Christians were popular with the people (Acts 2:47; 3:21). But this situation could not last. The missionary work of Paul among the gentiles soon provoked controversy even within the church (Acts 15:1–5).

Although many Christians in Jerusalem did maintain a Jewish profile, the peace was tenuous and, when added to the volatile state of Jewish politics between A. D. 40–66, could easily break down completely (Acts 21:20–31). Thus there was an ever increasing gulf between the Christians, (even Jewish Christians) and the religion and politics of Israel. Outside Judea, Jewish hostility to Christians was evident even from the beginning (Acts 13:45; 14:1–6).

The problem was complicated by the fact that Judaism was a legally recognised religion and to leave it for the new Christianity was to be left out in the cold. When any persecution broke out against Christians, Jewish believers could easily see a return to Judaism as a safe course of action. After all, the earliest believers in Jerusalem had succeeded in combining faith in Jesus with their Jewish heritage (at least superficially).

But not only was mainstream Judaism increasingly opposed to the mixture, the writer of Hebrews himself is at pains to show that now Christianity and Judaism are totally incompatible. To retreat to the 'safety' of Israel is to retreat from Jesus. Whatever value the Jewish rites and ceremonies once had in preparation for the coming of Christ, they are now finished and ought to be left behind (6:1–2). To return to Judaism is to commit apostasy, since the death of the Son of God, which brought Israel's faith to its conclusion, would be treated as ineffective and pointless (6:5–6). This study, therefore, regards the letter to the Hebrews as addressed to Jewish believers who are sorely tempted to opt out of open faith

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<sup>5</sup>C.f. R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, (1975) pg.169.

in Christ in order to avoid any further suffering (10:32–33; cf. 11:26). They need encouragement (*paraklesis* 13:22 that is exhortation ) to persevere (12:2) and they can only effectively do so if they remain together in mutual ministry. (10:23–25).

Where these people lived is uncertain. Some regard 13:24, ‘Those who come from Italy’, as indicating that Italian believers with the writer are sending greetings home, but it could equally mean that the author is in Italy and that Italian Christians are sending greetings to those outside the country. The latter could be the case if 13:18–19 indicates a Roman imprisonment of some sort. But no firm conclusions about locations are possible.

### Date

By knowing when a document was written, we can sometimes throw light onto various details contained within it. However, here again, precision eludes us. There is no external method of dating and internal evidence is ambiguous. For example, the writer speaks of the sacrificial system in the present tense (8:14; 9:9; 10:1) which may indicate that the Temple was still standing. This would give a date prior to A.D. 70, since it was in that year that Jerusalem, including the Temple, was destroyed by the Romans. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the writer’s argument is based on the Tabernacle and not on the Temple. But why, if the Temple had been destroyed at the time of writing, would such a significant event for the writer’s purpose (ie. of showing the finish of the old dispensation) not be mentioned? It is hard to see how he could have avoided some reference to it. A date prior to A. D. 70 is most probable.

### Outline of Hebrews

Any outline of the contents of Hebrews will artificially divide the work and to some extent detract from the ‘artistry’ which characterises it. What follows is only to show the major subjects and their related exhortations.

- 1:1–14 Jesus—Greater than prophets and angels
- 2:1–4 Exhortation
- 2:5–18 Jesus –Greater than Moses
- 3:7–4:13 Exhortation
- 4:14–5:10 Jesus –Greater than the Aaronic priesthood, being like Melchizedek
- 5:11–6:20 *Exhortation*
- 7:1–28 Jesus –A priest like Melchizedek
- 8:1–10:18 Jesus– High Priest and mediator of a new and better covenant
- 10:19–39 *Exhortation*
- 11:1–40 Faith– the essence of any relationship with God
- 12:1–13:17 Exhortation
- 13:18–25 Personal epilogue.

## *Hebrews Chapter One*

**Note:** The text followed in the commentary is that of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, 1971 edition.

### 1:1–14 **Jesus –Greater than prophets and angels**

1:1–2 In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; (2) but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Neither the Christian nor the Jewish faiths are human inventions; They are the result of God's action in revealing himself and his purposes: **In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.** Formerly, God's revelation came via the (Old Testament) prophets, but now, in these last days, has come by a Son, the Word of God(Jn.1:1ff).

By these opening words, the author has shown the continuity between Judaism and Christianity. The God who spoke of old to the prophets is the same God who speaks in the Son. Jesus himself declared that 'Salvation is of the Jews' (Jn.4:22). But continuity does not imply equality and the author has, by mentioning prophets and Son as representatives of the 'old' and the



'last days' introduced the great contrast which he intends to develop. Prophets are those who acted as God's mouthpieces (cf. eg. Jer. 1:9), in this context probably irrespective of whether their writings are technically prophecies or not. Thus the reference is probably to the whole of the ancient scriptures. **In these last days** ought perhaps be more accurately translated 'at the end of these days'(RV). If so, then the implication is not that of the last days of New testament eschatology 'but of highlighting the finish of the old revelatory order.

'A Son' is literally 'by Son'. The finality of this revelation is seen in that the Son in no mere mouthpiece, for he is **The heir of all things** (compare Ps. 2:8, Heb.2:5) All the purposes of God find their purpose and fulfilment in him (2Cor.1:20). Creation exists for him; in fact it is the Son **through whom also he** (ie. God) **created the world**. 'The world' (R.S.V.) is, literally, 'the ages' (compare 6:5,9:26,11:3). The son is the author of every *sphere of existence* with its particular characteristics. The N.E.B. 'orders of existence' helps to capture the force of the Greek word for 'age' (gk. *aion*. cf. Gal. 1:4).

1:3–4 He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, (4) having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.

The Son, by whom God speaks, is, unlike the prophets, in no way inferior to God. **He reflects the glory of God** or, better, 'he is the brightness (or radiance) of God's glory'. When the Father's glory shines upon

us, it does no in the Son. This is illustrated in John 11:40 where Jesus says that he himself is about to do, namely, raise Lazarus, is in fact the glory of God. The Son **bears the very nature**. **This** translation (the R.S.V.) is misleading, as it seems to imply that the Son bears the imprint of God's nature. The Greek word (character) indicates that by which the nature of God's being is expressed. Thus the son *is* the stamp by which the nature of God leaves its mark.

The Son is also (c) **upholding the universe** (lit. 'all things') **by his word of power**. This is no thought of 'Atlas', rather that all things that exist(compare 1Cor.8:6). the 'ages', continue their course by their creator's utterance.

Whereas the prophets condemned sin and exposed it, the Son(d) **made purification for sins**. The precise scope and meaning of this will be elaborated later in the letter. It is sufficient, at this point, to note the contrast.

These descriptions of the Son are climaxed by the main statement. He, by whom God has spoken, has finished his work. Having done so, **he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high**. The implication is direct: all that needed saying, as revelation, has now been said. 'The Majesty on high' is a roundabout of saying 'God' by using one of his characteristics. (compare Mk,14:62 for a similar instance, though see Heb. 10:12 for plain speech within this letter.) Obviously no literal physical location is intended. The reference is clearly only to the exaltation and supremacy of the Son.

He sat down, **having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs** (compare Eph. 1:20–22). The transition from prophets to angels seems confusing. Why 'angels' ?

Among the suggested answers, when the commentators bother even to ask the question, are that angels are introduced because of the problems of some form of *gnosticism*, a system of quasi-Christian thought which regarded Jesus and angels as simply some part of a spiritual hierarchy, or that perhaps the readers were even involved in angel worship. But 'Christian' *gnosticism* developed much later than the writing of the letter and there is no evidence that Jews ever indulged in angel worship. The answer is surely in the juxtaposition of angels to prophets. Though it is not a common notion today, it seems clear that in the New Testament period the idea was current that angels were present at the giving of the Law. The closest thing to this in the Old Testament is perhaps Deuteronomy 33:2, the LXX version of which says, 'at his right hand were angels with him' (compare especially, Gal. 3:19 and Acts 7:53). The point is, then, that the contrast is between the revelation mediated by angels namely the Law, and that mediated by the Son. Virtually all the arguments which follow in this letter are drawn from the Law and its regulations. The greater the mediator, the greater the revelation.

His **name** is more than his title; it is the expression of his character and status (compare Ex. 33:18–19a; 34:5–7) and thus has great significance (so Phil. 2:9–11).

1:5 For to what angel did God ever say, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee?' Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?'

Verses 5–14 are an expansion of this last statement about the Son's superiority to the angels. In what way is the Son superior? Well to begin with, **To what angel did God ever say, 'Thou art my Son as is quoting Ps. 2:7**

and 2 Sam. 7:14. Plainly, the answer is, to none of them.

1:6 And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'

**And again, introduces** another quotation and ought not be connected with 'he brings,' as in the N. A.S.B. which renders it, 'And when he again brings the firstborn as is', for the son was only brought into the world once; there was only one incarnation. **The firstborn** (cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:5). is the only way the Son is addressed. As a title, this may have its roots in Ps. 89:27, which originally referred to David, the man after God's own heart, to whom Ps. 2:7 (see Heb. 1:5) also initially applied. The significance of the firstborn must be seen in its setting in the ancient world, where inheritance and position were tied to it (cf. Gen. 27:1–4, 35–37; Deut. 21:17; Luke 15:31). Also the title was used figuratively to indicate pre-eminence, even in a negative sense (for example Job. 18:13; Isa. 14:30). In the light of other clear New Testament teaching (for example Jn. 1:1ff). it cannot be taken to mean that the Son had a beginning.

Is the reference to his birth as son of Mary? Certainly angels worshipped then (Luke. 2:8–14). The quotation, '**Let all God's angels worship him,**' is from the LXX of Deut. 32:43, which called on the angels to worship God. (In passing, the deity of Christ is confirmed by such use of the Old Testament in the New—see also on 1:8). F.F. Bruce draws attention to a rabbinic tradition which claims that when Adam was created, the angels were invited to come and worship him.<sup>1</sup> If the

<sup>1</sup> The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids, 1964) pg. 16.

tradition was current when this letter was written, it may well be that the author had it, at least partially, in mind

1:7 Of the angels he says, 'Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire'.

The next quotation, from Ps.104:4, describes the function of angels in the divine economy. They are portrayed as executing God's commands with the swiftness of the **winds** and the strength of **fire**. Or it may be, in contrast with the quotations to follow in verses 8–12, that the nature of angelic ministry is fading like wind and fire by comparison with the eternal changelessness of the Son.

1:8–9 But of the Son he says, 'Thy throne O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of the kingdom.(9) Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades'.

This quotation, from Ps. 45:6–7, is set in contrast to verse 7, In saying **But of the Son he says, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever....'**the writer is directly addressing the Son as God! (The R.S.V. of Ps. 45:6 is inadequate; see footnote 'h') Notice how a psalm initially addressed to the king (probably a royal wedding psalm) is seen as applying to Christ.

The feature of the rule of the Son is his **righteousness**; his is a **righteous scepter**. Passages such as Jer.23:1–6

highlight the righteous reign of the Messiah against the continuing unrighteousness of Israel's leaders (the shepherds).

But who are **the comrades** who are unable to experience such joy as his? One suggestion is that they are those whom "he is not ashamed to call...brethren" (2:11), but this seems unlikely in the light of such statements as Matt. 25:21, 'enter into the *joy of your Lord*' and Jn.15:11, 'that your *joy* may be full ' which, in the context, is Christ's joy in them. Although, in the Psalm, 'comrades' refers to contemporaries of the king, namely kings of surrounding countries, it is probable here, in view of the context of Christ's superiority to angels, that the comrades are also a reference to the angels.

1:10–12 And, 'Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; (11) they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment,(12) like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end.

Next in the list of Old Testament quotes is the statement taken from Ps.102:25–27. Three statements originally addressed *to* God are here taken as being spoken *by* God *to* the Son. There is no real difficulty in this, since the writer has already established, in 1:1, that the Old Testament writings are God speaking. Not e also the consistent picture of the Son, as creator (1:2,10,11:3) and as eternal (1:8,12;7:74–25;13:8).

1:13 But to what angel has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet'?

Clearly, no angel has ever been given the privilege of sitting at **my right hand till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet** (Ps.110:1). Consequently no angel would ever be addressed thus (see Matt.22:21–46 for Jesus use of this quotation.)

1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?

The reason why God never speaks to angels this way is simple; they are only **ministering spirits, sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation. If** it is true that angels are the object of comparison here because they are symbolic of the Law, then we can see a close resemblance to Paul's declaration that "the law.....ordained by angels, but a preliminary statement of what will be filled out later, namely the preparatory nature of the Law.

The salvation spoken of lies in the future (4:11, cf.1 Pet. 1:5), even it its blessings can already be enjoyed (6:5). We are only heirs as the result of the ministry of *the heir* (1:2,cf.1:22–23).

## Hebrews Chapter Two

### 2:1–4 Exhortation

Exactly what this salvation is does not need to be filled out here. The readers are no doubt aware of the details and, besides this much of the substance of salvation will be detailed out later in the letter. What does need emphasis is the fearful danger of treating this salvation lightly. It must be kept in mind that an exhortation such as this, though no doubt severe, is nonetheless gracious since its aim is to keep the believers from losing their inheritance. The whole letter is just such an exhortation (13:22).

2:1 Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

God has spoken to us in his Son. **Therefore, we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard**, that is, our response must be disciplined, **lest we drift away from it**. To fail to hear truly what is said would be to find oneself in a hopeless situation, cut off from any certainty of salvation (cf. in contrast, 3:6).

2:2–3 For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a

just retribution, (3) how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation. It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him,

It is well known how seriously **every transgression or disobedience** to the earlier revelation was treated. The major example of Num. 20:2–13 is dealt with in 3:7–4:12. Well, if **the message declared by angels was**, as the readers would readily agree, **valid, and** disobedience treated so severely, **how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation**? Since the final revelation came directly through the Son, obviously to neglect the salvation he has revealed would be to cut oneself off from any hope of escape from an equally *just* retribution.

The salvation which has been received **was declared at first by the Lord**, Jesus himself. This does not simply refer to Jesus as a preacher but to his whole ministry which was an *effective* proclamation of salvation, that is in his proclamation men and women were actually saved (cf. Luke 4:18–21, 36; 19:9). This saving proclamation **was attested to us by those who heard him. They** confirmed his proclamation and their confirmation was, of course, in the same power as the initial proclamation. It was more than an agreement that Jesus had actually said such and such. Those who confirmed it were equally ‘eye-witnesses and *ministers* of the word’ (Luke 1:2), through whom the salvation was brought to effect (Luke 24:46–49). The readers of this letter had experienced a powerful deliverance through the ministry of those who had in turn heard Jesus.

2:4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will.

This was no bare proclamation which had come to them. God himself **also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will.** ‘The mighty works and wonders and signs which marked the ministry of Jesus (Acts. 2:22) continued to mark the ministry of the apostles from Pentecost onwards (Acts. 2:43)’<sup>1</sup> The various distributions of the Holy Spirit were not limited to the apostles, as we see in 1 Corinthians 12:11.

Because of the clarity and finality of this revelation, to neglect would be to neglect the only possible way of salvation (cf. Acts. 4:12)

### 2:5–18 Jesus as greater than angels is the perfect man.

The section, 2:5–18, goes on to show what it is that Jesus has both done and is doing with regard to this great salvation. In fact it is only in Christ that man’s destiny as promised by God has any possibility of fulfilment.

2:5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.

**It was not to angels that** the promises were made; they were only the bearers of the Old Covenant. Rather the promises were made to *man*. **God subjected the world to come** to man. (For ‘subjected’, see the discussion on 2:8).

<sup>1</sup>Bruce. pg.31. See also Acts. 4:29–30; 14:3; Rom. 15:18–19.



The word ‘world’ here (gk. *oikoumene*) is the inhabited earth, with particular reference to the inhabitants (cf. Acts.17:30–31). But it is not this world but the **world to come, of which we are speaking**. The world to come is the goal of the people of God which will be discussed in ch. 4 (cf. 6:5; 2Pet.3:13). How can the writer say that we are speaking of the world to come? The subject is the neglect of salvation. The answer is that the world to come is the inheritance which this salvation brings. To be saved is to be ‘born anew to a living *hope*.....to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you’ (1Pet.1:3–4; cf. Rom.8:18–25).

2:6–8a It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is men that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him?(7) Thou didst make him for a little lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour,(8) putting everything in subjection under his feet’.

Far from concentrating on angels, God’s focus for his care and concern is man, as **has, been testified somewhere**. The writer is not concerned to identify the particular authors whom he quotes. This is not simply laziness on his part; it is unnecessary, since he has already recognised that the scriptures are in fact the utterances of God.

The quotation, from Ps. 8:4–6, demonstrates the wonder which overcomes the psalmist when he considers the exalted way in which God deals with man. Man is not a puny, helpless creature, but God has created him to be so far above brute creatures as to be only a little **lower than the angels, almost** comparable with them

in glory.<sup>2</sup> Man is glorious, but not because of his own qualities. It is God’s **glory** with which he has been crowned. His **honour** lies in being in the image of God and thus sharing in the dominion of God over the created order (Gen.1:26–28).

2:8b Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

The dominion of man was over **everything** in creation; nothing was omitted. The world to come (2:5) will be the point for the restored dominion of the sons of God. Until then, they walk by faith and not by sight cf. Rom.5:17) However, it is clear that, in spite of his created glory, man does not, in fact, have everything subject to him. Man does not exercise his rightful dominion.

2:9 But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste for every one.

While we do not see man crowned with glory and honour and exercising his rightful dominion, **we do see Jesus** who is *the* man who fulfils God’s creational

<sup>2</sup> The R.S.V. of Ps.8:5, ‘a little less than God’, reflects the most obvious meaning of the Hebrew ‘*elohim*’, but Heb.2:7 follows the LXX which takes ‘*elohim*’ in its rarer, generic sense, to mean supernatural beings, that is angels’ (D. Kinder, Psalms 1-72, T.O.T.C. pg.67) For a different explanation of the force of the Psalm, see J.Brown, *An Exposition of The Epistle to The Hebrews*, (Banner of Truth, London, 1961) pp.92-94.

purpose as expressed in the Psalm. He is 'the last Adam', 'the second man' (1Cor.15:45,47).

Jesus **for a little while was made lower than the angels.** The translation 'for a little while' of the Greek phrase *brachu ts* is not without its opponents. The Greek is ambiguous. Some prefer to render the sentence 'made a *little* lower than the angels', both here and in verse 7. In defence of this latter translation Westcott says '*brachu ts* is used here of degree 9cf.2 Sam.16:1) and not of time (Isa.57:17 LXX 'for a little while') The hebrew is unambiguous; and there is no reason to depart from its meaning either in (vs.7) or (here)'<sup>3</sup> Both renderings seem to fit the ministry of Jesus. He was made 'a little lower than the angels' that is he became a man, but to say that he was a man only for a little while fails to see that the glorified Jesus who ascended into heaven is still a man. It is also hard to see how 'for a little while' could apply to man in Ps.8:5<sup>4</sup>

The crowning of Jesus **with glory and honour** directly relates to his undergoing **the suffering of death** (cf.Lu.24:26; 1Pet.1:11). His glory was his suffering of death, because his passion was his obedient sonship (cf.5:8; Phill.2:5–11). This suffering of death was the action of **the grace of God. The Son** did not suffer on his own account, but that in his death **he might taste death for everyone.**<sup>5</sup> His glory as man was the glory of God's grace.

<sup>3</sup> Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, 1974) pg.44.

<sup>4</sup> against Brown, see note 8.

<sup>5</sup> A full discussion of the implications of 'for everyone' (R.S.V.) will be found in Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, 1977), pp. 92-94.

2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons into glory should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

The death of Christ **was fitting**, or appropriate, for the purpose of God. Just how appropriate is yet to be set out in detail, but it will include discussion of the inappropriate nature of the Aaronic priesthood for true cleansing of the conscience (see especially ch.9, but this is the thrust of a large part of the letter) and the deep nature of man's bondage(2:14–15).

God is described as the one **for whom and by whom all things exist** and is this distinct from Jesus who has been "made a little lower than the angels". However, it is clear from 1:2–3 & 10–12 that Jesus is not excluded from the ascription.

God is bringing men (back) **into glory** (2:7), not just as men but as **sons** as Jesus is Son. The means of bringing men to their fulfilment their created norm—is the suffering of Jesus. His suffering made him **perfect** or mature. As the author or **pioneer of our salvation, Jesus** is what we will be. His sonship is the measure of ours (cf. Eph.4:13). Hence God's action made Jesus a mature Son (5:8\_9) and so truly our representative both in his death and exaltation.

2:11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Jesus is the one **who sanctifies. The** language of sanctification in this letter primarily relates to the High Priest . That which the High Priest does in his sacrificial

duties effects the sanctification of the people. The people are holy (sanctified) because the priest has made atonement for their sins. The ongoing process of sanctification is described in 12:14 as ‘following after holiness’ It is **those who are sanctified** who will do this. Both Jesus, the High Priest and the objects of his gracious work, as mature sons, derive their mature sonship from God; they **have all one origin**. Since this sonship is the purpose of God, Jesus is **not ashamed to call (them) brethren, to** identify with them, by acknowledging the relationship (cf.(Rom. 8:28–29). This identification will be a source of great comfort to those who feel in need (cf.4:14–16).

2:12–13 saying, I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee’ (13) And again, ‘I will put my trust in him’. And again, ‘Here am I, and the children God has given me’.

These verses illustrate the relationship, which has just been mentioned, with three quotations from the Old Testament, from, Ps.22:22 and Isa. 8:17–18. The quotation highlight the fact that, although it may not always appear so on the surface, the New Testament writers were very careful in their use of scripture In particular, the context of the chosen Old Testament texts was highly significant.

The first quotation was taken from Psalm 22, ‘in which no Christian of the first century would have failed to recognise

Christ as the speaker’<sup>6</sup> The psalm may be divided into two sections. The first, verses 12–21, tells of the suffering of the speaker and the significance of the

psalm for New Testament descriptions of Christ is easy to see (for example the reference to the pioneer of salvation being made perfect through *suffering* 2:10) The statement in vs. 12, taken from Ps.22:22, is from the commencement of the second section of the psalm (verse 22–31) which carries the note of praise and joy for deliverance. The suffering is over (and effect, see Isa. 53:11). The psalmist praises God ‘in the midst of the congregation’ (hebrew *qahat*) of Israel, which is parallelism for ‘to my brethren ‘ The New Testament, following the LXX, uses *ekklesia* for congregation. The community of believers, those who are sanctified, are Christ’s brethren .

