



THE LAST HIGH PRIEST

**The Son Of God
Ministers From Heaven**

Biblical Research Library

Roger E. Dickson

CONTENTS

Introduction – 3

- 1 – *The Divine High Priest* – 6**
- 2 – *The Incarnational High Priest* – 12**
- 3 – *The Salvational High Priest* – 15**
- 4 – *A Faithful High Priest* – 17**
- 5 – *The Approachable High Priest* – 19**
- 6 – *The Sympathetic High Priest* – 21**
- 7 – *The Directly-Called High Priest* – 22**
- 8 – *The Resurrected High Priest* – 24**
- 9 – *The Legal High Priest* – 26**
- 10 – *The Better-Covenant High Priest* – 29**
- 11 – *The Heavenly High Priest* – 30**
- 12 – *The Offered High Priest* – 33**
- 13 – *The Sanctifying High Priest* – 36**
- 14 – *The Redemptive High Priest* – 39**
- 15 – *The Sacrificial High Priest* – 41**
- 16 – *The Blood-Offered High Priest* – 45**
- 17 – *The Only High Priest* – 50**
- 18 – *The Eternal High Priest* – 53**
- 19 – *The Unshakable High Priest* – 56**



Roger E. Dickson
rdickson@mweb.co.za

www.africainternational.org

www.blog.africainternational.org

Philadelphia, Western Cape, South Africa

Copyright 2015, Africa International Missions

Scripture quotations from *International King James Version*

Cover Theme: *WATCHING & HELPING* (Sunrise in the Western Cape of South Africa, R.E.D.)

THE LAST HIGH PRIEST

When struggling with our faith, there is no greater document among the libraries of humanity to consult, than the document of Hebrews.

When there is no growth in Christ, spiritual stagnation sets in, and then comes doubt and spiritual death. This was certainly in the mind of Peter when he revealed two vivid metaphors of those who turn from the Son of God. They are as dogs who return to their own vomit and pigs that were washed to wallowing in the mire (2 Pt 2:20-22). In order to prevent such from happening in our lives, Peter exhorted in his second letter, “*But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18). This is advice that we need to heed. It is spiritual advice that some early Jewish Christians failed to follow, for the Hebrew writer rebuked his readers for their lack of growth in the knowledge of the word of God. They should have by the time of writing been teachers of the word (Hb 5:12). Unfortunately, the result of non-growth on the part of the Hebrew writer’s audience was that they were on their way back to Jewish religiosity, and thus back to the Levitical priesthood and back to the insufficient animal sacrifices of the Sinai law. In their case, their lack of growth in the knowledge of the Son of God and His present function as our high priest, as well as His sufficient atoning sacrifice, was leading them to forsake the superior for the inferior.

Before we are too quick to judge some of the Jewish Christians who were on their way back to the Sinai law, we must take another look at ourselves. We too must heed the exhortation of Peter and grow in our knowledge of the Son of God. Most people have a Matthew-through-John knowledge of Jesus in His ministry in the flesh. Some still only know of baby Jesus in a manger. But unless we grow from knowing Jesus in the flesh to knowing Him according to His present function in and from heaven, we will be as those to whom the Hebrew writer wrote. The transitional point in our knowledge of the ministry of Jesus is summed up in what Paul wrote: “*Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more*” (2 Co 5:16). This was the mandate of the Holy Spirit as He inspired one to write a special letter to Jewish Christians. Hebrews is the letter that we must study in order to know the Son of God who is now ministering from heaven as our high priest, far beyond His earthly ministry in the flesh.

INTRODUCTION

We can only assume who the writer of Hebrews might be. In view of the antagonism against Paul throughout the Roman Empire by the persecuting Jews (At 13:43), we would assume that he would keep his name off this document if he were the author. He would want his readers to fully understand the awesomeness of the Son of God in His present ministry, that it is not according to His ministry in the flesh (2 Co 5:16). Therefore, in the words of the Holy Spirit through the writer, this is a brilliant piece of apologetical literature that instructs us concerning Jesus' present ministry.

One of the first points in the letter is that the author did not want his message to be obscured by his own personality as the writer. So there is no specific identity of the writer, and thus, no distraction from the One about whom the writer identifies in the heavens. We can only make deductions as by whom the letter was written, and thus, we would only assume that it was written by the apostle Paul.

The purpose of the Hebrew letter is stated in the final chapter: "*And I urge you, brethren, bear this word of exhortation*"^{13:22} This was a letter of encouragement, reassurance, and finally a warning to those who were on the verge of forsaking all that they had received in Christ.