The second and third quotation are taken from Isa. 8:17–18. The context is again a messianic passage (for example see Isa. 8:14–15), in which the prophet , his message commits himself to God and leaves the message with his disciples. He and his sons, with their symbolic names, stand alone as signs and portents to unbelieving Israel. The choice of these two quotations here points to the whole thrust of this letter. God has spoken (Isa. 8:19–20) and through rejected by men, the Word committed himself to God (1Pet.4:19) and takes his stand with the sons of God.<sup>7</sup>

2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that it , the devil,

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, pg.45.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce says of the quotation from Isa.8:17-18, ‘This is a good example of C.H. Dodd’s thesis that principle Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are not isolated proof texts, but carry their contexts with them by implication’. (Bruce, pg.46).



In order for Jesus to be the pioneer of salvation for man, to be *the* man crowned with glory and honour, and to taste death for everyone, it was necessary for him to assume human form. **Since the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature.** The word became flesh.

Now, the end of all flesh is death (Gen.2:16–17;3:22; Rom.6:23) and Jesus became flesh in order to **destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil.** In order to do this, Jesus must enter death himself with a view to rising again<sup>8</sup> and so breaking the hold (gk. *kratos*) over death which Satan has. He has **the power of death while** there is guilt in the human conscience (cf.9:14). With this hold broken, Satan is destroyed that is rendered powerless. ‘Death that is truly death (1Jn.3:14).which was the utmost effect of Satan’s power, became the instrument of his defeat’<sup>9</sup>

2:15 and deliver all those who through fear FO death were subject to lifelong bondage.

It is by the **fear of death** that the Devil has his hold. Approach to understanding this statement, fall into three basic categories. The first refers the fear of death to those who come to perceive their precarious position and who are delivered because they have applied to Christ for salvation.<sup>10</sup> The second approach that of John Brown who translates the words as ‘liable to the fear of death’. He says,

<sup>8</sup> although resurrection is not specifically mentioned until 13:20.

<sup>9</sup> Westcott, pg.53.

<sup>10</sup> for example Westcott,pg.53.

‘all men by nature .....are doomed to death as a penal evil. The awful truth on this subject may be brought before their minds in its meaning and evidence, and if it is, they must be agitated with fear....Had it not been for the salvation of Christ, all men would have been, during their whole life, liable to be attacked by such fears of death’.<sup>11</sup>

Both these approaches see the fear of death as a specifically conscious experience. The third approach, on the contrary, is not concerned with only a conscious awareness of fear. The point here is that all men, in spite of their protests to the contrary, and even their actions to the contrary, have a deep fear of death, and this fear, says 1Jn.4:18, is related to punishment, which is, of course, the result of guilt. Thus we see all around us attempts to cover the naked reality of death and its awesome implications, for example in our society, euphemisms, elaborate memorials as is. As well as the urgent attempts of the people to gain ‘security’. However, ‘perfect love casts out *all* fear’ because perfect love, God’s love action, deals with guilt at the point where it is operative, namely the conscience (see 9:14;10:2;1Jn.4:10)

2:16 For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham.

The thought returns to the issues raised earlier. It is **not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham** (lit. ‘not of angels does he take hold, but he takes hold of the seed of Abraham’). Angels are not saved but the descendants of Abraham are. That is why he assumed human nature.

<sup>11</sup> pg. 129.

'He takes hold' is in the present tense. Brown says, 'The assumption of human nature is a past event, but the salvation of

his people is the constant employment of the Saviour'<sup>12</sup>

**The descendants of Abraham** indicates the first priorities of the Son. The first action of the Gospel was upon the Jews(cf.Matt.10:5–6;Rom.1:16 as is) and our readers are Jewish (see *Introduction*). Cf.Gal.3:16, where Paul argues that the singular 'seed' implies not many but one, that is Christ. The singular is likewise used here. The R.S.V.' descendants' is therefore correct only by implication. Salvation is for Abraham's seed, for it is he who representative of those whom he is to deliver.<sup>13</sup>

2:17 Therefore he had to be made like his brethren every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people.

The writer now introduces another aspect of Jesus' identification with his brethren. He must be like them in every respect in order that he may function for them in the role of **a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God. He** was their representative, but the appointment was God's (see 3:2). What he did, he did 'by the grace of God' (2:9)

If the goal was to deliver people from the fear of death, then

their high priest must **make propitiation for the sins of the people**. If he did not, he would not be

<sup>12</sup> Pg.131.

<sup>13</sup> In this connection , cf. the representative use of Hos,11:1 at Matt.2:15,as well as the force of Heb.2:6-9.

merciful to the people nor faithful to he commission. Mercy always finds expression in the context of judgment (cf. the repeated references to a coming judgment within this letter). Those sins which will make the prospect of judgment within this letter). Those sins which will make the prospect of judgment fearful, must be put away.

*Expiation or propitiation?* <sup>14</sup>This question presents itself in the various translations of the Bible, for example 'expiation' in R.S.V. and N.E.B. and 'propitiation' in N.A.S.B.<sup>15</sup> Those who prefer 'expiation' see the object of the action the sins, or are the sins the reason why the action is necessary? Both in this letter (10:26–31)and elsewhere (Rom.1:18ff.; 1Thess1:10; 2Thess.1:5–10 as is) it is clear that God is *angry with* the sin of man. It is quite clear that *God* must be *propitiated* if the conscience of man is to have peace. His sin must be dealt with, but it is his relationship with God which is at stake. The fear of death is the fear of standing before an unpropitiated God. Thus we read in a literal translation of Luke 18:13,'God be propitious to me a sinner.'

2:18 For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

Because he took flesh and blood, the high priest can experience all the pressures which the people

<sup>14</sup> A very full discussion of this question is to be found in Leon Morris, the *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*,(London,1965) pp.144-213; there is also an abbreviated form of this in the *New Bible Dictionary*,(London,1962)pg.1046f.

<sup>15</sup> N.I.V. 'to make atonement' is incorrect. 'Atonement' or 'reconcillation' is the translation of the gk. *Katallage*, whereas the word here is *hilaskesthai*. The editors of the N.I.V. have added the meaning of *hilaskesthai* in a footnote.

experience. He **has suffered and been tempted** (and *died* for us ) Therefore **he is able to help those who are tempted** to turn back from the suffering which comes to those who desire to be ‘godly in Christ’ (2 Tim.3:12). We must recall that this is, in fact, the purpose of this letter; the readers were tempted to choose a way of ‘godliness’ that did not include identification with Christ, namely a return to Judaism . But it is too late, since Christ has already identified himself totally with them. To go back would be neglect what the high priest has already accomplished (2:30) But they need not fear; he is able to help them.

### *Hebrews Chapter Three*

#### **3:1–6 Jesus –Greater than Moses.**

3:1–4:13 is an exposition of what the faithful high priesthood of Jesus means. He is able to help, but only on the condition that his high priesthood and the effectiveness of his ministry is taken seriously.

3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession .

**Holy Brethren;** this designation, beside being a recognition of the writer’s relationship with his readers, flows directly from what has been said above in 2:10–11. They are **brethren**, first of the Son (as in 2:11) and then, in consequence, of each other, and they are **holy** brethren because they have been sanctified. They are the objects of the work of the merciful and faithful high priest, therefore they *are* holy. Their holiness does not depend upon their own efforts but upon his. Their problem is that they are being sorely tempted to withdraw from this position, which is a **heavenly call** (c.f. 2:9 by the *Grace* of God).

Since their privileged position was won by the propitiatory death of Jesus (2:17), they must seriously consider Jesus and the implication of his ministry. He is **the apostle and high priest of our confession**. He is the apostle –the one sent from God (from *apostello* –I send ) –and the high priest—who acted on our behalf in the great action of propitiation. In him both the role of Moses and Aaron are combined.

**Of our confession.** The initial response to Christ was to *confess* him as Lord (see Acts 2:36 –38; 16:31; Rom.10:9). But far from being a mere title, his lordship encompassed all he had done, and since the early disciples were generally well taught by the apostles (compare Acts 19:8–10 20:26–27 as is ) they would have known the issues involved. Their problem was not one of intellect but of will.

3:2 He was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in God's house.

The consideration of Jesus as apostle and high priest invites comparison, first with Moses, who was likewise sent to the people of Israel to deliver them and whose claim to authority was paramount for Israel.

Both Jesus and Moses were faithful to God. Moses was faithful in God's house (compare Num.12:7 ) that is the whole family of the people of God.

3:3–4 Yet Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more glory than the house.(4) (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)

While both Jesus and Moses were faithful, still Jesus is to be seen as deserving far greater glory than Moses in the same way that a building which serves its purpose is not as praiseworthy as the one who built it .

It was *not* Moses who established or built the people of Israel. He did not initiate anything. The builder of all things is God and the writer has already established that the Son was the one through whom the building was done (1:2). What Jesus achieved in delivering his people was nothing less than the bringing into being the 'new' or 'renewed' people of God. He was not as 'Moses was, so to speak, lost in the economy which was given through him: Christ was the author of that which he instituted.'<sup>1</sup>

3:5–6a Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, (6) but Christ was faithful over God's house as a son.

The distinction between Moses and Jesus is simple. Moses was faithful **in** God's house, Jesus **over** it . Moses was the servant in the house, Jesus the Son who has total authority over it.

Moses' serving was with a view to his bearing witness to things which were to be spoken later. As such his ministry, and by implication the role of the old Judaic cultus, was provisional. He prepared Israel to receive the Word to come (so Heb.1:1–2) Now those things which were to be spoken have been said. Moses task is finished!

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<sup>1</sup> Westcott, pg.76.

3:6b. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.

If the nation of Israel was the household in which Moses served, what is the household over which Jesus rules? The answer that “we” are his house, we Christians who have believed in him. (cf. Gal. 6:10 ‘the household of faith’) However, the writer stressed that membership of the household of God, while not coming about through human effort (2:9 ‘by the *grace* of God’) does require that the members to persevere to the end. They have heard the word (1:1–2, 2:5) and must now hold fast to it. (Mk.13:13; Jn.8:31).

**Our confidence** is our bold action of faith, and our **pride in our hope** is in contrast to the hope which makes us ashamed (see Rom.5:2,5). Our pride in our hope is seen in our pressing on towards our hope.

### 3:7–4:13 Exhortation

3:7–11 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Today, when you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as  
as  
in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. (10) Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their hearts; they have not known my ways’, (11) As I swore in my wrath, “They shall never enter my rest”.

This quotation, from Psalm 95:7–11, is the Holy Spirit’s warning to us. It was not the first time such a warning had been given. The psalmist had been

solemnly warning his own generation. The quotation flows naturally from what has just been said (3:6b). It describes the failure of Israel to persevere in faith and to move forward in confidence towards their promised goal (hope). They heard God’s word but hardened their hearts and so failed to enter the promised land. This rejection of God’s word was a rejection of Moses’ leadership (see Ex. 17:1–2, Num. 14:22 ff. 20:2ff as is ) The relative seriousness of rejection of *Jesus* authority has already been spelled out in 2:1–4.

**Your fathers put me to the test** (vs. 9; R.V. ‘your fathers tempted me by proving me’). They had no right to expect God to prove himself as worthy of their trust –their responsibility was simply to obey.

3:12 Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

The **take care** (lit. ‘see’) follows from the ‘therefore’ of vs.7. As the warning indicated, the readers must beware lest there be in them **an evil unbelieving heart**. The evil is the unbelief, since it fails to receive the revelation which God has given (cf. Rom.1:18–21). And it is unbelief which leads to a **falling away from the living God**, which is what happened to the people under Moses. The warning is clear; it *is* possible for believers to fall away through neglect of faith. Such a falling away would not be seen as tragic mistake. Rather it would be tantamount to rebellion and carry with it the consequences of rebellion (3:10–11cf. Deut.28:15–68), more serious than those incurred by Israel (2:2–3).

3:13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

There is need, therefore, for careful discernment and mutual exhortation whilst the opportunity remains. **As long as it is called today** refers to the need for immediate response of vs. 7. Under Moses the 'today' lasted 40 years; so, if you can hear God speaking now, then act now. The day will surely come when rebellion will result in such hardening that nothing of the voice of God can be heard at all.

**The deceitfulness of sin** is such that it does not appear as sin but as that which is in itself a value to the one who is tempted (see for example Gen. 3:6) Of course it is deadly and as such must be treated with utmost seriousness. Otherwise the conscience will gradually (though not necessarily *slowly* ) be seared until it can no longer register to the demands of God (1 Tim. 4:2).

3:14 For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.

This repeats the call for perseverance of 3:6 **We share in Christ**

( lit. *the* Christ, that is the hope of our fathers<sup>2</sup> only whom we are diligent to live in the good of his work for us. Our sharing in Christ continues the thought of being his 'brethren' (2:11) through what he has done.

3:15 while it is said, 'Today when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'

<sup>2</sup> Westcott,pg.84f.

The point is that while sin may harden, the responsibility is all ours: 'Do not harden your hearts'.

3:16–18 Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they should never enter his rest, but to those who disobedient?

These verses repeat the exhortation, but from a different angel. To whom was God speaking when he said 'harden not your hearts' ? It was not to the sinful outsider ' but those who had actually experienced the deliverance at the exodus. Likewise those who provoked the Lord to anger were e those who had witnessed God's mighty works yet nevertheless rebelled against him. And those who were excluded from God's 'rest' were those who actually expected to enter it, who had devoutly sworn obedience (Ex.19:8).Cf.1 Cor.10:1–13 for similar use of the O.T. experiences.

3:19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Disobedience such as that in the wilderness was nothing but the expression of unbelief. (see Rom. 1:5, 16:26. Acts 6:7 where to believe is to obey, and 2 Thess. 1:8, 1 Pet 2:8 where unbelief is disobedience). Thus seen, we can observe, with Westcott, that 'Their exclusion from Canaan was not only a fact, but a moral necessity'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Westcottpg.88.



## *Hebrews Chapter Four*

4:1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it.

**Therefore.** This chapter takes up and applies more fully the lessons learned from the people of Israel in the wilderness. In doing so it raises an important issue, namely the fulfilment of Old Testament types in the New Testament. The point being made does not only involve the wilderness rebellion as an illustration of the problems facing the readers of this letter. Rather the wilderness rebellion excluded the people from entry into the promised land, and the promised land is, in itself, only a partial fulfilment of God's promises. For, **the promise of entering his rest remains.** The rest under Joshua was only a "type", a paradigm worked out beforehand, of all that God had purposed for his people. It is still, therefore, the 'today' of the warning in 3:13<sup>1</sup>

**Let us fear....**The reader's danger in leaving Christ for the 'security' of Judaism was far greater than they

imagined, since in doing so they would exclude themselves from any fulfilment of God's promises (cf. 6:4ff. as is ) 'There is no attitude more dangerous to the church than that of unconcern and complacency'<sup>2</sup> That is the whole point in 'considering Christ' (3:1) lest we 'neglect such a great salvation' (2:3).

4:2 For good news came to us just as to them; but the message which they heard did not benefit them because it did not meet faith in the hearers.

**For the good news came to us....**is literally, 'we also have been evangelised'<sup>3</sup> Technically, 'gospel' does *not* mean 'good news'; it means 'appropriate proclamation' *Good* news is a mistranslation of the Greek prefix *eu* which is an adverb meaning 'well' (as in euthanasia) The gospel is proclamation to be presented with due solemnity, considering its source (cf. Mk. 1:14–15) It is only *good* news if it **meets with faith in the hearers.** Otherwise it is a message of judgment (cf. Rev. 14:6–7; Luke 3:7–18). The readers have heard the proclamation; they have been evangelised. But then so had those in the wilderness (cf. Gal. 3:8). However, they failed to benefit from the message itself both a promise *and* a warning (cf. Acts. 17:30–31; Rev. 14:6–7) because they did not believe it.

4:3–5 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall never

<sup>1</sup> This gives point to the argument in 11:39–40 that the Old Testament men and women of faith could not receive the promises apart from the believers under the New Covenant.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, pg. 155.

<sup>3</sup> The noun 'gospel' (gk. *euaggelion*) does not appear at all in this letter and the verb 'to evangelise' (gk. *euaggelizomai*) only twice, here and at 4:6

enter my rest,' although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.(4) For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works' (5) And again in this place he said, 'They shall never enter my rest.'

The contrast with those who perished in the wilderness because of unbelief and the readers is that it is **we who have believed (who) enter that rest**. The writer's warning always take into account the gracious work which has been done in his readers, that is he never preaches *at* them, but the warning is always a word of exhortation (cf. 13:22, and the hard word in 6:4–8 which is followed by 6:9ff.) He is encouraging them to continue in faith, in love and good works (so 10:21).

The point of repeating the last part of the quotation is to show that God does have a rest and that it has not yet been attained. But that does not mean that it is at all uncertain. It is most certainly there since the works of God were finished from the foundation of the world. God's purpose was not conditioned by events which overtook mankind. Rather, his plan, including his gospel, was formed in eternity (cf. Eph.1:3–5; Rev. 13:8; Rom. 8:28–30; 2Tim.1:9).

The apparent vagueness of **somewhere** has been seen previously in 2:6. Hughes.<sup>4</sup> refers to Aquinas' judgment that 'somewhere' 'is used here to signify a text that is well known. In the nature of the case, it could hardly betoken uncertainty on the author's part and there is no necessity for him to give his readers, well versed as they were in the scriptures, a specific identification of the passage's source'.

<sup>4</sup> Pg.159.

4:6–7 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, (7) again he sets a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts'.

The failure of Israel to enter the rest and the possibility that some may still enter it is seen in the way that God, **through David**, who in general is regarded as the author of the whole psalter, repeated the promise. There is another 'today', not limited to the time of Moses.

4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later of another day.

Plainly if the 'rest' obtained by the people under Joshua was the fulfilment of God's purpose s (that is if Judaism was the most one could expect ) then the repetition of the promise by the psalmist would be pointless.

4:9–10 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God; (10) for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labours as God did from his.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is clear; there is a **sabbath rest for the people of God**. The word for 'sabbath rest', *sabbatismos*, is not found in the literature before this, and occurs only here in the New Testament. It is evidently a word created by Greek speaking Jews (is not in fact, by the author of this letter !) to describe that 'rest' (gk. *katapausin*) which Israel failed to gain in the wilderness. By using this word, the writer evidently intends to bring home the fact that the



sabbath in the Old Testament , rooted as it was in creation and redemption (cf.Ex.20:8–11; Deut.5:12–15) was itself a type of the rest available to the people of God. Just as entry into Canaan under Joshua pointed forward to the rest from wandering, so also the sabbath day pointed forward to a rest from labour, for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labours as God did from his (see Gen.2:2)

The rest is only **for the people of God**, of course. As in the wilderness they were known, not by their words but by their faith and obedience (cf.3:18–19), so now they will be known by their holding fast their 'confidence and pride in their hope' (3:6, see the note.)

4:11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience .

Once again, the possibility of harsh criticism is removed by the writer associating himself with his readers: **Let us strive. The** exhortation is applicable to all.

Entry into the rest of God is of grace (2:9) but never let it be thought that grace can be neglected, or disobedience to the Word of God allowed. Disobedience such as theirs in the wilderness will cause the readers to **fall** (as the people fell in the wilderness, cf.3:12)

4:12 For the word o f God is living and active, sharper than any two –edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Disobedience which leads to falling away from the living God is disobedience to the *Word* of God . It is the

warning of 3:7–8 which is here continued . Disobedience will be discovered by the Word and retribution certain.

The word is **living and active**. It is not *incarcerated* within the scrolls in the synagogue (or within the pages of the Bible). That Word written is *still* the revelation of God who *still* deals with men (cf.Jer.23:29).

The word is **sharper than any two edged sword** (cf. **Ps. 7:12; Isa.27:1; 34:5–6; Eph.6:17**; Wisdom 18:15f.) The sword of the Lord is sharper and more penetrating than any human weapon; it penetrates to the deepest recesses of the heart (cf. Ps.139:2; Jer.17:10). The Word of God analyses, lays bare, reveals in their true nature, reduces to their final elements, all the powers of man<sup>5</sup> **Soul and spirit. joints and marrow as is** . Much effort has been spent trying to explain the distinctions here <sup>6</sup> Clearly there are distinctions made within scriptures concerning the human 'being' (for example 1 Thess. 5:23), but 'it would indeed be precarious to draw any conclusions from these words about our author's psychology....That the word of God probes the innermost recesses of our spiritual being and brings the subconscious motives to light is what is meant.'<sup>7</sup>

4:13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do .

'We may conceal our inner being from our neighbours, and we can even deceive ourselves; but nothing

<sup>5</sup> Westcott, pg.102.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Hughes, pg. 165.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce. pg.82.

escapes the scrutiny of God; before Him everything lies exposed and powerless. And it is with him .....that our final reckoning has to be made.’<sup>8</sup>

**4:14–5:10 Jesus –Greater than the Aaronic priesthood, being like Melchizedek.**

4:14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus , the Son of God let us hold fast our confession.

The subject now moves to the high priesthood of Jesus, which was first raised in 2:17 and 3:1. The discussion begins (4:14–16) with the encouragement his high priesthood provides, then develops into the nature of that high priesthood (5:1–10:18. with a significant exhortation from 5:11–6:12).

Jesus is **a great high priest** . Hughes points out that ‘the force of the adjective ‘great’ here, is literally ‘great priest’. ....as Luther explains , ‘the greatest of all priests’<sup>9</sup> As believers, they have a high priest *par excellence* ,not like other high priests whose office was conspicuously limited.<sup>10</sup> Rather, this high priest **has passed through the heavens**. ‘Heavens’ (plural) represents the Hebrew word in the Old testament which always plural. The point is not whether there is one or many heavens (cf. 1 Cor. 12:2) but the exaltation of

Jesus. HE did not return to join his sinful people as did the Aaronic priest ; he ascended to the place of supreme authority (cf.1:3b.ff.) He is the **Son of God**.

Since this one is our great high priest. **let us hold fast our confession**. Not to do so would be supreme foolishness.

4:15 For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Our high priest, whom we are to consider (3:1) is not distant from us. The weakness and pressures the readers experience, he fully understands. He became a partaker of flesh and blood (2:14) and has experienced all the temptations which come to men and women. He too has been tempted to give up(Matt.27:40–43), to give in to human weaknesses (Matt.4:1–11). But he did not yield. He was victorious in the conflict. Unlike the high priests of Judaism, he was **without sin**. **What** he did as high priest, therefore, he did completely for others.

4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

No uncertainty, therefore, need attend the readers perseverance as Christians. They can and ought **with confidence draw near to the throne of grace**. Their high priest serves at the throne of God, indeed he is seated upon it (1:8,13), but it is ‘the throne of grace’ (cf.2:9). The throne of God in the Old testament , was the ‘mercy seat’ upon the ark (Ex.25:19–22, cf.Ps.99:1), where. once a year, the blood was

<sup>8</sup> Bruce, pg.83.

<sup>9</sup> Hughes,pg.169.

<sup>10</sup> The office was a political appointment in the latter years before 70ad. Often holders of the position occupied the role for very short periods.

sprinkled on the Day of Atonement. Now this high priest calls the readers to the throne of grace (cf.10:19ff). where they **may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

## *Hebrews Chapter Five*

5:1 For every high priest chosen from among men appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

‘Grace to help in time of need’ relates to the function of the high priest (cf.4:14). Hence the conjunction **for** here, which links the ministry of Jesus with that of **every high priest**. He conforms to the pattern established under Moses.

The high priest was **chosen from among men** (cf.2:14). Jesus who bears the ascriptions of the deity in chapter 1, was also a man. The high priest was also **appointed**. God does not call for volunteers; the high priesthood is his choice alone (cf.5:4). This observation was no doubt especially significant in the light of the degraded way the high priesthood was treated in Jerusalem during the period immediately preceding the was of AD.66–70, the time in which this letter was written. The office was reduced to a political appointment and often went to unscrupulous rogues.<sup>1</sup>

The high priest’s commission was **to act on behalf of men in relation to God**. God chose the one who would

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<sup>1</sup> FF. Bruce. *New Testament History* (New York,1972) pg.65ff. See also Hughes, pg.179.

represent the people before him, and the high priest did so by **offering gifts and sacrifices for sins**, that is all the sacrifices of the Old Testament cultus were required because of the sins of the people.

5:2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weaknesses.

The high priest **can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward**. He will, of course, not deal at all with those who openly reject the holiness of God (cf. Num.15:27–31). His gentleness will flow from a recognition that he too **is beset with weakness** Jesus is no different, in so far as he has been tempted in every respect as we are (4:15). He knows what it is to be under pressure to sin. He also knew what it was to refuse to yield to temptation which, far from making him aloof, renders him one to whom we can come with confidence (4:16).

5:3 Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people.

The weakness of the high priests, however, was not merely due to their humanity but to their depravity.<sup>2</sup> It was, therefore necessary, for the high priest **to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as those of the people**. **Such** was not the case for Jesus. He stands above such weaknesses and thus offers a more certain hope to those who come for cleansing (cf.9:13–14;10:1–4 as is).

5:4 And one does not take the honour upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Taking up the subject of 5:1, the appointment of the high priest by God, it is important to note that a man may not **take the honour upon himself**. On the contrary he must be **called by God**. The illustration of this is **Aaron**, the human paradigm of high priesthood. The events in which Aaron was confirmed as god's choice for the office are described in Num.16:1–17:11.

We ought to observe, however, that Aaron drew his high priesthood from the pattern which existed in eternity, namely the high priesthood of the Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world (Rev.13:8).

5:5–6 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest., but was appointed by him who said to him. 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee' (6) as he says also in another place, 'Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Just as Aaron was called by God, so also was **Christ**, who **did not exalt himself**. On the contrary, 'He humbled himself.....*God* has highly exalted him' (Phil.2:8–9) His calling and appointment are reflected in the two quotations from the psalms, Ps. 2:7 and Ps. 110:4. The first has already been used in the list of references concerning the exaltation of the Son, in 1:5. The context of Psalm 2 shows that the declaration quote here refers to the whole royal ministry of the Son, which *God* had given him over against the rebellion of the kings of the earth. In the second quotation, from Ps. 110:4, a specific feature of his kingly rule as Son is brought out, and it is this aspect which the writer now wishes to develop. The priesthood of Jesus is **after the order of Melchizedek**, who was both king and priest (see 7:1)

<sup>2</sup> Hughes,pg.177.

5:7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear.

Verses 7–10 relate to the suffering of Jesus and its results (cf. 2:9–10). They are intended to show how his endurance qualified him to be the source of eternal salvation and a sympathetic high priest.

In this verse we are told of the depths of Jesus' agony. He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death. There is no doubt a reference to the events in the Garden of Gethsemane, though the reference is to what took place in the days of his flesh. The phrase he was heard for his godly fear has occasioned no little difficulty. How was Jesus delivered from death in the Garden? We are not able here to enter the debate in detail.<sup>3</sup> We can, however, note that some manuscripts of Luke 22 add verses 43–44, 'there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him'. His prayer was answered.

5:8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;

<sup>3</sup> The subject is well treated by Hughes, pp.181–186 and Hewitt, **The Epistle to the Hebrews**, (T.N.T.C. Grand Rapids, 1960), pp.99–101. We can agree with Hewitt when he concludes, 'The great agony of the Saviour of the World will ever remain a mystery to us in this life, and so will other aspects of his suffering. No one can, therefore, afford to be dogmatic concerning the meaning of this difficult phrase' (pg.100f.).

Being Son did not mean that, for Jesus' maturity was granted automatically. Had it been, then he would not have been able to 'sympathise with our weaknesses' (4:15). Rather, **he learned obedience through what he suffered.** This does not imply 'the conquest of disobedience as actual',<sup>4</sup> that is, that he must needs overcome his own sinfulness, for he had none. It does mean that he used each suffering as the occasion to present his full obedience to the Father. So it was that he *learned* obedience of the Son was experiential obedience. Our high priest knows what we go through; he has already been through it.

We ought also to note that had he not learned *obedience* through what he suffered, he would in fact have been denying his Sonship. The import of this to the readers was clear. Not to persevere in obedience (3:18–19) would be to deny the identity as 'the house of God'. (3:6).

5:9–10 and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, (10) being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

**Being made perfect** implies not just 'without fault', but that Jesus was fully qualified for the task which was his (2:10). He lacked nothing and so **became the source (gk. *aitios*)** or cause or originator **or eternal salvation to all who obey him.** His perfection flowed from his obedience to the Father; our perfection from obedience to him.

<sup>4</sup> Westcott, pg.128.

The word translated ‘being made perfect’, (gk, *teleiotheis*) can also be translated ‘mature’, which may accord better with the language of sonship. His obedience was his maturity. At each point he responded as the mature Son. (the issue of maturity is to dominate the section 5:11–6:8).

Why should we obey him? The answer is that his high priesthood is qualitatively different to that of the high priests in Israel. When God appointed him, he **designated him as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek**, who, as we have seen, was king as well as priest (see on 5:6).

### 5:11–6:20 Exhortation

5:11 About this we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

The writer’s intention is to discuss the meaning of Jesus as high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and indeed he will do so in 7:1ff. But in the meantime he is confronted with the inability of the readers to function on this level. The passage, which begins here and continues until 6:20 returns to the subject of Melchizedek, seems like a massive digression. Of course it is not. If anything, it is the major issue, which the more doctrinal parts of the letter are meant to address. The letter itself is, finally, a word of exhortation (13:22).

The writer cannot continue simply to expound the place of Melchizedek. He senses that his audience cannot handle it. They **have become dull of hearing**. It is not the difficulty of the subject but the sluggish thinking of the readers. The perfect tense of ‘have become’ implies that

once they were ‘keen of hearing but now 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 ..... Unbelief closes the ears; incipient unbelief dulls them.’<sup>5</sup>

5:12 For although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God’s word. You need milk not solid food;

If it is expected that believers will mature (Eph. 4:11–16). The clear principle throughout scripture is that the people of God must grow by responding to ‘the Word’, the utterances of God. Such a response to the word will enable believers to instruct those younger and less mature in the faith. This does not mean that all should be teachers in any official sense; it is simply the capacity to speak from mature experience. But the readers are unable to do so. In fact, they are as those who are new born, requiring instruction in **the first principles of God’s word**. As we have seen, it is unbelief which has placed them in this position (cf. 3:12, 19). They cannot teach the word because they have become dull of hearing, that is they do not know the word. This word is not just the Old Testament scriptures, but the living and active word which constantly touches the believer’s conscience and will, so motivating him to growth. And since they are immature they **need milk and not (yet) solid food**.

5:13 for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness. for he is a child.

<sup>5</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1966) pg. 170.



To live on milk, in this context, is to refuse the solid food, to prefer to remain in the safe area where retreat is still possible, or at least it seems to be still possible. it is to remain **a child**.

To do this, the readers must avoid the action to which **the word** constantly draws them, namely the action which is based on accepting Christ alone as our **righteousness** and which therefore moves out to live as those who are confident in that (cf.3:6,14) and who move out in practical engagement in the issues of righteousness (cf.13:12).

5:14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

**Solid food**, on the other hand, and in particular the solid food which the writer wants to give them, which is again the word, **is for the mature**. This maturity cannot be measured simply by time. Rather, the mature are those **who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil**. That is, maturity comes from confronting sin as sin<sup>6</sup> and choosing the good. This is, in fact, to live as one who is righteous in Christ. There is simply no place for dalliance with sin in the believer.

To distinguish good from evil is to choose good and reject evil hence **the faculties are trained by practice**.<sup>7</sup> Passive discernment without active choice is quickly lost, though, in the nature of the case, the loss is seldom noticed.

<sup>6</sup> Contrast 3:13, 'the deceitfulness of sin'

<sup>7</sup> C.F. Hughes, pg.192f. who seems to prefer to discuss the subject in the context of mental disownment.

## Hebrews Chapter Six

6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from the dead works and faith toward God.

**Therefore**, that is understanding what has just been said, **let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity**, of which we have just been speaking,. Their capacity to handle solid food will increase as they move on to maturity. They do not (finally) need milk. Again we note the writer's oneness with the reader's *let us go on*'.

**'The elementary doctrines of Christ'** (lit. 'the word of the beginning of Christ') are listed (vss.1–6). There is, however, no agreement as to whether these things are part of the early Christian proclamation<sup>1</sup> or actually the basic elements of Judaism.<sup>2</sup> Keeping in mind the context of

<sup>1</sup> For example Hughes, pg. 195ff; Brown, pg.275ff; Lenski, pg.175f. J. Calvin, *Hebrews and 1 and 2 Peter* trans W.B. Johnston (Grand Rapids, 1963) pg.71.

<sup>2</sup> For example Bruce, Pg. 112ff; G. Wilson, *Hebrews* (London, 1970) pg.68, says, 'Accordingly, they must no longer adhere to the ceremonies in which Christ was typically prefigured in the Old Testament oracles (5:12), but rather press on to a full apprehension of the 'perfection' of his redeeming work'.

the appeal within the whole letter, we must agree that it is probably the latter which is intended. As Hewitt says,<sup>3</sup> 'If they are to reach spiritual maturity they must break away from Judaism'. The foundation does not need to be laid over again.

Each of the 'doctrines' listed can be understood as part of the preparatory doctrines provided by the Old Testament. The writer does not give an exposition of these doctrines here, he assumes their content is known. We may, though, make some basic observations.

**Repentance from dead works.** "Dead works" are those works which are done in order to satisfy the demands of the law, but they are dead because they are done in ignorance of God's way of righteousness. As such they need to be repented of. In 9:14 the writer declares that only the blood of Christ can cleanse the conscience from the pollution of these dead works, which actually tend to callous the conscience to the real issues (cf. for example Isa. 58:1–59:8; Jer. 4:1–4; Mic. 6:6–8).

The corollary to this is **Faith towards God.** **Repentance** is the repudiation of all that is contrary to the mind of God, and therefore repentance shuts a person up to faith. If you repent there is no alternative but to trust God. The principle of faith is fundamental to the whole structure of Israel, as in Gen. 12:3, Isa. 7:9 and Hab. 2:4 (which is quoted in the argument in 10:37–39).

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<sup>3</sup> P.g.103.

6:2 with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

**Instructions about ablutions** (lit. 'a teaching of baptisms') The Greek word used is not the word normally used for Christian baptism (*baptisma*) ; he uses instead *baptismos*, and that in the plural. On the two other occasions when it is used in the New Testament (Heb. 9:10 and Mark. 7:14) it is used for Jewish ritual washings. Apart from the ritual of the red heifer in Num. 19:1–10 and the promises of such passages as Ezek. 36:25, there was great emphasis on 'ablutions' in contemporary Judaism, both orthodox and radical. Evidence for this can be seen in the archeological excavations of ritual baths at Masada and Qumran and the writings of the Qumran community (Dead Sea Scrolls) The latter 'did not regard such ablutions as a means of removing iniquity from a man's heart. Only by submission to the commandments of God, they believed, could a man be inwardly purified and not until then would ceremonial washing have any value for him.'<sup>4</sup>

**The laying on of hands** is found in the Law in relation to both the commissioning of Joshua (Num. 27:18,23; Deut. 34:9) and the activities of the sacrificial system (Lev. 1:4,3:2,4:4,8:14 as is )

**The resurrection of the dead** Although not a prominent doctrine in the Old Testament, it was nonetheless clearly stated in Isa. 26:19 and Dan. 12:2, and Jesus taught that it was implicit in the declaration that God was not the God of the dead but of the living (see Ex. 3:6; Mark 12:26f.)

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce, pg.115.



**Eternal judgment** See Gen. 18:25, Isa, 33:22. ‘Gods recurring judgments in history will be summed up in the eschatological judgment of Dan.7:9ff.’<sup>5</sup>

6 :3 And this we will do if God permits,

They will go on to maturity, and so be able to receive the word which the writer wants to give (5:11), **if God permits**. There is no sense of doubt implied in this. The writer has already declared the purpose of God in 2:10; 4:8–9 as is. His qualification is, therefore, a recognition of the sovereign hand of God in the life of the believer. It is God who *enables* us to move to maturity. This clause should stir the readers to cry out to God for help and to press on towards *his* sabbath rest

6:4–5 For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and become partakers of the holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come.

Not only will they do this (6:3), it is imperative that they do! There is a point where unbelief (3:19) becomes irreversible, and the readers are faced with this fact. **It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who**, having every experienced the following benefits, commit apostasy.

To understand the issue, the nature of repentance must be clearly grasped Technically, the Greek word for repentance, *metanoia* means ‘a change of mind’. But there is more to repentance than this, as an examination

of the biblical data reveals. Repentance is both a gift from God and an action of the will on the part of the recipient (compare Acts 5:31, 17:30). We may then, say of repentance that *it is given to a man or women to repudiate the ungodly past and all that is associated with it in the present*. In doing so, men and women are left with no other option than to trust God totally, since to repudiate all that is ungodly in the past is, in the ultimate, to repudiate all the past because it is seen that there in no point in the past where sin was not active. By being shut up to faith by true repentance, it becomes clear that *truly repentance is unto life*’ (Acts 11:18, cf. 2 Cor. 7:10).

Those who have repented are Those who have once been enlightened. Reference to concordance will show the way believers are described as having been rescued from ‘the kingdom of darkness’ (Col.1:13), into ‘his marvellous light’ (1 Pet. 2:9) They have within them ‘the light of knowledge, of the glory of God: (2 Cor. 4:6) and as such they now ‘know all things’ (1 Jn. 2:20–21). This new knowledge, essentially a relationship, carries with it the responsibility of consistent living (Eph. 5:8ff) and ongoing faith (1 Jn 1:7). Some have seen this reference to enlightenment as indicating baptism, and the following statement indicating the ‘tasting’ of the Lord’s supper. This sacramental approach is not accepted, but is clearly quite ancient<sup>6</sup>

The readers **have tasted the heavenly gift**. All that believers have is a gift (1f Cor. 4:7), including eternal life itself (Rom. 6:23), faith (Eph 2:8–9) repentance

<sup>5</sup> Bruce pg. 117, see especially his note 33.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, pg. 208f.

(Acts 11:18) and the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned in the next clause (cf. Acts 2:38).

They **have become partakers of the Holy Spirit**. The principle of the New Testament is clear: To believe in Christ is to receive the Holy Spirit and, therefore, to participate in the ministry of the Spirit to the Church (1 Cor. 12:7). This ministry of the Spirit confirmed the Word originally given (2:3b–4).

They **have tasted the goodness of the Word of God**. It is the Word which has been spoken which has brought life, and the Word is the Son himself (Heb. 1:1–2; Jn.1:1ff.) The readers no doubt recall the first time they heard the Word proclaimed (2:3–4) and by it experienced the power of god in total cleansing and renewal (1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:16; Tit.3:4–7).

The experience of the power of God was not limited to the first encounter with Christ. It was an ongoing experience (compare Gal.3:5) They can recall the indications of the Spirit's activity (Heb./2:4). Such indications were the presence in the age (this sphere of existence ) of the **age to come**, over which the Son stands supreme (see note on 1:2).

6:6 if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.

To **commit apostasy** is to repudiate the former repentance, and by implication, the blessings which flowed from it. It is , in effect to deliberately take a stand with those who crucified Christ, and to do so with the full consciousness that they had once stood *with* Christ. It is to treat **the Son of God** with **contempt**, the Son by whom God has definitively spoken (1:2). Those who do such a

thing may have no confidence of restoration since they, by their apostasy, have turned from the sole source of salvation.

It is such a situation which the readers face. By turning from Christ back to Judaism, they are actually returning to those who mocked and then crucified the Son of God.

6:7–8 For the land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.(8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.

The principle of 6:4–6 is illustrated from commonly accepted agricultural practices. Land which receives God's bounty and produces fruit **receives a blessing from God**. But land which fails to bear fruit can only expect judgment (cf. Jer.8:13; Matt. 21:18 and especially Jn. 15:1–6). The parallels with creation would have been obvious to the readers (cf. Gen. 1:11; 2:5,9; 3:17; Isa. 5:1ff).

To say that the land is **near to being cursed** does not mean that there is a possible escape if it should suddenly become fruitful. On the contrary, the nearness of the curse is its imminence, the nearness of contact.<sup>7</sup>

6:9 Though we speak thus , yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation.

<sup>7</sup> Cf Mk. 1:15 and parallels, where the Kingdom of God is also described as 'near' (gk. *eggus*) the word used here.

The severe warning just given could lead to despair if it was misunderstood to mean that slow progress meant no progress. The warning, though necessary and urgent, must not be taken to mean that ‘a genuine work of grace has (not) taken place in their midst’<sup>8</sup> Hence the encouragement. He is not saying that they have e(all) committed apostasy. Rather, the writer can see in them **things that belong to salvation.**

6:10 For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do .

The evidence of grace at work in them is in their **work and the love which (they ) show for his sake in serving the saints.** For these things see 10:32–34. The saints are the holy ones, those who are sanctified (2:11); they are the Christians to whom the letter is written (cf. 13:24) and those who came into contact with them in times of adversity.

God is not so unjust as to overlook as is some Roman Catholic writers see this statement ‘as supporting the doctrine of the meritorious character of good works’<sup>9</sup> But the principle of scripture is that good works are the result and not the cause of salvation . Salvation, from beginning to end, is the effect of grace received by faith (so Rom. 1:16–17; 1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 3:1–5; Eph. 2:8–10; Ex. 20:1ff. as is ) Here it would be unjust to God to overlook the evidences of his own grace. To do so would be to deny *himself* (cf. 2Tim. 2:12–13 where the two parts are clearly contrasted ).

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, pg. 224.

<sup>9</sup> Hughes pg. 226.

6:11–12 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realising the full assurance of hope until the end, (12) so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inheritance the promises.

**And we desire** or , better. ‘we yearn intensely’ that you **show the same earnestness**, as you did when you began (vs.10;10:32–34) **in realising the full assurance of hope until the end.** In chapter 11 the writer says that ‘faith gives substance to what is hoped for’, and thus faith results in assurance that what is hoped for will be received in the end, even though what is hoped for is not yet seen (Rom. 8:24–25). to realise the full assurance of hope until the end is therefore to continue in faith (in Christ ) until the end. This continuance as the opposite of the dull spirit described in 5:11ff. Thus the writer here says that to continue in active faith will ensure that the readers are not **sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

6:13–15 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, (14) saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you’ (15) And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise.

Having said that he desired that the readers should ‘inherit the promises’, the writer now turns to demonstrate the certainty of the promises (which have already been indicated in 4:1 as is ) Abraham illustrates this . **God made a promise** to him, and this promise was solemnly affirmed. Abraham, having only the promise to go

by, (cf. Rom. 4:18–21) nevertheless **patiently endured** and, thus, **obtained the promises**.<sup>10</sup> The promise which was made following by God ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you’ was made following Abraham’s offering up of Isaac (Gen. 22:16ff.) Then there is an explicit oath, which, far from indicating that God was untrustworthy, pointed to the seriousness with which God made his promise. This promise ‘was a recapitulation and elaboration of God’s earlier promise to Abraham that he would bless him and make of him a great nation (Gen. 12:2ff)’<sup>11</sup> Abraham **obtained the promise** not only when Isaac was born, but when, ‘figuratively speaking’, he received him back from the dead. It was the required offering of Isaac which no doubt lies behind the author’s observation that Abraham **patiently endured**.

Note that the writer obviously expects the readers to be aware of the original wording of the oath in Gen. 22:16. This principle is important since the point to which he is moving, namely the designation of the messiah as an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, was by an oath, even though the full quotation, from Ps. 110:4, including the oath is not given until Heb. 7:21.

6:16–17 Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation (17) So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of purpose, he interposed with an oath,

<sup>10</sup> For the apparent contrast between this statement and Heb.11:39, see Bruce pg.129,note 76.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce pg. 129.

The point is emphasised by observing the common practice of placing oneself on oath. The **oath is final** for **confirmation**. But of course men can call upon a **greater than themselves** when they wish to do so. But who is greater than God? So when he **desired to show to the heirs of the promise**, that is initially Abraham but also those who shared his faith (cf. 11:39–40; Gal.3:6–9’23–29) **the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath**; God also added an oath.

6:18 so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us.

The purpose of the oath was to give Abraham (and the readers) a double incentive to persevere **to seize the hope set before us**, The double incentive takes the form of (i) the promise of God and (ii) the oath itself. “God must fulfill His promise. He must fulfill His oath”<sup>12</sup> There is no excuse for sluggishness. Exactly what is intended by **we who have fled for refuge** is not clear. The language is reminiscent of the provision of the cities of refuge in Num.35, but may also indicate the expectation of coming calamity. It is more likely that the words are intended to remind the readers that, like Abraham, they had to press on to the city whose builder and maker is God (11:9–10; 13:14).

6:19–20 We have e this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, (20) where Jesus has gone as a

<sup>12</sup> Westcott pg. 161f.

forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

This double incentive is **a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul**. The image of the anchor relates to the immovable nature of the promise of God and not to any notion of staying still. On the contrary this anchor **is a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain**. That is, our hope derives directly from God himself; our certainty comes from knowing what our high priest has done, Jesus has entered into the very presence of

God **on our behalf** and stayed there as our personal **forerunner** and representative. He will not come out in order to repeat the procedure in a year's time, like the Aaronic priest s in Judaism (cf. 1:3b; 2:10) His high priesthood is significantly different from theirs because (and here the writer returns to the main point of the argument which he left in 5:10) Jesus has **become a high priest after the order of Melchizedek**.

## *Hebrews Chapter Seven*

### **7:1–28 Jesus –A Priest like Melchizedek.**

7:1–2 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; (2) and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of right-eousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

Exactly who was Melchizedek ?<sup>1</sup> The answer is that he was the King of Salem, described briefly in Gen. 14:17–20. Apart from the references in Ps. 110 and here in Hebrews, nothing more is known of him.

**King of Salem, priest of the Most High God.** This designation is a direct quotation from Gen. 14:18. Tradition accepts Jerusalem as the place indicated by Salem. Melchizedek combined the offices of king and priest . We are obviously intended to see, both in Genesis

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended discussion on the significance of Melchizedek, see Hughes, pg.237-245.

and here, that Melchizedek was a worshipper of Yahweh<sup>2</sup> and acted as his priest in Salem.

After Abraham had defeated the four kings (as described in Gen. 14) Melchizedek met him and blessed him. Abraham responded by giving Melchizedek one tenth of all the spoil. The implication of these actions will be developed in 7:4ff.

The name Melchizedek, in hebrew, means **king of righteousness**, and Salem means **peace**. However, it is as a type of the coming Messiah that Melchizedek is described in this way.

7:3 He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever.

The writer's description of Melchizedek as **without father or mother or genealogy** as is may, at first sight, be taken as an observation that the Genesis account gives no information whatsoever about him. To all intents and purposes, then, he stands as 'fitting type of Christ, who has **neither beginning of days nor end of life** and who **continues a priest for ever**.'<sup>3</sup>

Plainly, there is no suggestion 'that he was a biological anomaly, or an angel in disguise'<sup>4</sup>, although some have, as Bruce points out<sup>5</sup> regarded Melchizedek as a manifestation of the preincarnate Son. However, the description, or rather the lack of description, of Melchizedek's genealogy serves a more simple and practical purpose. Melchizedek's role in this passage is

<sup>2</sup> The intention is obvious to all ; cf. L. Hicks, Melchizedek', *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3 pg.343.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, pg. 138.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, pg. 137.

<sup>5</sup> Pg. 137, note 20.

that of a priest of the Most High God, and he introduced, not for his own sake but because the subject is that of the high priestly role of Jesus over against the role of the Aaronic priests. Now the priests in the Old Testament cultus had their genealogies specified; they had to be descended from Aaron. Ezra 2:62 describes how, at the return from exile in Babylon, a number of men claimed to be priests but could not prove their genealogy and 'so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean'. Melchizedek, therefore, would have been totally unacceptable as a priest in Israel.

Again, the description of Melchizedek as having **neither beginning of days nor end of life ..... he continues as a priest for ever**, may be in contrast with the age limits imposed on service for the Levites in Num. 8:24–25; high priests continued in office until death (Num.35:25.28).

7:4 See how great he is ! Abraham the patriarch gave him a tithe of the spoils.

In spite of Melchizedek's unsuitability for service in Israel, **see how great he is ! Abraham the patriarch gave him a tithe of the spoils**. That means that Abraham honoured *him*, yet Abraham was the ancestral father of Israel.

7:5 And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is from their brethren, though these also are descended from Abraham.

Now the principle in Israel is that the **descendants of Levi** (among whom are the priests ) who **are descended from Abraham**



are the recipients of the tithes of the rest of the people. They themselves do not tithe since they were especially concerned with the activities of Israel's religious life and therefore were supported by **their brethren**. Nor was this arrangement voluntary : **the law** commanded it.

7:6–7 But this man who has not their genealogy received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. (7) It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.

But in the case of Melchizedek, Abraham, the father of those receiving tithes, actually pays them to one who stands completely outside the line of those whom the law specifies as recipients. Melchizedek **has not their** (the priests) **genealogy**, that is there is no legal obligation upon Abraham to do this . Abraham, to whom God gave **the promises** actually acknowledges Melchizedek's superiority by doing as he did.

7:8 Here tithes are received by mortal men; there, by one of whom it is testified that he lives.

**Here**, in the present situation in Israel, **tithes are received by mortal men**, that is by those with clear limits to their ministry. But with Melchizedek, tithes are received **by one of whom it is testified that he lives**.

In what way is it testified that he lives ?The answer is not that Melchizedek is now physically alive, rather that there is no record in the testimony (of scripture) concerning his death (cf. 7:3). But the significance of the comment lies in the priesthood which the Old Testament establishes on the basis of this namely in Ps. 110:4

where God declares to the Messiah, 'You are a priest *forever*, after the order of Melchizedek'. It is this which will be taken up in 7:11ff.

7:9–10 One might even say Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid through Abraham, (10) for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

The significance of the different priesthood is elaborated by the observation that when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, and this acknowledged his superiority, in a very real sense Levi, the father of the Aaronic priesthood, also paid tithes. The argument is very similar to Paul's argument in Rom.5:12–21 where the action of the racial head is the action of all. 'Both seminally and by representation Levi was present in the person of his great –grandfather on the occasion.'<sup>6</sup>

7:11–12 Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron ? (12) For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

Since Ps. 110:4 raises the issue of a new *order* or priesthood for the Messiah, the question also arises as to why such should be necessary, unless there is a deficiency in **the Levitical priesthood**. And this must be the case.

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes, pg,253.

Perfection was not and is not **attainable through the Levitical priesthood**, hence a new order is necessary.

The perfection which the levitical priesthood could *not* give was that of a totally pure, mature relationship of the worshipper with God (cf. 10:1–4). At best, since its priest were so limited, the Aaronic priesthood could only point towards that goal.

**For under it** (the Levitical priesthood) **the people received the law. This** is more than just a passing remark, although the translations included it in parentheses. The law which came via Aaron was the basis for the whole system upon which Israel functioned, however much Israel's understanding of that basis may have been corrupted. Still the law, which included all the prescriptions for the sacrificial system, remained while ever the priesthood of Aaron remained. But with the introduction of a new order of priesthood, **there is necessarily a change in the law as well. The** whole structure is changed.

7:13–14 For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar.(14) For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with the tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

There must be a change in the legal structure of priesthood, for the one described as a priest after the order of Melchizedek **belonged to another tribe from which no one has ever served at the altar.** (See 1 Sam. 13:8–14 for an example of the attitude towards the usurping of the priestly functions by someone from another tribe; in that case it was Benjamin.)

**For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah** (cf. Matt. 1:1–17; Luke 1:26,32; 2:4; Gen.49:10). The implication is therefore that Jesus is the Messiah of Jewish expectation. Only four times in this letter(1:10;2:3;13:20 and here) is Jesus called Lord. The title here is particularly appropriate since the mention of Jesus as priest after the order of Melchizedek does more than quote from Ps. 110:4; it reminds us also of the opening verses of the psalm: 'The Lord says to my lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'. Melchizedek and Jesus both are royal priests (cf.7:2).

7:15 This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek,

This need for change in the law becomes even more evident when we observe that Jesus is in **likeness of Melchizedek**. "Melchizedek furnishes, so to speak, the personal as well as the official type of the new High Priest. This likeness brings out more clearly than before the difference between the new and the old priesthood".<sup>7</sup> The nature of the likeness has already been described from Melchizedek's point of view in 7:3.

7:16 who has become a priest, not according to legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life.

Two sides of the likeness are presented. The first is negative; the new high priest is **not according to a legal**

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<sup>7</sup> Westcott, pg. 184.



**requirement concerning bodily descent, that is** descent from Aaron. The second is positive ; his priesthood **is by the power of an indestructible life** (cf. the comments on 7:3). For the contrast between law and life, see also 2 Cor. 3:6 as is .

7:17 For it is witnessed of him, ‘Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek’.

The observation that Jesus has an indestructible life is grounded in the **witness** of scripture. The particular quotation is, of course, from Ps. 110:4 which the writer is stressing at this point, but clearly the theme is a dominant one in the New Testament, for example Acts 2:24; 4:33; Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:12ff; Rev. 1:17f. However, we must notice that the writer is ‘proving his point’ from the Old Testament scriptures. Why should anyone return to Judaism when the Jewish scriptures themselves point to Christ ?

7:18 On the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness.

The **former commandment** related to the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. It was **set aside because of its weakness and uselessness**. It is God who set it aside, since it was he who established the new priesthood, and he did so because the old priesthood could not deal with the problem of guilt (cf. 10:1–2) It could only regulate the external life of the people. That is, it set up the conditions for the people to come to God, in particular in the sacrificial system, but it could never offer the final step, namely total cleansing. It is this theme which will be developed in 9:11–10:18.

7:19 (for the law made nothing perfect) on the other hand, a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God.

Hughes quotes Hebrews to the effect that ‘although some were made perfect under the law, it was not from that they had perfection, but from grace’. It was not the law which gave relief to the conscience. At best it could point the sinner to grace ; of itself **the law made nothing perfect**. But the introduction of a new priesthood means that **a better hope is introduced** which, as we have seen in 6:19, ‘enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain’, that is directly and without guilt into the presence of God.

7:20 And it was not without an oath.

The writer now returns to the subject of the certainty provided by the oath which God swore, which was raised in 6:16ff. The new priesthood came with God’s confirming oath.

7:21 Those who formerly became priests took their office without an oath, but this one was addressed with an oath, ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘Thou art a priest for ever.’

This was in contrast with the Levitical priests who **took their office without an oath** . Jesus, on the other hand, was confirmed in office **with an oath**. In spite of the repeated references to this oath and to Ps. 110:4, and the partial quotation of the verse in 5:6 and 7:17,

this is the first time the opening part of the verse had actually been stated in full.

**7:22 This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant.**

The addition of the oath with the promise **makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant**. He is the guarantee because, unlike the other priests, his order has the stamp of God's personal confirmation upon it.

**7:23–24 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; (24) but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever.**

**The former** that is Levitical **priest were many in number**. This was simple necessity, **because they were prevented by death from continuing in office**. However, no such hindrance limits Jesus (cf. 7:16) **He holds his priesthood permanently because he continues for ever**.

**7:25 Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.**

**Consequently** that is because his priesthood knows no limitations, **he is able for all time to save**; the salvation he brings is unlimited. All **who draw near to God through him** may know its fulness. The contrast is implied, of course, with those who draw near to God through the Levitical priests or who wish to return to them.

The reason why their salvation is so vast and complete is that **he ever lives** (again, see on 7:16) **to make intercession for them**. **He** has, as high priest, entered the sanctuary and instead to coming out again, to repeat the ritual in the years time, he remains before God (cf. 9:12) he stands over *against*. God in this intercession, as if God is angry and Jesus is lovingly pleading our cause. Quite the contrary 'God put him forward as a propitiation by his blood' (Rom.3:25). God's wrath against sin has been dealt with. His intercession for those who come to God through him is against the accusation of those who would try to re-impose the guilt (see especially Zech. 3:1–4; Rom. 8:31–34; Rev.12:10)!

**7:26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens.**

**It was fitting that we should have such a high priest**. A better translation may be 'such a high priest befitted us', that is his high priesthood expressly fitted human need (cf. N.E.B. 'Such a high priest does indeed fit our condition' ). He is described as **holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens**. Our high priest is pure and glorious. No doubt there is a degree of overlap in these ascriptions, but each does have its own clear meaning.

**Holy**. The word used here in the Greek, *hosios*, is rare in the New testament. It signifies a 'moral excellence in reference to God-piety'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Brown, pg.353, cf. Westcott, pg. 194

**blameless.** A. V. has ‘harmless’ In relation to his fellow men, our high priest is unimpeachable. As ‘holy’ means that he loves the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, so ‘blameless’ means that he loves his neighbour as himself.

**Unstained** .Possibly the implication of this is that of personal integrity, as for example, in Ps. 25:21. ‘Moffatt suggests that the language may be intended to suggest a contrast between the deep ethical purity of Jesus and the ritual of the Levitical high priest who had to take extreme precautions against outward defilement’,<sup>9</sup>

**Separated from sinners.** This phrase sums up the preceding three ascriptions. It does not imply any personal distance from men and women (cf. 4:15) but rather a moral distinctiveness.<sup>10</sup>

**Exalted above the heavens.** See 1:3b–4, 13;4:14; Eph.1:20ff; 4:10;Phil.2:9–11. His is the place of supreme glory and authority.

7:27 He has no need, like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered up himself.

The Implication of the previous verse is now made. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people. He ad no sin of his own and the offering for the people was done **once for all when he offered up himself.**

**‘daily’** There is a difficulty here, in that the Old Testament does not say that the high priests sacrificed for themselves and the people *daily*. They did so once a year on the Day of Atonement. Possibly the writer is viewing the daily round of activities which took place in the Temple at the time he was writing and linking those with the major yearly festival of the Day of Atonement. In any event, whether daily or yearly, Christ finished *all* sacrifices when he offered himself.

7:28 Indeed, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

We have in this verse a summary of all that has been said of Jesus’ priestly role thus far, with the addition of the earlier details that he is the Son . **The oath, which came later than the law** is a reminder that the appointment of the Son as high priest *supercedes* all the legally constituted priesthood.

<sup>9</sup> Hewitt, pg.126.

<sup>10</sup> For other possible interpretations of this phrase, see Hughes, pg. 273ff.

## *Hebrews Chapter Eight*

**8:1–10:18 Jesus—High Priest and mediator of a new and better covenant.**

8:1 Now the point in what we are saying is this : we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,

**Now the point of what we are saying** may be interpreted as being the point to which all that has so far been said is directed, but the implication of the Greek word *kephalaion* is more that of ‘supreme point’. W. Manson translates it as “to crown the argument”,<sup>1</sup> We do **have such a high priest** who has been made perfect forever (7:28), **one who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven** .Our high priest is king. This continues the subject of his likeness to Melchizedek (cf. also 1:1–4).

8:2 a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Bruce, pg. 163.

It is from this position of supreme authority that Jesus is **a minister in the sanctuary**, which may possibly be translated as ‘a minister of the saints’ or ‘of the holy things’<sup>2</sup>**the true tent**. It is the true or genuine tent because the tent of meeting, or tabernacle, in the wilderness was only ever a foreshadowing of the real thing (cf. 8:5). It is also the true tent because it has been **set up not by man but by the Lord**.

We may, however, query what is meant by this last clause especially in the light of 8:5b, where the erection of the tent in the wilderness is clearly not at the direction of men at all. The answer, no doubt, lies in the double meaning which references to Old Testament activities and institutions must carry. There is the first and obvious meaning of the activities and institutions as instituted by God, and which are, therefore, ‘holy and just and good’ (Rom.7:12). But there is also the meaning of the activities and institutions as they were used (or abused) in Judaism. As such they were ‘set up by man’ and not God, in so far as their present use was concerned. The same issue must be seen in the attitude towards ‘the law’ in other parts of the New Testament. There the strong rejection of Law must be seen against this dual background. The Law, *per se*, is good and a delight, but the Law as represented by self justifying Judaism stands in opposition to the truth.

8:3 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices ; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion see Hughes. pg. 281n. 54.

The opening statement, **for every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices**, repeats what was said previously in 5:1. The use of 'for' indicates that a high priest has a sanctuary, for he is appointed .....as is If a high priest offers sacrifices, **it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer**. The words 'it is' (R.S.V, A.V., R.V.) have been added to the text since the Greek lacks the verb 'to be' at this point. The N.I.V. has 'was necessary' which is more appropriate, since Jesus does not now need something to offer, a point made strongly in this letter (cf. 9:25ff.).

8:4 Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.

This though has already been expressed in 7:12–14. The statement here that if **he were on earth he would not be a priest at all** flows from the comparison of Jesus' sanctuary with that set up by man. His sanctuary is in heaven.

8:5 They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain'.

The Levitical priests, who serve in the earthly sanctuary, actually **serve in a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary**, which is, as we saw in vs. 2 'the true tent'. When Moses was about to erect the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness, he was instructed by God, saying '**See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain**'. The implication is that Moses was not simply given details of

what and how to build; he saw the pattern, the type that is the original. A similar statement is made by Stephen in Acts 7:44, which is a quotation from Exodus 25:40 as also is this. Precisely in what way Moses saw the original is not stated.<sup>3</sup> But the point remains that the earthly tent is not the genuine article.

8:6 But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

Now, by virtue of the superiority of the sanctuary in which he ministers, **Christ has obtained a ministry which is.....more excellent than the old**. He is now interceding at the right hand of God whereas the Levitical priests may only briefly once a year enter God's sanctuary.

Christ's ministry is superior also because **the covenant he mediates is better**, a subject introduced in passing in 7:22, being **enacted on better promises**. The promises of the better covenant (also called a "second covenant" in vs. 8) are better because they assure us of the 'perfection' which the priesthood of the old covenant could never provide (7:11, 18–19).

8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second.

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<sup>3</sup> There is no shortage of people willing to speculate; see Bruce pg. 165, Hughes pg. 293ff. For a detailed discussion of the concept of type see **T.D.N.T.** vol xiii pp. 246-259 esp. pp. 256-259.

This inability for the old covenant, with its legal requirements, to achieve perfection, is the reason that a second covenant is necessary.

8:8a For he finds fault with them when he says :

The promise of a new covenant is made by God : **For he finds fault with them when he says:** What follows, 8b–12 is God’s promise of a new and effective covenant in Jer. 31:31–34.

He finds fault ‘with them’ seems strange in context. Who are the ‘them’? Clearly the fault discussed at this point is with the old covenant not with the people, although the N.I.V. removes even the possibility of ambiguity by its translation “God found fault with the people”. There is however a variant reading in the Greek (*autois* instead of the usually accepted *autois*; the documentary evidence tends to support the latter ). If this were to be followed we would then translate, ‘For finding fault, he says *to them* ‘*which* makes more sense within the argument.<sup>4</sup> The principle of choosing the more difficult reading has provided our present text.

8b–9 ‘The days will come, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; (9) not like the covenant that 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 so I paid no heed to them, says the Lord.

<sup>4</sup> See Hughes, pg. 298-299, and n19 and B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London, 1971) pg. 667.

At the time of the judgment upon Judah, the ineffectiveness of the old covenant being clearly demonstrated in the life of the people, the promise came. The **new covenant** would be (necessarily ) quite different from the one established through Moses at Sinai. Specifically, the new covenant was to be **with the house of Israel and the house of Judah**. All the descendants of Abraham ought to more interested in the provisions of the new covenant than with those of the old.

**So I paid no heed to them.** (following the L.X.X.). The judgment Judah was experiencing was God abandoning them to the consequences of the broken covenant.

8:10 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 write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The new covenant **with the house of Israel** (that is the whole of the people as they were when the old covenant was made) will involve a radical transformation. Instead of the law being external to the people, that is over against them, it will now be **put .....into their minds** and written **on their hearts**. That is to say, under the new covenant, obedience will now be ‘natural’ (cf. Ezek 36:26–27) Then the covenant declaration **I will be their God and they shall be my people** will be fully realised (cf. Gen. 17:7–8 and Rev. 21:3,7),

8 :11 And they shall not teach every one his fellow or every one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for



all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

The role of teacher in Israel belonged to the priests. (see Hos. 4:4–6) No longer will they be required to urge knowledge of God upon the people **for they will all know me**. Now there will be a relationship between the people and God requiring no intermediary (cf. 1 Jn. 2:20,27). Furthermore, this will not be a relationship for the elite: rather, this is for all, **from the least of them to the greatest** (cf. also Joel 2:28–29 and Acts 2:14ff).

8:12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sin s no more.

The effectiveness of the new covenant depends on the degree to which it can offer perfection (cf. 7:11,18–19). Only a priesthood which can totally cleanse the conscience will do that. The promise which God makes is of total forgiveness and mercy. **I will remember their sins no more**. unlike the yearly remembrance under the old covenant (cf. 10:3) Such total forgiveness will be the dynamic of the new covenant. Israel broke the old covenant precisely because it could not effect the radical transformation which the conscience required (see Acts 13:38–39). These then are the better promises of vs. 6.

8:13 In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away .

Obviously, **in speaking of a new covenant** God **treats the first as obsolete**. Now, if the covenant of Moses is obsolete then it clearly finished, since the

principle is that **what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away**. This is true quite apart from the history of Judea. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. But even had they not , Judaism as a system is finished.

## *Hebrews Chapter Nine*

**9:1 Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary.**

The writer now turns to discuss the details of **regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary** under the **old covenant**, which he has already established is obsolete.

9:2 For a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place.

Attention is drawn to the **Tent** (or tabernacle) which **was prepared**. It is conspicuous that the focus of attention is not the Temple. Suggestions to account for this included the possibility that the readers lived outside Palestine and were thus less concerned with the Temple (an unlikely situation –recall the crowds which came to Jerusalem for Pentecost, Acts 2:9–11) or that the Temple had by the time of writing been destroyed. But far more likely is the writers concern to focus on the fact that the regulations which established the Tabernacle, of which the Temple was simply a more permanent development, were an integral part of the first covenant, made through Moses.

The tent was divided into two parts. The outer part, that is the part immediately accessible from the outside, contained first **the lampstand**. The details of the lamps construction are found in Ex 25:31–40. The lamp's appearance has been preserved on the Arch of Titus in Rome. With the lampstand is **the table and the bread of the Presence**, as described in Ex. 25:23–30, Lev. 24:5–9. This part of the tent is called **the Holy Place**.

9:3 Behind the second curtain stood a tent, called the Holy of Holies,

**Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies.** The curtain is called 'second', not because a first has been mentioned but because it was the second the priests would encounter, the first being that through which they entered. This second curtain was the one referred to in Matthew 27:51.

'Stood a tent' (RSV) is difficult construction, for which the NIV has 'was a room' However the word 'tent' is the same one used in vs.2 where the NIV has 'tabernacle' and then adds, for the sake of sense, 'in its first room' In any event, the sense is clear: 'There was a tent which the lampstand, the table and the presentation loaves were kept, was called the Holy Place; then beyond the second veil, an innermost part, which was called the Holy of Holies'. (verses 2–3 Jerusalem Bible) 'The Holy of Holies' (verses 2–3 Jerusalem Bible). 'The Holy of Holies' is the Hebrew equivalent to a superlative, 'The Most Holy Place'.

9:4 having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which

contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;

Two pieces of furniture were in the Holy of Holies; **the golden altar of incense** (Ex. 30:1–5 cf. Luke 1:9)<sup>1</sup> and **the ark of the covenant** (Ex. 25:10–22). The ark, which was probably destroyed in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, **contained a golden urn holding the manna** (see Ex. 16:32–34), **and Aaron's rod that budded** (Numbers 17:1–10) **and the tables of the covenant** (Ex. 25:16). It was the inclusion of the 'two tables' which gave the ark its title 'the ark of the covenant' The two tables were possibly duplicates, one belonging to Yahweh and one to Israel as joint parties to the covenant.<sup>2</sup>

9:5 Above (the ark) were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

**Above (the ark) were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.** Details of the construction are included with those for the ark, in Ex. 26:17–22. The mercy to seat was a cover (the literal meaning of the Hebrew word) for the ark and was the place where the blood of the sacrifice of the day of atonement was sprinkled. However, although the word used, *hilasterios*, is the usual one for 'the mercy seat' it is significant that it is also the word used to describe Jesus ministry of

<sup>1</sup> An apparent discrepancy exists concerning the locations of the altar of incense. For a discussion of the problem and possible solutions see Hughes pg. 309-314.

<sup>2</sup> cf. M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, (Grand Rapids, 1963) pp.13-26.

'propitiation' in Rom. 3:25, 1Jn. 2:2 as is . It is also a word derived from the verb used in Heb. 2:17 (see the discussion there).

**Of these things as is.** There is no need to provide more details in the letter. The writer's aim was to concentrate on one specific feature namely the sacrifice of Jesus. He avoids indulging in excessive allegorical interpretation of the details of the tabernacle such as we find in others, for example Philo and Origen.

9:6 These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties;

The provision of these items of furniture **was a preparation** for the activities which took place every day, when **the priests go continually into the tent, performing their ritual duties**, which included the burning of incense (Luke 1:9) and the weekly replacement of "the bread of the Presence" (cf. Mk.2:23–26).

9:7 but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people.

None except **the high priest** could enter the inner chambers, and he could only go in **once a year**, on the Day of Atonement. But even he could not enter **without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people**. The blood was that of the sacrificial bull (Lev. 16:6,14) and goat (Lev. 16:15–16). There could be no entry to the presence of God without the atoning blood.

Because he was also a sinner, the high priest had to offer the blood first for himself and then for the errors of the people (see Heb. 5:3, and 7:27). 'Errors' are literally 'ignorances' and, as in Heb. 5:2, relate to those sins which were not open, conscious rejection of the holiness of God, as in Num. 15:27–31.

9:8 By the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing.

**The Holy Spirit** who is the author of the scriptures (cf, Heb. 3:7) **is indicating** a principal by means of the limitations which applied to the worship in the Tent. 'The first , the outer tabernacle' the sanctuary of habitual worship, did in a most impressible way show the limits which were placed upon the worshipper. While this held a recognised place among divine institutions the people were separated from the object of their devotion. All had not as yet the privilege of priests; all priests had not the right of approach to the divine throne.<sup>3</sup>.

9:9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper,

The outer tent **is symbolic for the present age** that is the outer tent in which we now live (however much we may be awaiting is consummation, cf. Heb 6:5 'the age to come').

Under the provisions of the old covenant, the symbolic arrangements, **gifts and sacrifices are offered** but

<sup>3</sup> Westcott pg. 252.

they cannot effect the radical cleansing which the guilty conscience requires (see Heb. 7:18). This is seen in both the nature of the sacrifice and in the need for repetition.

9:10 but deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

Since they **deal only with food and drink and various ablutions** they are obviously **regulations for the body** and not for the conscience. They are **imposed** (N.E.B. 'in force') **until the time of reformation**, the time when God would 'set straight' that which sin has marred. This , of course, was done in Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17 as is ) as the next verse declares.

9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation).

**But when Christ appeared** he brought the time of reformation into being, inaugurating the new age. He came **as a high priest of the good thing that have come**. Older manuscripts have 'the good things to come' but this was 'probably due to the influence of 10:1'<sup>4</sup> The good things which were once only anticipated have come, and Christ has brought them (cf. 2Cor. 1:20).

While he came, as high priest, entered his sanctuary; he, unlike his old covenant counterpart, went **through the greater and more perfect tent**, that is the outer tent which was **not made with hands, that is, not of**

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, pg. 198 note 68.

**this creation.** The existence of this tent has already been mentioned in 8:5.

9:12 he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

From the outer chamber, **He entered once for all into the Holy Place.** And unlike the other high priests, he did it 'once for all that is unrepeatable. 'The holy Place' was, of course, the Holy of Holies.

**Taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood** (R.S.V.) would be better translated as 'not *by* his own blood the blood of goats and calves but *by* his own blood' that is by *virtue of* his own blood. There can only be entrance into the Holy of Holies by virtue of an atoning sacrifice, of which the blood is the evidence; 'the life is in the blood' (Lev. 17:11) The blood by which he could enter and remain was his own, **thus having secured an eternal redemption.** R.S.V. 'thus securing' wrongly translates the aorist participle of the Greek (*heuramenos*) and gives the mistaken impression that it was other than his death which secured the eternal redemption. The Aaronic priests could only secure a temporary redemption; 'he became the source of ....eternal salvation' (Heb. 5:9).

9:13 For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh.

'The blood of slaughtered animals under the old order did possess a certain efficacy for the removal of ceremonial pollution'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bruce, pg. 201.

**The sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh,** ie. those sacrifices made it possible for the worshippers to come into the congregation of Israel. But it would take something more to deal with the conscience.

9:14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

This is most certainly a climactic verse in this letter! If the sacrifices of the Aaronic priests had limited efficacy, **how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God be efficacious?**

He offered himself 'through the eternal Spirit' representing another possibility that it was Christ 's own spirit (small 's') referred to. But the reference to the Holy Spirit is preferred. It is consistent with what we see of our Lord elsewhere. There is nothing which he did of himself; always it was through the energising of the Holy Spirit (see for example Luke 1:35;3:22;4:1,14,18; Matt.12:28; Rom.14<sup>6</sup> nor should it surprised us, since the servant of the Lord of Isaiah who 'makes his soul an offering for sin' (53:10) is he who is anointed by the Spirit for his ministry (42:1;61:1)

<sup>6</sup> Furthermore I suggest that I Pet. 3:18 could *possibly* be translated 'being put to death *by* the Spirit'

Being ‘without blemish’ was a requirement for every sacrifice to be offered to God (cf. Lev. 22:20; Mal. 1:13–14) Christ is without blemish, as has already been stated in Heb. 4:15 (cf. 1 Pet. 3:18a; Isa. 53:9) Now the blood or this unblemished will do more than unify the body. It will purify the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. That is to say, the perfection which the law could not provide (Heb. 7:19) is provide in Christ. The conscience can now, at last find relief from the dead works which are all the guilty person can offer to God. Hughes suggests <sup>7</sup> three reasons why these works are dead; (1) because they are done by those who are themselves dead –in trespasses and sins. Good works are the works of a new creation (Eph. 2:10). (2) because ‘they are essentially sterile and unproductive ; they yield no living harvest. How could they, since they are the mark of the person whose existence shows no regard for God who is the source of life. They are works of time, not eternity; works of lust, not love; works of the flesh, not of the Spirit (Rom. 6:21; Gal. 5:19ff)’ <sup>8</sup> (3) ‘not only because they proceed from deadness and are accompanied by deadness but also because they end in death; they lead to judgment and perdition (Rom. 6:21,23;Phil.3:19,Rev.21:8)’<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> pg. 361.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* Cf. also the very clear Artical XIII of the Anglican Church’s 39 Articles (AAPB, pg. 630): ‘Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of his spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make one meet to receive grace, or (as the School authors say) deserve grace of congruity : yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin’.

But now the blood of Christ has purified the conscience from this death. Now the conscience, in no longer registering guilt, is free ‘ to serve the living God’. A similar though is in Rom. 6:17–18,22. But the writer is saying more than that forgiveness is with a view to good works; that much is quite true, of course. He is, however, saying that the conscience can truly serve God by registering the truth, whereas once the truth was constantly suppressed. The conscience which is purified by the blood of Christ can now register the mind of Christ (cf. Acts 13:1–2; 1Cor.2:16) whereas previously the conscience registered falsely (as in Luke 18:11–12; Jn.8:33 as is) It goes without saying that such cleansing needs to be maintained, as in 1 Jn. 1:7.

9:15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promise eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

As Aaron and his successors were imitators of the old covenant, so Christ in his High Priestly role as the mediator of the promised new covenant. Those living under the new covenant may, therefore, through him, receive the inheritance which was promised. The promise of Jeremiah 31:31–34 referred to in Heb. 8:8–12 points to the elements of the inheritance, namely total cleansing and immediate knowledge of God (as distinct from merely mediated knowledge.) But the discussion of the inheritance here takes up the subject matter of chapters 3–4 where entry into God’s rest is held out as the goal for believers (3:19). For ancient Israel the land of Canaan was the inheritance but this was only a type of the real



inheritance (4:18). Now that Christ has died, the full inheritance is presented (cf. Heb. 12:22–24)

**A death has occurred which** has done what the sacrifice of the old covenant could only point to; it **redeemed them (that is those who are called ) from the transgressions under the first covenant.**

9:16 For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established

The language of covenant is also the language of a “will” (in the sense of ‘last will and testament’) The Greek word (*diatheke* ) means both . So where a will (a last covenant) is involved, obviously the administration of that will only takes place when the person making the will has died. Nor is the death assumed, **it must be established.**

9:17 For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

The reason is clear. Executors do not execute the will while the one who made the will is still alive.

9:18 Hence even the first covenant was not ratified without blood.

The same principle applied under the old covenant. There needed to be a death and the **covenant was not ratified without blood.** The blood was the evidence of death. ‘The life was in the blood’(Lev. 17:11).

9:19 For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people.

The description given here is generally that of the activities of Ex. 24:3–8, where the account is given of the inauguration of the first covenant. Not all the details here are found in the Exodus account. The mention of **goats** here and of **water, scarlet wool** and hyssop is not drawn from Exodus 24:76a . Also there is no indication in Exodus that the book was sprinkled with the blood. However, as Lenski points out, since the book was made by human hands, it, too, would need cleansing.<sup>10</sup>

John Owen explains the presence here of items not found in the particular Exodus account by saying that the writer ‘gathers into one head sundry things wherein the sprinkling of blood was of use under the law, as they are occasionally expressed in sundry places’.<sup>11</sup> This seems more reasonable than the appeal to sources no longer available to us, which Wilson suggests may be the solution.<sup>12</sup>

9:20 saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you’.

This statement, taken directly from Exodus 24:8, is clearly in our Lord’s mind in Matt. 26:28. Neither the

<sup>10</sup> Pg. 309.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Hughes, pg. 374.

<sup>12</sup> Pg.112-113.

old nor the new covenant was established without the shedding of blood.

9:21–22 And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. (22) Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins

Not only was the covenant established by the blood of the sacrifices, it was maintained by it. All the items pertaining to Israel's ongoing covenant relationship with God were likewise objects of blood purification: **Under the law almost everything is purified with blood.** Again, there is no direct scriptural evidence that all the items in the tabernacle were sprinkled with blood. However, as Bruce points out, it is not an unreasonable inference; 'As Aaron and his sons were hallowed with the blood of the ram or consecration as well as with the oil of anointing when they were installed in their sacred office (Lev. 8:23f,30), it might be inferred that the tabernacle and its furnishings, which were hallowed at the same time, were sprinkled with the blood in addition to being anointed with the oil'.<sup>13</sup>

**Almost everything is purified with blood** reminds us that certain exceptions existed for the poor (Lev. 5:11–13), for the people on one occasion (Num. 16:46) and for metal objects captured in war (Num 31:22f.) But these were exceptions. The principle remained; **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**

<sup>13</sup> pg. 216. Bruce also quotes Josephus (A. J. iii:206) to the same effect.

9:23 Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

It has already been established (in 8:2–5) that the tabernacle and its contents and activities are **copies of the heavenly things**. It was necessary for these copies to be purified by the sprinkling of the blood. **But the heavenly things themselves** were purified **with better sacrifices than these**. Much discussion has followed this latter clause, especially concerning how the true tabernacle, the heavenly reality could require cleansing.<sup>14</sup> But it seems clear that the writer, far from suggesting impurity in heaven, is simply continuing the contrast between the high priesthood of Jesus and that of Aaron. *The* sacrificed to which the others could only point, in *the* tabernacle of which the other was only a copy was far superior in its effect. The blood of the new covenant was absolutely superior to that of the old.

Another question concerns the use of the plural "better sacrifices". Hughes observes that the plural **better sacrifices** is not a precise but a generic plural **better sacrifices** is not a precise but a generic plural, corresponding or accommodated to the plural, **these rites** in the first clause of the verse.... To be specific, however, they were superseded not by many sacrifices but by *one*, the unique... offering ....on the cross.<sup>15</sup>

9:24 For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into

<sup>14</sup> See Hughes.

<sup>15</sup> pg. 379.

heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

The contrast between the copies and the heavenly things is now made again. **Christ**, the great high priest, entered **not into a sanctuary made with hands** that is he was functioning under the provisions of the old covenant as a levitical priest. Instead he entered **into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf**, to intercede for us, that is those who believe (see 7:25).

9:25 Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own.

Again, in contrast to the levitical priests, Christ did not **offer himself repeatedly**. Since it has already been established that it was his own blood which gave him access to the sanctuary (9:12), it must be stressed that as the levitical high priest took blood repeatedly (though not, of course, his own) Jesus did not need to repeat the sacrifice every year.

9:26 for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

To have repeated the sacrificed as the levitical priest did means that Jesus **would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world**, which is quite absurd since (vs 27) 'it is appointed for men to die *once*'. It would have been necessary 'since the foundation of

the world' because it was from that point that guilt became the determining factor in the experiences of men and women. It was not the giving of the law under Moses which marked the beginning. The establishment of the old covenant simply marked the expression of the law in covenant terms.

Far from repeated suffering, **he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**. He has appeared once for all, uniquely and unrepeatably, and this 'at the end of the age' (R.S.V.) the Greek has 'at the consummation / completion of the ages' (*epi sunteleis ton aionon*) The phrase is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, though it is practically synonymous with Paul's 'ends of the ages' in 1 Cor. 10:11. The meaning, besides being that of 'the climax of history' (N.E.B.), which it undoubtedly was, is that of the point where 'this present evil age' (Gal1:4) is effectively concluded and 'the age to come' (Heb.6:5) is inaugurated. The coming of Christ meant that 'the last days' had begun (Acts2:17cf.1 John2:18) As such, the phrase has more than chronological significance. The consummation of the ages has cosmic significance. This is so because at the decisive point Christ **put away sin by the offering of himself**. As under the old covenant sin was sent away on the head of the scapegoat (Lev. 16:22), so now sin has been dealt with totally through the sacrifice of Christ.

9:27–28 And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, (28) so Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Again there is a contrast, this time between the death which comes to all men and the death of Christ. **It is appointed** (ie. by God) **for men to die once**. The modern fascination with re-incarnation is totally excluded. Furthermore, death is followed by **judgment**. It must be so if God is holy (and if he is not holy then all the provisions for sacrifices under the old covenant were a tragic joke played on man!) Man's expectations is of a point of final reckoning.

**Christ**, on the other hand, **having been offered once to bear the sins of many will also appear a second time**. But he will not face judgement. Nor will he have **to deal with sin**. That issue has already been decided, sin has been put away! When he appears it will not be to punish **but to save those who are eagerly waited for him**. Judgment will be pronounced, but it will be judgement of acquittal and not condemnation. On that day what faith holds will be seen and experience in all its fulness. His appearance, unlike the re-appearance, unlike the re-appearance of the levitical priest on the Day of Atonement, will not mark the commencement of the next twelve month reprieve but the commencement of full salvation. No wonder they eagerly wait for him (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8).

## *Hebrews Chapter Ten*

10:1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near.

Having demonstrated the effectiveness of the death of Christ over against the old sacrifices was but a **shadow of the good things to come**. The law, though ineffective in itself, nonetheless had a connection with the work of Christ in the same way as a shadow precedes its reality. The believer under the old covenant could still find deep joy in the sacrifices even though they were not the reality, since they did anticipate and thus mediate the work of the cross. Nevertheless, the law could not offer perfection, for the blessings from the law depended on repetition year by year.

10:2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin.

Plainly, the very repetition of the sacrifices indicates the inability of the law to cleanse the worshipper. If there was full cleansing the law would not produce a **consciousness of sin** in the worshipper. This **consciousness (R.S.V.)** is literally a 'conscience' of sin, 'a radical knowledge of guilt which places one under the shadow of God's judgment, described as the 'evil conscience' in verse below, and which, as we have seen, the blood of Christ alone purifies from dead works to serve the living God (9:14).<sup>1</sup>

10:3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year.

**These sacrifices are a reminder of sin year after year.** The reference is to the annual ritual on the day of Atonement. The worshipper is regularly reminded of his sin. It is still there Conspicuous by the contrast is the prophecy of Jeremiah, already quote in 8:8–12, where God promises that under the new covenant *he* will not remember sins(so also 10:16–18).

10:4 For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.

Furthermore, **it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin.** A little reflection should show this to be obvious. The vastness of moral pollution could never be dealt with by the death of an animal. This view, too, was stated in the Old Testament scriptures themselves, for example Ps. 40:6–8, which our author now proceeds to quote, and Ps. 51:6–10,15–17.

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, pg. 391.

F.F. Bruce argues that this option of animal sacrifices was not uncommon amongst many Jews at the time this letter was written.<sup>2</sup>

10:5–7 Consequently, when Christ came into the world he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body thou hast prepared for me; (6) in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. (7) Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God'. as it is written of me in the roll of the book'.

Consistent with what has just been said is the application of Ps. 40:6–8 (LXX) to the coming of Christ. Over against the sacrifices in which God takes no pleasure is the willing obedience of Christ.

**Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired** is, of course, a further reference to the inadequacy of the law, *per se*, to cleanse. Certainly God established the sacrifices, but only as the expression of faith. Only when it could truly be said **Lo, I have come to do thy will** could God be satisfied, and this was only truly said **when Christ came in to the world.**(cf. Matt.3:15).

10:8–9 When he said above, 'Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the law), (9) Then he added, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will' He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.

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<sup>2</sup> Pg. 230 He concludes, 'the relatively easy adaptation of the Palestinian synagogue to the new conditions after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. shows the principle of the insufficiency of animal sacrifices had been widely grasped'

The rejection of **sacrifices and offerings, which** are done according to the law, and the declaration of total obedience by Christ, points out that the first, that is the sacrificial system, it thus abolished in order to establish, in its place, the second, namely the will of God. The will of God was not temporary relief but permanent cleansing.

10:10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And permanent cleansing is what has come. Christ's doing of the will of God, **the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all** (recall 9:13–14) means that **we have been sanctified. There** is nothing more to be done, the sanctification is complete. The worshippers at that sacrifice, which needs no repetition, are now holy. Their conscience is clean.

10:11–12 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (12) But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

The contrast between the two systems is again made, but this time there is a strong element of climax. On the one hand we have the levitical high priest offering his ineffective sacrifices; on the other hand, **when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sin he sat down at the right hand of God. He** had finished his work. The levitical priest **stands daily at his service,**

‘a seated priest is the guarantee of a finished work and an accepted sacrifice.’<sup>3</sup>

10:13 Then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet.

When he sat down he did so **at the right hand of God to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. This** statement is a quotation from Ps. 110:1(cf.1:13) and brings together the themes of completed sacrifice, superior priesthood and the kingship of Christ, who is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4;cf.7:1–2) It is as reigning king that ‘he ever lives to make intercession for us’ (7:25).

**To wait until his enemies as is** does not mean that there has not been a complete work. ‘Future judgment is only the application of the final judgment that has already taken place at Calvary’<sup>4</sup>

10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

The point being made is still simple and uncomplicated. By Christ's **single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.** To be ‘perfected’ means that his single offering brought ‘those who are sanctified’ to the goal of complete forgiveness. The perfect tense (*he has perfected*) means that the single action

<sup>3</sup> Bruce,pg.239.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes pg 402 His quotation of P. T. Forsyth is too lengthy to be included here, but will repay reading.



accomplished the goal and the condition continues into the present, in this case 'for all time' . The believers remain sanctified (cf. the perfect tense of that verb in vs. 10); they have permanent access to the throne or grace (4:16,6:19–20; 10:19).

10:15–17 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, (16) 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds,' (17) then he adds, 'I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more'.

Again, **the Holy Spirit** is described as the author of scripture(cf3:7) 'He confirms the conclusion which has just been reached when 'he says.....' The quotation which follows, from Jer. 31:31–34, has already appeared in ch. 8 where the stress was on the new covenant Here the stress is on the fact of total forgiveness, the perfection obtain through Christ's sacrifice, **I will remember their sins and misdeeds no more.**

10:18 For where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

The point is obvious **where there is forgiveness of these** (sins and misdeeds ) that si permanent cleansing and renewal, with the law now on the hearts and minds of the believers, **there is no longer any offering for sin.** For those tempted to return to Judaism, or at least to Judaise their faith, the conclusion is clear there is nothing valid to which they could return.

### 10:19–39 Exhortation.

10:19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence se to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,

The arguments of Christ's superiority to angels, Moses and Aaron are now complete. The author now turns to apply the truth he has expounded. If this is what Christ has done, and it is, then ' let us' (10:22,23,24; 12:1) respond accordingly.

It has been firmly established that **we have confidence to enter the sanctuary** (cf. note on 10:14). The confidence is based on the once for all shedding of **blood of Jesus** (9:12–14).

10:20 by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is though his flesh,

This access to the sanctuary did not exist until Christ opened it up. Until he went in, on the basis of his own blood, there was no possibility that the worshippers could go in. Entry on the basis of his sacrifice is then a completely **new and living way**, that is it is *constantly* open, not merely once a year.

Further, it is **a new and living way through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.** It is not easy to decide whether 'that is, through his flesh' refers to ' living way' or to 'the curtain'. Both are possible. The R.S.V. and N.I.V. link it to 'the curtain', the N.E.B. to the 'living way'. Either way, it was the Cross which did it all,

10:21 and since we have a great high priest over the house of God.

Not only was his flesh *the* sacrifice; Christ, as we have seen, is our **great high priest over the house of God** (cf.3:1,6).

10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Since all this is true, **let us draw near**. Let us do it! The language is not simply the logical application of objective truth. It is rather the impassioned exhortation to the ‘brethren’ (vs. 19) We must not lose sight of the fact that the letter is not a theological treatise but a ‘word of exhortation’ (13:22). Thus, **with a true heart** is no so much an obligation to be fulfilled as a statement of established fact. Since you are sanctified, come as such. There is no pretence, since whatever memories of sin may arise, he will remember your sin no more. That **full assurance is of faith for our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience**, (which previously registered guilt and therefore could not function purely, see 9:14), **and our bodies are washed with pure water**.

It is this latter clause, ‘our bodies washed with pure water’, which is unclear. Is it a reference to baptism (Acts.22:16) or to the purification of levitical priests for service (Lev.8:6 or is it)? If by this the author is referring to the believers as ‘a royal priesthood’ (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9), then we can see the appropriateness of the clause. But in this letter priesthood under the new covenant is exclusively Christ’s. It seems more likely that the reference is to cleansing which comes under the new covenant, as in Ezek. 36:25. As Hughes says, ‘Plainly it is no mere external rite that is intended, but a genuinely radical

cleansing, as the continuation of the promise (in Ezek. 36:25) confirms: A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you....<sup>5</sup>

10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful;

**Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering** follows the observation in 3:6. The temptation was for the readers to be less than firm about their confession. Instead of the usual ‘confession of *faith*’, the word ‘hope’ is used here, probably because their faith in Christ has given them a goal to move towards, expressed in terms of the promised rest of 4:11. They can move forward in confidence because **he who promised is faithful**.

10:24 and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

‘The readers will be the more apt to confess their hope courageously and unhesitatingly if they encourage one another. Christian faith and witness will flourish the more vigorously in an atmosphere of Christian fellowship’.<sup>6</sup> Christian fellowship should not be an occasion of mutual discouragement, a sharing of problems on the contrary, it must be used positively to stimulate **love and good works**, elements which are the natural expression of regeneration(cf.Eph.2:10; 1Pet.1:22).

10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

<sup>5</sup> Pg. 411.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce.pg.252-3.

The gathering of Christians would certainly indicate a level of commitment. To meet would be to publically identified. If such identification was bringing a degree of abuse upon them (10:32–34;13:13), it is not difficult to imagine them **neglecting to meet together** as evidently was already **the custom of some**. Whether for this reason or others for example laziness, some had already withdrawn, no doubt suffering the spiritual consequences. All need to be engaged in **encouraging one another**. As in other places in the New Testament, the Christian must see himself of herself as having a ministry to others. This ministry must not be slack. It must be done **all the more as you see the Day drawing near**. ‘The Day’ must surely mean the last day, the Day of the Lord, of Christ’s return, spoken of so frequently in the New Testament. If this time of final deliverance seemed delayed, it is not hard to imagine some being discouraged, especially under pressure of opposition (for example 2Pet.3:3ff) It may be that there was an added element for the readers. ‘You see the Day drawing near’ may also mean that they can see the impending doom of Jerusalem looming larger.

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...<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Bruce pg.256.

10:26 For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

The drift back to Judaism is not to be regarded as a possible alternative for the readers: it is apostasy, it is to **sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth** (cf. the warnings already given in 2:1ff;3:12;4:1ff and 6:4ff).

For such **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**. **This** principle has already been annunciated in 5:2. Even under the old covenant, deliberate rejection of the truth was not covered by the sacrificial system. There was no forgiveness for that (cf.Num.15:31).

10:27 but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries.

The **prospect, where** there was no forgiveness, was **fearful** Only God’s **judgement** could be expected, and the language the writer uses to describe it is clearly intended to convey the horror of falling under the burning wrath of God. The judgment is **a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries**. (see Num. 11:1–3 for a possible source of the language here).

10:28 a man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Apostasy was inexcusable under the old covenant. There was **no mercy**, and no appeal by the one **who has violated the law of Moses** could be allowed (cf. Deut 13:8) **If two or three witnesses** could testify to the guilt

then there could be no option as to the penalty (cf. Deut.17:2–7 where, of course, the witnesses would also be obliged ‘to cast the first stone’).

10:29 How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?

In Deut. 17:2–7 the judgement falls on the one who breaks the covenant. **How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved** by the one who has rejected such a richer privilege in Christ (see 6:4ff).

To return to Judaism, which itself rejected Christ and crucified him, and which has been so clearly demonstrated as finished and defunct, would be (1) to **spurn the Son of God**, (lit. ‘to trample under foot the Son of God’) that is to treat him with utmost contempt. In the context of this letter, that would also mean spurning the final word of revelation (1:1ff.) It would be also (11) to profane the blood of the covenant (that is the *new* covenant) **by which he was sanctified** that is to treat as ‘common’ the blood of Christ which was shed on the cross (cf. 9:14) and which alone can ‘sanctify’ men and women (cf.10:10). The death of Christ is treated as no more than the death of any sinful man. “The blood which has made it possible for him to enter into the sphere of God’s holiness he has treated as a thing unholy, thus completely contradicting the profession he had formerly made “<sup>8</sup> Finally, the person who does this has **outraged the Spirit of grace**. All that Christ did, he did through the Spirit. If then, there is grace at his throne,

<sup>8</sup> Hughes pg. 423.

it is the Spirit who applies it. To look for security other than at the Cross is, therefore, to insult the Spirit.

10:30 For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people’.

**We know him who said** means ‘we know who said these things and why’ It was Moses. Both the quotations which follow are from “the Song of Moses ‘, in Deut. 32:35–36, and , in the context, both are warnings against the apostasy of Israel (cf. Deut. 31:24–30). If **Vengeance is mine, I will repay** and **The Lord will judge his people** was true for Israel, how much more for the people of the new covenant (cf.8:10)?

10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Let there be no doubt; God is jealous for the holiness of his great name, which he vindicated at the Cross. For those who treat that as a contemptuous foolishness the warning is clear and not at all unreasonable: **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God**.

10:32 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.

As with the warnings of chapter 6, the severe warnings which have just been given are not intended to discourage the readers. On the contrary, the author wants to strengthen the readers and to encourage them to persevere in faith. Hence he urges them to **recall the former**

**days.....after you were enlightened.** In the early days of their Christian experience they **endured a hard struggle with sufferings.** If there are struggles and sufferings now (cf.13:13) recall the way you endured them when you first came to know Christ.

10:33 sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated.

They were **sometimes.....publicly exposed to abuse and affliction** and at other times, although they themselves did not actually experience the sufferings, they were **partners with those so treated**, that is they stood loyally by those who did suffer.

10:34 For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

The writer elaborates the previous verse by stating some of the things which they had endured. They **had compassion on the prisoners** that is gave them sympathetic support, which was itself a dangerous course to follow since it identified them with those who were imprisoned(cf.Acts.8:3;9:1–2;12:1–5 as is ) They had also **joyfully accepted the plundering of** their own **property**, not in any foolish sense, but in an awareness of grace. They knew that their earthly possessions were of little worth compared to the **better possession** they had, which was also **an abiding one**, one which could not be taken away (cf.1Pet.1:3–4)

10:35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward.

Having already endured all that, the readers must not now **throw away the confidence**, which they had so evidently displayed. Their ‘confidence’ is their confidence in Christ, an equivalent concept to ‘faith’ (see vss.38–39) This confidence **has great reward**, a subject which has been discussed in chapters 3–4,esp. 3:6,14;4:1–2.

10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.

The readers need **endurance**, perseverance in Christ in spite of the abuse and sufferings which come on his account as was seen in vs. 7, Jesus came to do the will of God; the readers must persevere in following him and **do the will of God and receive what is promised** (cf. John.6:28f,40 with Heb.4:1ff).

10:37–38 ‘For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and not tarry; (38) but my righteous shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him’.

The promise may seem yet distant, but it is not. The need for faithful endurance the light of this coming deliverance is supported by the quotation of Hab. 2:3–4. The author is quoting from the L.X.X. which applies the promise of the coming vision to a coming person. In vs.38,the two clauses as they appear in the original are transposed, but without altering the thrust of Habakkuk’s message. Habakkuk’s insistence is

that the one whom God declares righteous (always through faith) must continue to live in faith. His trust will not be in man or human institutions but in God alone. The righteous man must not shrink back from faith for 'without faith it is impossible to please him'(11:6).

10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls.

The exhortation thus far would be meaningless if a genuine work of grace had not taken place in the readers. The writer concludes, then, by way of encouragement, that **we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls.**

## *Hebrews Chapter Eleven*

### **11:1–40 Faith – The Essence of any Relationship with God.**

11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

The opening verses of this chapter are not an abstract discussion of faith. They are, rather, an explanation of the previous statement. They spell out what it means to have faith, in practical terms. What we have here is *not a definition of faith so much as a description of faith.*

**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for** (R.S.V.) Although the Greek word *hypostasis* is elsewhere translated as 'confidence' (3:14) and as 'nature' (1:3). The N.I.V. does not do justice to the present text or to the whole thrust of scripture by making faith seem a purely subjective experience: 'Faith is being sure of .....'. The best way to understand this verse is to see *hypostasis* as meaning 'substance'.<sup>1</sup> Faith gives substance now do what is hoped for that is, faith actually tastes 'the heavenly gift.....and the powers of the age to come'. (6:4f.)

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<sup>1</sup>So A.V., R.V. marg, N.A.S.B. marg and N.E.B. For the full range of possible translations see Hughes pg. 439f.



The fullness may yet lie in the future, but faith receives the foretaste for that hope now (cf. 1Pet. 1:8 where joy is already ‘glorified’ although the inheritance is not yet received). Faith brings the reality of our hope into present experience. Not ‘seeing is believing; believing is seeing’ Likewise, the author continues, **faith is the conviction of things not seen** (R.S.V.) The word translated as conviction, *elenchos*, is literally a ‘proof’ or a ‘test’ so we would translate, ‘faith is proving (of the reality of) things not seen’. True the hope is yet unseen, but faith proves the reality of it (cf. 2 cor. 5:7 where we walk by faith nor by sight’ does not imply that we do not know the reality; 2Cor. 4:18)

Those **things not seen** are literally ‘deeds’ (*pragmaton*) Faith proves the actions of deeds of God. That which God is doing, *faith* proves in experience (cf. Gal3:2–5)

**11:2 For it the men of old received divine approval is** literally. ‘For in this the elders had witness born to them’ that is by God (cf. 2:11 where Jesus’ is not ashamed to call them brethren’) The principle of faith which was always their receiving, without sight, that which God has promised to do (cf. Gen. 15:1–6)<sup>2</sup> Naturally, to have ‘divine approval’ (R.S.V.) is to have the truth of righteousness born home to the conscience.

<sup>2</sup>The N.E.B. has ‘it is for their faith that the men of faith stand or record ‘ that is are in the scriptures.

Divine approval is not merely external, but faith receives that, and the point where divine approval is supremely required is the conscience (see comments in 9:9,14;10:3).

11:3 By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

Faith had been the issue for man since creation. Although the first man of faith mentioned is Abel (vs 4) it is clear that for Adam to know God as creator and to truly live as a creature was for him to live in faith. His sin was reject faith in favour of the independent knowledge of good and evil (gen.3:22)

Faith is simply hearing what God says and acting upon that. Since man could not know the action of creation (cf. the *pragmaton* of vs.1) apart from revelation, it follows that knowledge of creation as being **by the word of God** is the result of God telling it. The writing of Genesis chapter one must be a response to revelation.

For **the world**, the Greek has ‘the ages’ (*tous aionas*) Every sphere of existence.<sup>3</sup> (which includes the physical world which is normally regarded as the focus of creation) was called into being by the utterance of God. Faith can see this, and therefore recognises that, apart from God calling into being, nothing would exist. That means, then, that what now has being. which may now be seen,

<sup>3</sup> *Aion* occurs fifteen times in Hebrews. ON twelve occasions the reference is to time or its extension (for example ‘you are a priest forever’) the remaining uses in 1:2;5:5 and 11:3 are surely exceptions by being limited to the physical realm

does *not* derive from other things which also appear. It may be reasonably concluded, also, that understanding this world as a created thing, is, finally, a matter not of scientific observation but of faith. 'The heavens declare the glory of God' as is but only faith can hear that declaration. In that sense, creation is not provable—it is only believable.

11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith is still speaking.

The gulf between Cain and Abel was not one of the type of sacrifices offered. There is no evidence of God even commanding the sacrifices. indeed, both flesh and grain are acceptable in the sacrificial system of later Israel. The division was between unbelief and faith. **By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.** it was not the type of *sacrifice* but the *faith* by which **he received approval as righteous** (lit., as in vs.2, 'testimony was born? The answer is that **God bore witness by accepting his gifts**(Gen 4:4) Abel, then, is the first of the elders (vs.2) to whom we have explicit testimony given, and consequently, though **he died.....through his faith** (lit ;it) **he yet speaks** to us of the way to live before God (cf.10:39).**see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God.**

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God.

**By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death.** Enoch did not die and it was his faith ('he walked with God' Gen 5:24) which received that blessing. **He was not found** that is his body was not found **because God had taken him** without death.

Enoch, too, had testimony born to him: **he was attested as having pleased God.** This latter is the LXX. rendering of Gen. 5:24.

11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

How could it be said that Enoch pleased God, unless it was by his faith? It is a creational principal (so vs.3) that **without faith it is impossible to please God.**

**For whoever would draw near to God** (cf.4:16) **must believe that he exists** This implies that there may have been those who did not believe that God exists, but such thinking was quiet improbable in the first century. There was no question of God's (or God's) existence. The Greek has.....that he is, and sounds very similar in intent to Ex. 3:14, 'I am that I am' Usually this statement in Exodus is taken to mean that God is the self existent being or some similar, philosophically inspired, phrase. But such abstract thinking was not usually found among Jews —it was more the language of Greek. Hebrew thinking always saw any predicate of God as describing his actions (cf. his love, hate as is all of which are understandable primarily in terms of what God does.

The same issue here is not his existence, which no one doubted. What matters is the belief that **he is** the God who does what he says he will do! As one writer, when

referring to Ex. 3:14, says, 'In 'I am that I am' the issue concerns the verbs, and thus the God that makes himself known as the one who acts, who lives, who demonstrates himself, in whom his people can trust'.<sup>4</sup>

This is qualified by what follows. Not only is God the one who does act, but **he** (specifically) **is the rewarder of those who seek him** (cf. 10:35–36). The rewards envisioned may be seen in terms of what has already been discussed in this letter, viz, the rest of God etc.

11:7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.

Noah was also a man of faith. The word of God came to him and he acted accordingly. He was **warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household**. His faith was, therefore not in the existence of God, but in the promised action of God.

By his faith he condemned the world. 2 Pet. 2:5 calls Noah 'a herald of righteousness' (cf. A.V. 'a preacher of righteousness') It was his faith, with its practical results, which proclaimed righteousness, and it was this by his faith that the world was condemned. By his faith, Noah **became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith** (cf. Gen. 6:8, 'Noah found favour *grace* in the eyes of the Lord') In the light of his

righteousness, the unrighteousness of the world was exposed to the judgement of God.

11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go.

Abraham is now introduced, and he is described in greater detail than anyone else in this chapter. This is hardly surprising since Abraham is the father of the people of Israel and it was to him that the promise which established Israel was given (Gen. 12:1–3 as is)

That righteousness comes to faith has been established in the previous verse, although the principle was declared most clearly in the Old Testament with regard to Abraham himself (Gen. 15:6). What is in view here is what Abraham did as a result of his faith. **Abraham obeyed when he was called**. Faith is, again, a response to the word of God. **He was called to go out to a place he was to receive as an inheritance, not knowing where he was to go**. The similarities with the readers own position were surely not missed.

11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

**By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land**. Abraham was in the place of promise but unable to claim it fully. Likewise, the readers tasted the powers of the age to come but could not *fully* enjoyed them. Abraham lived **in tents with Isaac and Jacob** (that is as did Isaac and Jacob) **heirs with him of the**

<sup>4</sup> Prof A Konig, in private notes available to his students.

**same promise.** Abraham's faith meant that he continued to believe God's promise even though he could not even begin to *realise* its fulfilment.

11:10 For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

**For he looked to the city which has foundations, whose builder and make is God.** Abraham looked to God to fulfil the promise. However, the writer described Abraham as looking beyond the present, beyond the tents, to the city with foundations, that is with permanence, which only God could provide. But Abraham's forward looking faith was directed far beyond the establishment of the city of Jerusalem in Palestine; the goals to his faith was indeed a city, but it was the heavenly Jerusalem which God has proposed (cf.12:22).

11:11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Sarah, too, it seems, was a person of faith, at least if it is true that Sarah is the proper subject of this verse.<sup>5</sup> That she laughed in unbelief when told of the promised child makes that conclusion questionable (see Gen. 18:12ff). Yet she was also a true wife to Abraham (cf.1Pet3:5–6) and as such doubtless was apparent with him in his faith and obedience.

This reference to Sarah does, in a sense, interrupt the discussion of the faith of Abraham as the subject of the

verb, to be translated as 'for the deposition of seed' and not 'to conceive seed', **to conceive** (R.S.V.). The N.I.V. translates, 'By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself as barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful....'

11:12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

The subject of Abraham's faith is resumed. The conclusion is that Abraham's faith meant that he received the fulfilment of the promise (Gen.15:5–6) in spite of the physical impossibility (cf.Rom.4:19–22).

11:13 These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

All those mentioned **died in faith**. They believed the promises of God, but did not receive **what was promised**. They did, however, receive a foretaste of the fulfilment, for example Abraham was the father of Isaac, the child of promise (Rom.9:7–8) In that sense, **having seen it they greeted it from afar**.

It was pre-eminently Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to whom the promises were made. And it was these who **acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth** (cf.Gen.23:4).

11:14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Bruce, pg.299ff; Hughes,pg.471ff.

**For people who speak thus**, that is who acknowledge by lip and life that they are strangers and exiles on the earth, **make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.** They are not looking back to their past for their security. The homeland which they acknowledge is before them.

11:15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

If the homeland which would satisfy their longings had indeed been **that land from which they had gone out**, they could have quite easily returned. There would have been opportunity to do so. But to do so, in spite of its undoubted attraction, would have been a violation of the principle of faith by which they lived.

11:16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

**As it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.** Their desire is for a far better country than anything this world can provide. Their fulfilment lay in the age to come(cf.6:5).

Because of their faith, **God is not ashamed to be called their God.** The phrase is clearly intended to remind the readers of the covenant formula ‘I will be their God and they shall be my people’ (see for example Jer.31:33) It is obvious that God is, therefore the covenant God, not of Israel *per se*, but of the Israel of faith, in particular those who persevere in faith in Israel’s Messiah. That

God is not ashamed of them is demonstrated in his preparation for them of a city (vs.10;cf.12:22–24).

11:17–18 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son,(18) of whom it was said, ‘through Isaac shall your descendants be named’.

The discussion of Abraham’s faith now continues with the description of the sacrifice of Isaac. This occasion was the testing of Abraham’s faith(cf. I Pet.1:6–7) ‘When we speak of God’s trying men, we are not to suppose that he needs to discover by experiment what is their real character. He knows what is in them before the trial, He knows beforehand what will be the effect of the trial, he knows beforehand what will be the effect of the trial; but he thus makes men’s characters known to themselves and to their fellow men for ends worthy of his own infinite wisdom, righteousness and kindness’<sup>6</sup> The emphasis is on Abraham’s willingness to offer up his son, and at the same time to believe the promises of God even though the promises he had received were stated to be fulfilled in Isaac; **Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.**

11:19 He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Abraham continued to believe the promises because he **considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead** Cf. Gen.22:5, where Abraham told the servants to expect both him and Isaac to return to them.

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<sup>6</sup>Brown,pg.521.



As far as he was concerned the boy was as good as dead: Abraham, therefore, expected to receive him back from the dead and **figuratively speaking he did receive him back.**

11:20 By faith Isaac invoked future blessing on Jacob and Esau

Only one incident is cited to demonstrate Isaac's faith namely the blessing of Jacob and Esau, as seen in Gen. 27:27ff. The faith is no doubt revealed in his refusal to revoke the blessing given to Jacob, even though it was obtained by deceit.

11:21 By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

Jacob, likewise pronounced a prophetic blessing over the sons of Joseph as he was dying. The incident referred to is found in Gen. 48. Like the blessing of Jacob and Esau, this blessing, too, was a reversal of the usual order (Gen.48:14ff.). This is strange action was the action of faith.

Jacob also **worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff**<sup>7</sup> (N.I.V.) The R.S.V. gives the impression that the worshipping coincided with the blessing of Joseph's sons. However this latter statement is drawn from Gen. 47:29–31, where Jacob expresses his desire to be buried in Canaan and not in Egypt. In other words, he believed

<sup>7</sup> Gen 47:31 has "bed" instead of "staff" For an explanation of the difference, see Hughes, pg,488ff.

the promise that Abraham's descendants would one day inherit the land.

11:22 By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his burial.

**Joseph**, also, **at the end of his life** exercised the same faith. He stated, in Gen. 50:24, that God would bring Israel out of Egypt and into the land of promise. In that faith **he gave directions concerning his burial** (his bones), specifying that his remains were to be taken from Egypt at the exodus. The instruction was eventually carried out by Moses, to whom the discussion now turns.

11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

Both vs. 23 and vs. 24 commence with the words **by faith Moses**. Initially, however, in this statement, it was Moses parents who exercised the faith. **When he was born**, they **hid him for three months** in order that he might not be murdered under Pharaoh 's decree (Ex.1:22).

The writer states that they hid him **because they saw that the child was beautiful, quoting** directly from Ex.2:2<sup>8</sup> Exactly what is intended by this we are not told,

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Acts. 7:20, where Stephen declares Moses to be 'beautiful before God' and Josephus (Ant. ii,224231), who says that it was the Egyptians who found him to be beautiful.



but it does seem likely that his parents saw in him something which drew out their action of faith. Evidently Moses was, to them, evidence that God had not forsaken his people.<sup>9</sup>

11:24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

The formative years of his life had been spent in an environment of faith. Then **by faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.** He rejected the exalted position which was his, though exactly what that position was is uncertain. Josephus says he was 'heir to (the) kingdom' of Egypt,<sup>10</sup> whereas Alan Cole, in the Tyndale Commentary on Exodus, says 'if the Pharaoh in question was Ramesses II, he had close on sixty daughters. He also had numerous 'hunting lodges scattered over the delta area, where duck and other game were plentiful, so there in no need to assume that Moses' parents lived near the royal capital Zoan'<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless his position was exalted.

11:25 choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He chose **rather to share ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.**

<sup>9</sup> Josephus (*Ant.* ii,210-216) describes Moses' father as being given a vision in which God foretold the birth and significance of Moses. Though there is nothing said in scripture concerning this, there is no inconsistency.

<sup>10</sup> *Antiquities.* ii 232.

<sup>11</sup> R.A. Cole *Exodus*, T.O.T.C.(London, 1973),pg.58.

**The** people of Israel were suffering as slaves in Egypt and Moses chose to identify himself with the slaves rather than with the royalty. It was faith that conditioned his choice. We therefore must assume that he had been thoroughly instructed in the promises of God for his people (cf.11:22 as is) He regarded remaining in his place of privilege as **the fleeting pleasures of sins**. This does not imply the privilege was in itself sinful; rather it means that 'for Moses to do this (that is remain there), when once he had seen the path of duty clear before him, would have been sin – the crowning sin of apostasy, against which the recipients of this letter required so insistently to be warned'<sup>12</sup>

11:26 He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward.

The abuse which Moses endured was (lit) **the abuse of the Christ** The N.E.B. translates this as 'the stigma that rests on God's Anointed', possibly to imply that 'God's anointed' is in fact Israel. However, the word 'Christ' has already been used eight times in this letter, always as a direct reference to Jesus, so that, although Israel was God's anointed (see Ps.105:15 as is) it seems that the author is intending so much a theological statement as he is using language appropriate to the needs of his readers to describe the dilemma of Moses.<sup>13</sup>

Moses chose to reject **the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward.** Moses did not measure his life in

<sup>12</sup> Bruce, pg. 319.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, pg.544 says 'I believe every attentive reader of the Bible has felt some difficulty in satisfactorily explaining to himself this passage.' See also Hughes,pg.495-7.

terms of what he had left behind but in terms of his moving towards what God had promised (cf. 11:16). Again the language is suited to the readers. The reward for Moses and the people was the land of Canaan; for the readers, a greater 'rest' than that (cf. 4:8ff).

11:27 By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

Moses did what he did **by faith**. **There** was nothing in the circumstances to give him confidence. **He left Egypt**, Faith is not action but does always result in action (see 11:4,7,8 as is) He went, **not being afraid of the anger of the king**. Moses left Egypt twice; the first occasion followed his killing of the Egyptian (Ex. 2:15). The second was the exodus. In the first, Ex.2:14ff. indicates that Moses was (at least partially) motivated by fear. If it is the exodus being referred to, then it is asked why the exodus is described before the Passover which is not mentioned until vs.28. Commentators are divided as to which of the two is in mind and each argues his case well. G. Campbell Morgan concludes, 'So far as I am concerned I think it concludes both. I think the statement refers to his first leaving, and forty years afterwards'.<sup>14</sup> In spite of the difficulties which each possibility contains, there is no final reason why both occasions should not be in view, especially if we take vs. 24 as describing the *fundamental* motive for all that Moses did.

<sup>14</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The triumphs of Faith*, (London, 1943)pg.87. in favour of the events of Ex.2 are Hughes, Bruce, Dods, and Hewitt; of the exodus, Brown, Lenski, Calvin, Westcott & Wilson.

**He endured, that** is he persevered, but not as living by sight; he did so **as seeing him who is invisible**. Faith gave substance to the things hoped for and proof of the things not seen.

11:28 By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

Another point at which Moses faith was displayed was the institution of **the Passover**.<sup>15</sup> There was nothing on which to have any certainty **that the destroyer of the first born mighty not touch them** other than the promise of God.

11:29–30 By faith the people crossed the Red sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. (30) By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

The people of Israel themselves exercised faith on occasions. The Old Testament recounts numerous failures by the people, but on at least two occasions the people took action out of faith. When **they crossed the Red sea as if on dry land** that was, literally, a step of faith. 'Unless God should prove himself the God of the impossible, there was no chance of survival....'<sup>16</sup> It was the **Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same who were drowned**.

<sup>15</sup> See Hughes pg. 500 n. 82 for the issues of whether the reference is the inauguration of the institution of Passover or simply to the single event of the feast prior to the Exodus.

<sup>16</sup> Hughes, pg.501.

Forty years later, it was faith in the promises of God alone which caused them to march around the walls of Jericho each day. As a result to their faith **the walls of Jericho fell down**.

11:31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given friendly welcome to the spies.

It was not only the Israelites who exercised faith. **Rahab the harlot** committed herself to the hope of deliverance, and so did **not perish with those who were disobedient**, namely those who were the inhabitants of Jericho. They experienced Judgement via the Israelites and not merely defeat (cf. Gen. 15:16). Rahab's action of faith lay in her **giving friendly welcome to the spies**, a course fraught with danger lest she be caught. As such, she was in a similar situation to the readers (cf. 10:34).

11:32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets –

The author has given enough detail of Abel, Noah, Abraham and Moses to prove his point. Those who were of significance in Israel were men of faith. They continued, in spite of opposition and difficulty, to believe the promises of God.

And more could be said but **time would fail** the author is the same detail was given about other figures in Israel's past. He mentions six: **Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah**, whose exploits are recorded in the book of Judges, and **David and Samuel**. The four judges were conspicuous for their weakness at other times,

but nonetheless, in spite of it, they were victorious by faith. David, from both the narratives and his own writings in the Psalms, was clearly a man of faith. Likewise Samuel, mentioned after David though chronologically before him, possibly because he is associated with **the prophets**, was also a person of faith from childhood.

11:33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions.

The names having been given, the achievements of faith are now given. All these **through faith conquered kingdoms** for example the judges mentioned and David, **enforced justice** that is ruled justly although the phrase 'can be used of doing what is right with reference to personal integrity, as in Ps. 15:2 and Acts 10:35',<sup>17</sup> **received promises, stopped the mouths of lions**, no doubt a reference to Daniel in the lions' den as a result of his faithfulness to God.

11:34 quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Others **quenched raging fire**, this time probably referring to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Dan.3:17). Some **escaped the edge of the sword** and generally, all **won strength out of weakness** (cf. 2Cor.12:8–10). Many **became**, therefore, **mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight**.

<sup>17</sup> Hughes, pg. 508.

**11:35 Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life.**

**Women received their dead by resurrection**, possibly referring to the occasions when Elijah and Elisha were instrumental in restoring children to life (in 1 Kings 17:17ff. and 2 Kings 4:8ff. ) However, not all the people of faith saw such spectacular results; **some were tortured, refusing to accept release that they might rise again to a better life.** **Whatever** is in mind, and the Maccabean period provides a number of examples,<sup>18</sup> the point is that faith looks to the promises of God, even if it does mean death. God has something far better for the people of faith than any mere survival in this life. Statements such as that in 10:36 must be kept clearly in mind when reading this chapter,

11:36–38 Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment.(37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute afflicted, ill-treated–(38) of whom the world was not worthy– wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

There were **others** who **suffered mocking scourging and even chains and imprisonment.** The prophet Jeremiah certainly fits this description and according to tradition was also among those who **were stoned.**<sup>19</sup> The tradition that Isaiah was **sawn in two** may lie behind

<sup>18</sup> for example 2 Macc.6:18-31,7:1-42.esp.7:14, 'Better to be killed by men and cherish Gods promise to raise again' (N.E.B.)

<sup>19</sup> Hughes, pg.541.

this comment.<sup>20</sup> Some **were killed with the sword** and , among those whose lives were not taken, many were left with nothing, forced to wear animal skins for clothing. being **destitute, afflicted, ill– treated.** They were exiled from their homeland compelled to wander **over deserts and mountains** (cf.Ps,107:4) and to find their shelter **in dens and caves of the earth** Although they seemed to be least among men, their faith gave them superior dignity in God's sight **the world was not worthy of them.**

11:39 And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised.

The promises of God were, as has been demonstrated in the earlier sections of this letter, specifically fulfilled in Jesus. So **all these** who have been discussed in this chapter **though well attested by their faith** (the same verb as used in 11:2) **did not receive what was promised.** They did, of course, receive a foretaste of the fulfilment, since their faith gave substance to the things hoped for.

11:40 since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should be made perfect.

The reason they did not receive 'the promise was that God had determined to fulfil his promise in "our day" <sup>21</sup> He **had foreseen something better for us.** *We* are the ones to live in the age of fulfilment, so that **apart from us they should not be made perfect.** There is no

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> C.F.Wilson, pg.159.

perfection or maturity apart from Christ. Therefore these saints of old will only find perfection in company with us who know Christ. Heb. 10:14 has already made it clear that 'by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified'.

## *Hebrews Chapter Twelve*

### **12:1–13:17 Exhortation**

12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

**Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses**, let us copy their faith. The witnesses are, of course, those mentioned in chapter 11. They have borne witness to the life of faith. So then, **let us** (he associates himself with them) **lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.** The language is that of the athletic contest in which the contestants get rid of any encumbrance. Christ has appeared once to put away sin by the offering of himself (8:26); therefore let us not hang on to it. And *the* sin which will be the supreme hindrance is that of unbelief (3:13,19).

One of the chief problems with the Hebrew Christians to whom this letter is addressed is that they have set out on the race but, after a good start (10:32–34), are now slackening in the will to persevere: their effort is decreasing (2:1), sin is holding them back (3:17–21), they need to recover their intensity of purpose (4:11), to shake off the sluggish mood

into which they have fallen (6:11ff.), to regain their confidence (10:35,39) and their competitive spirit (12:12)<sup>1</sup>

12:2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

In 2:10, Jesus has been describes as the pioneer of salvation. He has gone before, blazed the trail. He has already attained the goal(2:10;5;9). The race set before us, then, carries no uncertainty. It is run **looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith . He** has run the race before us (2:9) and set the pattern. ‘The incarnate Son is himself the man of faith *par excellence* ‘<sup>2</sup> He is also faith’s perfecter: ‘He believes in him will not be put to shame’ (Isa. 28:16,cf.1 Pet.2:6) In him the goal has already been achieved. So look to him and follow the pattern which he has established. **For the joy that was set before him (he) endured the cross, despising the shame.** The joy before him was that of taking his seat **at the right hand of the throne of God** (cf. 1:3;10:12–13) with all the glory which that carries. But before the Christ could enter into his glory which that carries. But before the Christ could enter into his glory, it was necessary for him to suffer (luke 24:26; 1 Pet.1:11) So he endured the cross, and the sham of it was not able to deter him, The readers could hardly miss the point, especially in the light of 10:36.

12:3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

<sup>1</sup> Hughes, pg. 520.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, pg.522.

It us only by considering Jesus and **the hostility** which he endured **against himself** that the readers will **not grow weary or fainthearted. Once** they did endure the struggle (10:32ff); now they need endurance and it is the sight of Christ having already achieved the goal for them which, alone, can strengthen them.

12:4 In your struggle against sin you have e not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Possibly the readers thought they were suffering more than could be endured.? That was simply not so, for in their **struggle against sin (they) have not yet resisted to the point of shedding their blood.** The point, or course, is not that they may have to shed their blood, which was always a possibility, but that Jesus has. In reality, the struggle against sin has already been finalised: ‘He made purification for sins’ (1:3, cf.Rom.6:11).

12:5–6 And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him.(6) For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’

**And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?** The quotation which follows, from Prov. 3:11–12, is not simply about painful discipline: it is about *sons* who are disciplined. Were the readers not sons they would not be disciplined. And , as has been described in 2:10, the purpose of Jesus’ suffering was that many sons should be glorified



*The Son* is the pioneer so that *the sons* may securely follow.

Two possible reactions to discipline are described in the quotation. The first is to **regard lightly the discipline of the Lord**. This implies a refusal to see the Father's serious purpose for his sons and a consequent refusal to see the Fathers' serious purpose for his sons and a consequent refusal to profit from it (cf. Jer.5:3). The second is to **lose courage when you are punished by him**. A better translation than 'punished' (R.S.V.) would be 'reproved' (N.A.S.B.) or 'rebuked' (N.I.V.).<sup>3</sup> The discipline is to be regarded, instead, as the action of the Lord's love, even though it may be a painful scourging (chastening).

12:7–8 it is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (8) If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

The sufferings which the readers experience as believers are not simply the negative reactions of the world. They are the positive action of God the Father who is **treating (them) as sons**. This discipline is not essentially different from the way earthly fathers discipline their sons. To be left without discipline, **in which all have participated, that is all sons** have participated, would obviously point to them not being legitimate sons at all. The would be **illegitimate children and not sons**. If the purpose of discipline is to bring the sons to the full maturing of their sonship, then for a person to remain undisciplined would demonstrate that the person was

<sup>3</sup> The same word is used for example in Jn. 16:8, where clearly the Spirit does not 'punish'

not truly a son and therefore a person for whom 'no future honour and responsibility was envisaged'<sup>4</sup>

12:9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers do discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

When our **earthly fathers** ( lit. the fathers of our flesh) disciplined us, we respected them. As children we accepted it as right that our fathers should direct us and correct us . Ought not those disciplined by **the Father of spirits** be subject to him **and live?**

When our **earth fathers** (lit. the fathers of our flesh) disciplined us, we respected them. As children we accepted it as right that our fathers should direct us and correct us. Ought not those disciplined by **the Father of spirits** be subject to him **and live?**

The phrase 'the Father of spirits' is most likely a reference of *our spirits* (so A.R.V. mg.) that is to us as spiritual (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13b,15;3:1 where the Greek word is *pneumatikois*, spiritual, as in the N.I.V. ) The contrast is to the fathers of our flesh God is the father by whom we are born as whole men and women, ie. as body, soul and *spirit* (1 Thess 5:23)<sup>5</sup> By being subject to this Father as sons who are complete in Christ, we live—we know life.

12:10 For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

Our earthly fathers **disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure**; 'they knew, or thought they knew, what was best for us and subjected us to the discipline that commended itself to them...(they) may sometimes

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, pg. 358.

<sup>5</sup> See G.C. Bingham, *The Day Of The Spirit*, (N.C.I.1985) pp.27-29.

have been mistaken in their estimate of the discipline that we needed'<sup>6</sup> He, on the other hand, **disciplines us for our good** that is for our profit. There is possibly the observation here as well that the discipline by earthly fathers is usually less than totally directed towards the benefit of the children. Is there not an element of selfishness in most of it? But the Father, ever true to his own nature, does it all for the benefit of the sons. He does not need to satisfy any demand within himself. When he loves(12:6), it is total giving. The purpose of this discipline of love is **that we may share his holiness**. These disciplines are in order that his holiness may be increasingly manifest in the sons.

12:11 For the moment all discipline seems painful; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

It is readily admitted that **discipline seems painful rather than pleasant**. It touches us at points which need correction. But it is the final product which must be kept in view. **The peaceful fruit of righteousness** will result. If we keep in mind that righteousness is the result of the action of justification (or, 'righteous-ification' to coin a word, since to justify is to make righteous), then we will avoid the temptation to see 'of righteousness' here as an objective genitive, that is the fruit which *is* righteousness. There may be an eschatological element to righteousness,(cf. Gal.5:5), but it is not in mind here. Rather we ought to see that true righteousness *produces* the fruit(a subjective genitive), in this case the fruit which is peaceful. We may contrast this with the present conflict

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, pg.359.

in which the readers found themselves. But if they fall back from the conflict in which the readers found themselves. But if they fall back from the conflict, then they cannot hope to complete the race which is set before them and so cannot expect to attain the goal. It seems probable that the writer has in mind Isa. 32:17, 'And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever'

12:12–13 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, (13) and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

The logical conclusion of this (**therefore**) is that, far from giving up and retreating to the safety of Judaism, the readers should **lift up drooping hands and strengthen weak knees**. This time the language is taken from Isa. 35:5. Isaiah urges this course because Judah is fearful and he wants then to know that God 'will come and save you'.

The readers are to **make straight paths for (their) feet**, that is set a straight course for the goal without being deflected. If they do this, then **what is lame may not be put out of joint<sup>7</sup> but rather be healed**. The readers are no doubt feeling their weaknesses and almost limping towards the goal. But this warning tells them that to turn aside will not ease the strain but will actually make it worse, even beyond healing (cf. 6:4ff). Only in continuing to the goal will they know true and total healing.

12:14 Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> For an alternative translation, see Hughes, pg.535.

If the believers suffer persecution, it ought not to be because of their wrong behaviour. On their part, they are to **strive for peace with all men**. This is a consistent theme in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 5:16; Rom. 12:18; 1 Pet. 2:12 etc.)

But peace with men must not be at the expense of **the holiness without which no one will see the Lord**. John Brown says of this, 'We must, then at all events 'follow holiness' at all hazards we must act the part of persons sincerely and entirely devoted to God. If, in consistency with this, we can live in peace with men, it is so much the better; but if peace with men cannot be purchased but at the expense of devotedness to God, then we must –we must willingly submit– to their convenience arising from having men to 'be our enemies knowing that it is infinitely better to have the whole world for our enemies and God for our friend, than to have the whole world for our friends and God for our enemy.'<sup>8</sup>

The 'no one' he refers to can be considered in two ways. First, if the readers do not pursue holiness, they will not see the Lord: 'they shall not enter my rest' (3:11 as is ) But, secondly, if the readers do not pursue holiness, then others as yet unbelieving will not see the Lord *in them*.

12:15 See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled;

The readers are to **see to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God**. They were recipients of grace, but there is 'grace upon grace' for those in Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13) Not to press on to receive the final grace of

<sup>8</sup> pg.637f.

glory (2:9–10) would be, in Paul's words, 'to receive the grace of God in vain' (2 Cor. 6:1).

The writer also urges **that no 'root of bitterness' spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled**. This is not a reference to suppressed anger and resentment however dangerous that may be, but to the possibility of secret apostasy being present in the church. The statement is taken from Deut. 29:18. Such impurity within the people cannot but pollute the whole people (cf. 3:12)

12:16 that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

Warning is now given, lest anyone should **be immoral or irreligious like Esau**. Fornication is not something to be toyed with: 'Flee fornication' (1 Cor. 6:18 A.V.) It 'must not even be named among you as is fitting among saints' (Eph. 5:3) But whether the mention of immorality was a reference of Esau is not clear. Certainly, in later Judaism Esau was regarded as a very low character. But within scripture there is no reference to him committing fornication.<sup>9</sup> However, he certainly was irreligious: **he sold his birthright for a single meal**. HE would have been taught the mature of the promise which God made to his grandfather Abraham, but he treated it as having less value than a single meal of vegetables (Gen. 25:29–34).

12:17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

<sup>9</sup> See Bruce, pg.366ff.

There is another instance of Esau's attitude. When, later, he came to receive the blessing due to the firstborn, he found that Jacob had already deceitfully received it (Gen.27:1–40) Even though he had clear evidence of his brother's duplicity, he did not care sufficiently to be on guard.

Consequently, when he tried later to obtain the blessing, it was simply too late. It was too late **too repent** of his previous irreligious attitude since the blessing was gone. And no amount of tears could restore it. The implications are plain, as set out earlier in 4:1 and 6:4ff.

12:18–19 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, (19) and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them.

The events of Israel's history were an anticipation of that which was to come, so the writer can say to the readers, **for you have not come to what may be touched** for example "For" (gk. *gar*) links the previous paragraph with this: 'the reason we give these injunctions is this....' And the reason is that the readers share a privilege far beyond any enjoyed by the Old Testament saints They could only come to Mount Sinai with its **blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them that is directly.**

12:20 For they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned'.

Their fear was justified by the warning that if even one of their animals encroached upon the mountain it was to be stoned, that si put to death 'from a distance, as no one was permitted to set foot on and thus desecrate what was holy ground'.<sup>10</sup>

12:21 Indeed so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear'.

Only Moses was permitted to approach God on Sinai, but even he found the expression of God's power and presence **so terrifying that he said 'I tremble with fear'.**

12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angles in festal gathering.

In clear contrast to that scene, **you have come to Mount Zion** (an alternative title for Jerusalem, though actually the name of one of the hills on which the city was built), **to the city of the living God. However,** lest that he mistaken for the present city, the writer adds that it is **the heavenly Jerusalem** to which they have come. His point is that the readers are already there . Nothing could be gained by returning to Sinai's law.

The **innumerable angels in festal gathering** are possibly those angels through whom the law was given (see on 1:4), who now surrounded the throne of God in worship (Rev. 5:11–12) If this is so, then we may see that as once the angels were present at the giving of the law, now they rejoice that the purpose of the law has been

<sup>10</sup> Hughes, pg.543.

achieved (Gal.3:22,24). The readers now join the angelic host in worship of the Lamb.

12:23 and to the assembly of the first– born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

The readers have not only joined the celebrating angels, they have also come to **the assembly of the first born**. This phrase is a direct reference back to ‘Israel *assembled* under Moses ‘ leadership at Mount Sinai. The ‘assembly ‘ is the *ekklesia*. the Greek word for both the church in the New Testament and the people of God gathered together in the Old Testament) and according to Moses, when God gathered Israel at Sinai it was as his ‘first born’ (Ex.4:22f). The title ‘first born’ is used with reference to the inheritance (cf. 1 Pet 1:4 for example) Now those who are to receive the inheritance are no longer **enrolled** in Israel (cf,Num.3:40ff) Their names are recorded **in heaven**. The list includes all those who live by faith (ch. 11)

They have come **to judge who is God of all**. The readers persecutions are not unnoticed. They will be vindicated, ‘ though now for a little while they may have to suffer various trials’ (I Pet. 1:6) A Judge was not only someone who would pronounce a person guilty; he was one to who will vindicate them and there is no fear of his not seeing ; he is the God of all. The readers can come with confidence to his judge and find grace to help in time of need(4:16)

They have come **to the spirits of just men made perfect**. The usual approach to this statement is to understand ‘spirits’ as those who have died, either the Old

Testament saints such as those mentioned in ch.11, New Testament believers who have already died (such as those described in I Thess.4:13–18) or both. They are now at home with the Lord. As Lenski says, they have been ‘brought to the final goal by a blessed death’.<sup>11</sup>

But we must question this reasoning. Why should ‘spirits’ refer to those who have died? Apart from the statement in I Pet3:19 there is no evidence in the New Testament of ‘spirit’ ever being used to describe the dead . So why may it not equally refer to those who are ‘spiritual’ as we have already suggested at 12:9? Since to be made perfect in no something that lies in the future, in this letter at least (cf.10:14), but has already taken place in us through the one offering of Jesus, it is suggested that this phrase may very well describe the wide family of believers wherever they may be. *This would not preclude those who have died* , but would focus attention on the ‘great multitude which no man can number’ who are recipients of the salvation won by the Lamb(Rev.7:9ff). The ‘just’ are the ‘righteous’, those who have been justified. That is why they are perfect or complete. They have all reached the goal in Christ.

12:24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

The paragraph closes with two clauses which re–affirm all that has been said previously. The readers have come **to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant**. As we saw in vs. 19, under the old covenant the people required a mediator. But the old covenant had, of

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<sup>11</sup> pg.458.



necessity, to pass away, since God had promised a new covenant (cf. 8:6–13; 9:15). Now the readers have come, not to Moses and all the, covenant regulations associated with him; they have come to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.

They have also come **to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel**. The reference to sprinkled blood points us to the effect of the sacrifices under the old covenant and the great contrast that exists between them and the sacrifice of Jesus (cf. 9:9–10, 13–14). But the writer does not mention the sacrifices of the old covenant; he compares, instead, the blood of Christ with that of Abel. Both Abel and Jesus were innocent victims of the depravity of man (cf. 1 Pet. 3:18). But the blood of Abel, which Gen. 4:10 records as ‘crying to (God) from the ground’ was calling for vengeance. The blood of Jesus, on the other hand, speaks more graciously (lit. better things *gk. kreitton*<sup>12</sup>) his blood cries for cleansing since by it he has made purification for sins.

12:25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking  
For if they did not escape when they refused him who  
warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if  
we reject him who warns from heaven.

It is the blood of Christ which speaks so graciously; therefore **see that you do not refuse him who is speaking**. But there is more than just a reference back to the previous sentence. The principle established at the

<sup>12</sup> *kreitton* occurs twelve times in this letter being translated as ‘superior’ or ‘better’ cf. 1:4; 6:9; 7:7; 7:9; 7:22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16; 11:35; 11:40 and 12:24.

commencement of this letter was that it is God who speaks in the Son (1:1–2). To refuse him is to neglect the great salvation which has been won (2:3), to crucify the son of God on their own account (6:6) and to profane the blood of the covenant (10:29). Furthermore, to refuse him would be to put the readers in the same position as the people of Israel at Sinai who, in 12:19 are described as ‘refusing to have any further word spoken to them’<sup>13</sup>

The principle was well established in the life of Israel; **they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth**. Some have seen this as a reference to Moses<sup>14</sup> but it seems clear that it is God who is described as speaking. ‘On earth’ is to be seen in the light of the language of 12:18–21, where the place at which the old covenant was given was contrasted with ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ (12:22). But it was God who spoke to the people, hence the warning repeated in 3:7, ‘Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion....’ The Israelites ‘did not escape’ when they refused to listen. **Much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven** (cf. 10:26–31).

12:26 His voice then shook the earth; but now he has  
promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the  
earth but also the heaven’.

At Sinai, **his voice then shook the earth**. ‘The whole mountain quaked greatly’ (Ex. 19:18). But on the coming day of judgment it will not only be the mountain

<sup>13</sup> Bruce, pg. 381. The same word, *paraiteomai*, is used in both instances.

<sup>14</sup> for example see Hughes, pg. 556



which quakes but the whole created order. **Now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but the heaven’** This is a quotation from Hag. 2:7, which adds that ‘the sea and the dry land’ are included. As we have seen earlier<sup>15</sup> the context of the quotation is significant. Here, Haggai’s warning is in the framework of an extortion by God to his people to take courage because he is with them, and not to fear because his Spirit abides among them, and a promise that the future glory of God’s house will exceed all that has been known hitherto’<sup>16</sup>

12:27 This phrase, ‘Yet once more’ indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain,

**This phrase, ‘Yet once more’ indicates the removal of what has been shaken, as of what has been made.** The writer’s justification for this comment is found further on in Haggai, where the warning is repeated. Hag. 2:21–22 indicates that when the heavens and the earth are shaken, all ‘the strength of the kingdoms of the nations’ will be destroyed. Only **what cannot be shaken will remain.** Only that which is not of this earth ‘not made with hands, that is not of this creation’ (9:11) can remain.

12:28–29 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; (29) for our God is a consuming fire.

Therefore, since the shaking of heavens and earth will mean the destruction of the kingdoms of the nations, let **us be grateful for receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken.** And if sacrifices are to be offered, let them not be those of the old covenant which is ‘obsolete.....growing old....ready to vanish away’ (8:13) Instead **let us offer to God acceptable worship** that is worship that is consistent with his revelation in his Son and the mediator (12:24). And the readers must not be presumptuous, assuming that these things can be taken lightly. They must, on the contrary, offer acceptable worship **with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.**(cf.10:31)

<sup>15</sup> See note 13 above.

<sup>16</sup> Hughes, pg.558

## *Hebrews Chapter Thirteen*

### 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

As the readers look back on their experiences as believers (cf. 10:32ff) They will realise that underlying all was their obedience to the truth which had resulted in ‘a sincere love of the brethren’ (1 Pet. 1:22) Far from giving up their relationships, the readers are urged to **let brotherly love continue**. This is not just socially valuable; it is fundamental to the whole purpose of God, for they are brethren as a result of the actions of Jesus. They have been sanctified by his work (cf. 10:14) and on that basis ‘he is not ashamed to call them brethren’ (2:11).

13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Hospitality means more than socialising . It means that those who exercise hospitality open their homes to those in need. Such behaviour could often be dangerous for it would mean that they were publicly associating themselves with those who may have been fugitives. If it was persecution which was making many of their number want to turn back, then we have evidence

that persecution also resulted in significant movements in the Christian population (for example Acts. 8:1–4) In spite of the danger, the readers must **not neglect to show hospitality to strangers**.

That there is great blessing in such hospitality is clear from the words of Jesus, ‘as you did it to the least of these my brethren you did it to me (Matt. 25:40) . But the significant illustration of the value of hospitality is the occasion when Abraham entertained the strangers on their way to Sodom. By his hospitality, he **entertained angels unawares**.

13:3 Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated since you also are in the body.

Some of the believers are in prison, where, without the assistance given by family and friends they could easily suffer great hardship But again, ministering to their needs could expose the readers to similar dangers. In the past they had not hesitated to visit those in prison (cf. 10:34; 2 Tim. 1:16), but no doubt, either as the opposition increased or as their own endurance waned, this injunction was increasingly necessary; **remember those who are in prison with them**. They were to act towards the prisoners in the same way that they would want others to treat them.

F.F. Bruce illustrates this issue with the description of the imprisonment of Proteus Peregrinus, as described by Lucian. Whom he quotes,

...the Christians ‘left no stone unturned in their endeavour to procure his release. When this proved impossible, they looked after his wants in all other matters with untiring solicitude and devotion. From earliest dawn old women

and orphan children might be seen waiting about the prison doors; while the officers of the church, by bribing the jailers, were able to spend the night inside with him. Meals were brought in and they went through their sacred formulas'

Bruce continues;

This picture, satirical as it is in intention, can be duplicated many times over from other records of the concern which Christians showed for those who were in prison or otherwise suffering for their faith, ignoring the personal risks involved''<sup>1</sup>

Not all were in prison; many were simply **ill – treated**. They too must not be neglected. The readers must recall that they **also are in the body**. Opinions are divided between those who see 'the body' as a reference to the Body of Christ, that is the church and those who see it as speaking of the state of being yet in the body. If it is the former, then the writer is saying that being in the Body of Christ ought to make one particularly sensitive to the needs of other members of the Body suffering affliction, that is 'you ought to have a common feeling for one another's troubles, so that you are not divided amongst yourselves'<sup>2</sup>If the reference is to being in the physical body, then the meaning would be that 'the bodily hardships now being experienced by some of their fellow believers could equally well, and perhaps will be experienced by them too'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> pg. 391f.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin pg. 205.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, pg.565 Hughes adds that 'the imposter and the hypocrite betray themselves by their lack of brotherly love and compassion (ibid)

13:4 Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous.

It is not impossible that there were two extremes towards which the readers were likely to be pulled in the matter of sexual morality. Quite possibly, in times of stress there would be pressure to give up the discipline of maintaining pure marriage relationships. So, in the light of this, **let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled** There can be no pleading that times were difficult or pressures too strong. God has not changed; just as there is always 'grace to help in time of need' (4:16), so too, **God will judge the immoral and adulterous**. The term *immoral* designates those persons who indulge in sexual relationships outside of the marriage bond, both heterosexual and homosexual, while *adulterous* indicates those who are unfaithful to their marriage vows'.<sup>4</sup>

At the other extreme, there was possibly a group in the church who were forbidding marriage (1 Tim.4:3) and asserting that only celibacy could produce sanctity . It was this stress that led to the later development, among other things, of monasticism. A suggestion is that the readers of this letter were being especially influenced by the ascetic doctrines of the Jewish *Essenes* 87<sup>5</sup> However, it is the first possibility which seems the most likely in the context, especially considering the severity and nature of the warning (cf. Cor. 6:9–11; Eph.5:5–6).

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, pg.566

<sup>5</sup> Pg.566.

13:5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you'.

It is not difficult to understand the readers beginning to resent the loss of their possessions. Again, there has been reference already in 10:34, to the way they had initially 'joyfully accepted the plundering of (their ) property' However, in spite of the hardships which they may be enduring as a result of the loss of their possessions, the word still is clear; **keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have.** The danger of desiring to be rich is clearly stated in the scriptures, as in Matt. 6:19–21,24; Mark 10:17–25<sup>6</sup> 1 Tim.6:6–10.

There may well have been some degree of anxiety among the readers concerning the ability of the heavenly Father to provide for their needs. Consequently, there is added the reminder of the promise God made to Joshua that **I will never fail you or forsake you** (Josh. 1:5).

13:6 Hence we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?'

That being so, the readers can **confidently** echo the words of Ps, 11 8:6 **The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?** Hughes comment is worth recording: 'With this promise (from Josh.1:5), no matter how limited our earthly resources may be, we can say with the Psalmist,

<sup>6</sup> Some manuscripts 'how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom' cf. Matt. 19:23.

and we can do so confidently: '*The Lord is my helper*'—and having been freed from the greatest of all fears (Heb. 2:14f.) there is no room for lesser fears! —' *What can man do to me?*— He may deprive me of my belongings and even kill my body (Matt. 10:28), but he cannot so much as touch the eternal life and wealth that are mine in Jesus Christ my Lord: indeed all things are mine, and I am Christ's and Christ is God's (1 Cor.3:21f.)'<sup>7</sup>

13:7 Remember you leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith.

It is no doubt understandable that those who are suffering should think that they are in some way unique. Elijah the prophet is an example of this (cf. 1 Kings 19:10). But it is not correct; the readers experiences are in line with those of many who have preceded them (cf. Matt.5:11–12) So they should **remember (their) leaders, those who spoke to (them) the word of God.** These leaders are probably the people referred to in 2:3, those who, having heard the Lord, passed on the message of salvation to others. ('Leaders " are also mentioned in 13:17 and 24, but these are the people who are presently leading the church of which the readers are members. ) Let the readers for a moment **consider the outcome of their life.** The writer is probably referring to their death. 'Outcome' (gk. *elbasis* ) is used in the New Testament only here and in 1 Cor. 10:13, where it is translated as 'a way of escape'. However, in Wisd. 2:17, it is clearly a reference to death: 'let us test what will happen at the end of his life (cf. Wisdom 2:20 where it is

<sup>7</sup> Pg. 568.

‘a shameful death’ being considered) These leaders also died. The readers, therefore, need not retreat but to **imitate their faith**. The leaders have joined the great cloud of witnesses.

13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

However, it is not the leaders who are to capture the thinking of the readers. They are to consider them, but in doing so see that their faith was in **Jesus Christ** and their faith can securely be imitated because Jesus has not changed. He **is the same yesterday and today and forever**. He is still the high priest who can sympathise with their weaknesses and who can administer ‘grace to help in time of need’ (4:15–16). Furthermore, he will never prove unfaithful. ‘But thou art the same, and thy years will never end’ (Ps.102:27, quoted in the argument of 1:12).

13:9 Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited their adherents.

If Jesus is unchangeable, then the revelation which came by him will never be superseded. Consequently, the readers must beware lest they be **led away by diverse and strange teachings**. The danger of false teaching is regularly mentioned in the New Testament (Matt24:23ff. Mk.13:21–23; Acts 20:29ff. Gal1:6\_9; Col.2:8,16–19; 3:16; 1Tim.4:1–3; 2 Pet.2:1–3). Precisely what these teaching were in not given; however, both form the context of this letter as well as the reference

following, it seems likely that it was in some way related to the activities of Jewish teachers. The contrast is strongly stated: **it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace**. that grace which sent the Son to taste death for everyone (2:9) and which is continually being poured out at the throne of grace (4:16) **not by foods** (lit. ‘meats’ gk. *brōmasin*) **which have not benefited their adherents** ‘Since the meticulous observance of such distinctions did not profit those who practiced them, it would be sheer folly to exchanged the principle of grace for the empty ritual of a vanished order. As the writer goes on to say ‘we have an altar’ the term meats almost certainly refers to the priestly privilege of partaking in those sacred meals which were provided my meat which had been first offered in sacrifice. The apostle refers to ‘teaching’ not to practices; it is not implied that the Hebrews were in a locality where the practices were carried on, they were being carried aside by the doctrines’<sup>8</sup>

13:10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

The practice under the old covenant was that the priests were entitled to certain of the meats offered in sacrifices on the altar (cf. Lev7; 1 Cor.9:13;10:18) There where other sacrifices of which they could not eat, in particular the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement which prefigured the great sacrifice of Christ. But the general principle applied. However, **we have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat**. The priests of the old covenant gain no benefit from this altar, which is of course, the cross of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, pg.181f

13:11–12 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. (12) So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

The sacrifice of the Day of Atonement was, as we have said, a prefiguring of the final sacrifice of the cross. Just as **the bodies of those animal whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp** (Lev.16:27) so Jesus *the* sacrifice for sin **also suffered outside the gate**. Hughes draws attention to the fact that, the Jewish mind, Calvary was defiled ground. ‘How extraordinary, indeed shocking, to the Hebrew mind, to be told that he did this **order to sanctify the people through his own blood**, precisely on this unsanctified territory’<sup>9</sup> In this way the whole orientation of the old system towards ritual purity has been rendered invalid. True sanctification does not depend on Levitical orthodoxy (cf.7:12)

13:13 Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, and bear the abuse he endured.

**Therefore**, since Jesus has invalidated the whole Levitical system and has sanctified the people, **let us go forth to him outside the camp**. He suffered the opposition of the people and became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13) yet he is the one who purifies the conscience, and who has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (9:14;10;14) Joining him then, will involve the readers in **bear(ing) the abuse he endured**. Far from retreating

<sup>9</sup> Pg. 579.

from the abuse, they ought to willingly embrace it as a fellowship of the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 1:29;3:10).

13:14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come.

It could seem a painful thing to be cut off from all the religious life of Israel, symbolised by the city of Jerusalem. But the readers ought to go outside the camp. for **here** (they) **have no lasting city**. They are rejected by the same people who crucified Jesus. But far from being stateless, they **seek the city which is to come**(cf.Phil.3:20), the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22). They look forward to the rest of which the land gained under Joshua’s leadership was only an anticipation (cf.4: 8–10)

13:15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

The readers may be cut off from the old sacrificial system and there may be no further need for any sacrifice for sin, but they can, nevertheless offer sacrifices. They must do so **through him**, that is through Jesus, on the basis of his establishment of the new covenant. The sacrifice which is now the obligation of the worshipper is that **of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips which acknowledge his name**. Such sacrifices are an ongoing obligation, they are to be **continually offered**.

Such sacrifices are not aimed at achieving a right relationship with God. Praise is the *response* ‘to the action of God in redeeming his people (cf.Ps.40:1–3). Praise such as this is ‘the fruit of lips which acknowledge his name’ (cf. Hos. 14:2, which in the Hebrew reads



‘the bulls of our lips’, thus drawing a contrast with the levitical sacrifices). To acknowledge the name of christ is to call upon him as the sole source of peace for the conscience (cf. Acts. 2:21,36;4:12). To acknowledge the name is therefore to come into the sphere of the action of God in salvation, to which the response can only be praise and thanksgiving.

**13:16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.**

There is another aspect to the sacrifice of praise. Those who acknowledge the goodness of God in providing the only effective sacrifice for sin should **not neglect** to act consistently with the character of God. They ought also **do good and to share what they have**. The practicalities of this have already been raised at 13:1–3. But when seen as the response to his goodness, **such sacrifices are pleasing to God**.

**13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account . Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that we be of no advantage to you.**

Having urged the readers to ‘remember your leaders’ (13:7), referring to those who had first brought the gospel to them, the writer now urges them to **obey your leaders and submit to them**, that is the present leaders. Possibly, in the times of uncertainty through which the readers had been going, the leaders were not receiving the respect that was their due. But even if this was not the issue, the nature of the true people of God, the

people of the new covenant, requires submission to the authority of God as expressed through the authorities which he has established (Rom. 13:1–2; 1 Pet. 2:13–17), and in particular to those who are in positions of authority *within* the people of God (Acts. 20:28; 1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Pet. 5:1–5)

The submission which is required is not mindless subservience. It is a clear recognition of the nature of the varied ministries which God has given. The leaders are men who have special responsibilities and who are required to exercise them diligently (1 Pet. 5:1–4; James. 3:1). The leaders **are keeping watch over your souls** (cf. Acts. 20:28) and having such responsibility, must be regarded, not as people who have taken upon themselves positions of authority, but **as men who will have to give account**.

Peter has urged the elders to beware of temptations to resentment for authoritarianism in 1 Pet. 5:1–3 here the exhortation is probably directed towards the people as much as to the leaders. **Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.** that is you readers ‘Accountability to God attaches not only to the pastors but also to the members of those flocks which are blessed with earnest and faithful leaders. Let your leaders give and account to God *joyfully*, our author counsels his readers, and not *sadly*; in other words enable them, when the day of reckoning comes, to present a joyful report of blessing, thanks to your willing obedience and co-operation. A sad report of disharmony and spiritual decline, occasioned by an ungracious and recalcitrant spirit on your part, will be *of no advantage to you* he warns’<sup>10</sup> The advantage they

<sup>10</sup> Hughes, pg.587.

would lose would be that of being in the true people of God and living under the continuing lordship of Christ and the direction of the Spirit.

### 13:18–25 Personal Epilogue

13:18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things.

The contents of this letter have been at times quite severe, even though constantly touched by the spirit of comfort (cf. for example 6:1–8 and 6:9–10) The writer now urges the readers, not only to accept what has been said, but to reciprocate the concern; **pray for us**, that is for the writer and those who are with him (see vs. 24) The writer does not stand in a superior position. His exhortation has been the expression of genuine humility and concern. He is **sure** of his **clear conscience** in all his conduct, that he has been **desiring to act honourably in all things** ( cf. 2 Cor. 1:11f;4:1–2).

13:19 I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

This request that the readers pray for him has a quite specific purpose. They are urged **the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner**. He is concerned to see his readers soon. Although we are not able to draw any firm conclusions from this statement , we can at least observe that the writer had at one stage been with the readers, possibly as one of the leaders, but now he is separated from them and unable, for reasons beyond his control, to be with them as he would wish.

13:20–21 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, (21) equip you with everything good that you may do his will , working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to who the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Although not the final words of the letter, these verses are a beautiful concluding prayer and doxology which closes the whole. The readers are committed to the **God of peace**. Since the writer does not specify any particular area of life in which we should understand this, we ought not try to specify what was in the mind of the writer; the phrase, or one with a similar though, is not uncommon throughout the whole of the New Testament (cf. Rom 15:33; 16:20; Eph.23; Phil. 4:7,9; 1 Thess.5:23; 2Thess.3:16 for example) We might indeed, see an antecedent in the Old Testament concept of *Shalom*, the fulness of blessing (cf.Ps.29:11; 85:8 119:65;128:5–6; Isa.9:6–7; 32:17–18; Ezek 34:25 for example) but of course the subject of peace in the New Testament is very rich (cf. Jn. 14:27; Rom.5:1;14:17; Phil 4:6–7).

True peace is established only through the whole action of the Cross and resurrection (Eph.2:14–18) Consequently , the writer here continues by declaring that the God of peace is he **who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus**. Furthermore he calls Jesus **the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant**. The subject of ‘shepherds ‘ in Israel is worth pursuing. The title shepherd was used throughout the ancient east for the ruler or king (see Jer. 6:3; 23:1–6;Ezek.34:1–31). However , it is the Lord who is truly the shepherd of Israel , the true king. (Ps.23:1ff.

Ezek.34:11–16) It is in this context that Jesus says ‘ I am the good shepherd’ (Jn.10:11ff). He is declaring himself not only the tender caring one who ‘will feed his flock like a shepherd’ (Isa.40:11) but he is the king of whom it was said ‘ You are my Son , today I have begotten you’ (Ps. 2:6–9;cf.Heb1:5) But Jesus ‘ kingship, whilst eternal, nonetheless needed to be established, and it was the victory of the Cross which did it . And the people of the kingdom (cf.12:28;1 Pet.2:9) are secure because God has bound himself by a new and eternal covenant (cf.8:6–13;9:11–15) which was sealed in the blood of Jesus, both high priest and sacrifice (9:14;cf.Zech9:11;Matt.26:27–28).

For those who have such a King , the writer prays that God will **equip you with everything good that you may do his will** He is asking that the people of the new covenant may know their complete wholeness in God’s giving. The Greek for ‘equip’ (*katartizein*) means ‘to re-articulate what has been dislocated. to restore to a state of functional perfection’ <sup>11</sup> To be brought back to ‘functional perfection’ means that the dislocation of sin, which corrupted the old creation, has now been dealt with. The believers, in Christ, are now a ‘new creation’ (2Cor.5:17) . And, as such, the purpose of God for his creation, that is, good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10) will be expressed in the people of God. Only, therefore, in living in the new covenant, in God’s giving, can the people do his will. This will be only as God is **working in them that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ**. For God to effect in the people of the new covenant that which pleases him is clearly for them to

<sup>11</sup> Hughes,pg.590,n45.

know the wonders of the truly functional new `creation. (cf. Gen.1:31;cf.Phil.2:13). It is hardly surprising that, following such as incredible declaration of the purposes of God which are at work in the people of God, the writer should close with a burst of praise to God, **to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

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Verses 22–25 are a brief postscript. It has been suggested that their style and the obvious closing nature of the benediction and prayer in verses 20–21 point to these verses being added perhaps in the author’s own hand after he had used the services of an amanuensis.<sup>12</sup>

13:22 I appeal to you, brethren bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

It has not been a mere academic exercise in which the writer has been engaged. As we have seen he is deeply concerned for these readers . His closing words, therefore, again urge them to receive the message (gk. *logos*) of exhortation and not of judgment. He feels for them in their situation and wants them to benefit, not just form what he has said, but from Christ himself. Furthermore, he has not written a major dissertation; **I have written to you briefly**. He means that this is not the fruit of careful research and long reflection, though these things were undoubtedly part of the writer’s own preparation, buy rather the quick, urgent response to their need.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes,pg.591.

13:23 You should understand that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

Whilst we cannot be totally sure, it does seem likely that when the writer says **I want you to understand** (lit. 'know!') **that our brother Timothy has been released**, he is referring to the Timothy with whom we are familiar elsewhere in the New Testament. By 'our brother' we assume that the readers were well acquainted with him. Timothy has evidently been imprisoned and only recently released. This letter is possible the first news that the readers have had concerning him. **With whom I shall see you if he comes soon** suggests that the writer is hoping to join the readers and that should Timothy be able to arrive in time, they could, hopefully, journey together.

13:24 Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

The closing greetings are addressed first to **all your leaders**, without any indication as to their identity or number, and then to **all saints**, the 'holy ones' (gk. *hagious*) all those who are recipients of the work of Jesus the great high priest. As we saw in the introduction, the phrase **those who come from Italy send you greetings** is ambiguous for it can be understood as either those who are from Italy and no longer there (perhaps the readers were?) or those who are presently in Italy and who send greetings to those who are living elsewhere. Either way, the significance is that the readers are not alone; they are part of the whole fellowship of believers, the household of God.

13:25 Grace be with all of you. Amen.

'The final short benediction, identical with that of Titus 3:15, is a prayer that *grace*, that is the grace of God which is mediated through Jesus Christ (who by the grace of God tasted death for everyone, Heb.2:9) in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, in other words, *Christian grace*, may be with them all. This grace, says Spicq, 'is a stream of living water flowing through the desert, a power which enables us to withstand every adversity and to reach the promised land, the place of our rest, the heavenly Jerusalem' The source of this grace is the throne of grace where divine assistance is ever available to us in the hour of necessity (Heb.4:16) and strength to enable us to overcome every assault of the enemy and to persevere to the end (Heb. 13:9;cf.2Cor.12:9f)'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hughes, pg.594.