This was a letter of exhortation. This is Jewish language in reference to the exhortation that comes from the word of God. When Paul and Barnabas were

in the synagogue of Pisidia, the Jews of the Jewish synagogue asked of them, "*Men and brethren, if you have **any word of exhortation for the people, say it***" (At 13:15). The recipients of the Hebrew letter were indeed in need of a word of exhortation, for some were contemplating a return to the Sinai law and Levitical priesthood. It seems that a general lethargy in study of the word of God had set in among them, and thus, they were finding that their life in Christ had now grown stale after many years as Christians.^{12,3} And thus, the Hebrew writer lays the foundation for exhortation in Christ: "*Therefore, we must give more earnest attention to the things that we have heard so that we do not drift away.*"^{2:1} And drifting they were.

Their spiritual drift was the result of their lack of growth in the knowledge of Jesus. By the time the writer inscribed these words of exhortation, they should have spiritually grown to be teachers.^{5:12} In order to spur them on to growth, therefore, the letter was written to rehearse those teachings that should have continually inspired their spiritual growth. In order to generate enthusiasm in their hearts, the writer reminds them that God is living and active through the present heavenly ministry of the Son of God.^{4:12} In order to spur them on to learning, the writer reminds them of a day approaching wherein God will openly manifest again that He is actively working in the affairs of men.^{10:25}

Jesus did not ascend to idleness. He

is active as our high priest. However, the day was coming in the lives of the immediate readers when He would be active in terminating national Israel. It is our conclusion that the writer inscribed the words of this letter in view of the physical finality of national Israel in the destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 70. The Hebrew writer thus wrote with urgency in order to dissuade any thought of returning to a dead covenant and law under which most Jews of the day hopelessly sought to please God

Because they had not spiritually grown, it seems that the recipients had fallen victim to a faith in which they concluded that Jesus was no longer active. When our Christianity digresses to a faith in One whom we feel is passive on our behalf, then our Christianity becomes cold formalism wherein we legally perform the ceremonies of our faith in order to “maintain the faith.” Such Christianity is dead and brings no satisfaction to the spiritual soul of its adherents. In the cold formalism of their knowledge of elementary principles, the Hebrew writer considers it fundamental that we know Jesus according to how He now functions. We must move on from a knowledge of the fleshly ministry of Jesus to His heavenly ministry as He functions as priest and king in heaven.

Because of their lack of growth, the adherents had grown spiritually lethargic in their maintenance of the elementary principles of the faith. It was beyond the time that they should grow beyond the elementary knowledge of Jesus Christ.^{6:1,2} For this reason, the writer

placed little emphasis on the earthly ministry of Jesus in the flesh. Except for his note on the resurrection of Jesus in 13:20, emphasis is on the eternal sacrifice, and the subsequent active result of that sacrifice through the eternal priesthood of the sacrificial Lamb of God. The resurrection and ascension are assumed in reference to Jesus’ ministry from the time of the cross to His ministry at the right hand of God. So in the following statement of the writer in 7:25, the active ministry of Jesus on our behalf is highlighted: “... seeing He *always lives to make intercession for them.*”

Christ does not now live for Himself. **He lives for us.** He entered into the holy place “*to appear in the presence of God for us.*”^{9:24} He is our priest and king who is enthroned in heavenly places. He is not there with outstretched arms in pleading to the Father. He is there with the authority of the Godhead, exercising all authority for God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The old Catholic picture we often have in our minds is that Jesus is pacing about before the Father in priestly liturgy to plead the case of the righteous on earth. But this mental picture is simply not the picture that the Hebrew writer paints.

The writer seeks to picture Jesus as among His “family.” Quoting from the psalmist, he reminded his readers of the declaration of Jesus: “*I will declare Your name to My brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.*”^{2:12} (See Ps 22:22). Depending on whether we as interpreters would consider the word “firstborn” in 12:23 as a reference

to Jesus, and not to those of His family, does not deny the truth that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, never to die again (Cl 1:18; Rv 1:5). In the 12:23 text, the word “ones” is italics, and thus added by the translators. Reference could be to the firstborn “One,” or the firstborn “ones.” In either case, Jesus is the firstborn of all those who will be resurrected never to die again. Paul reminded his readers of this fact: “*But now Christ has been raised from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who are asleep*” (1 Co 15:20).

As the firstborn of His family, the ekklesia (the church), Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brethren (See Mk 3:34). Isaiah led the faithful remnant of God in order to preserve those who would survive the apostasy of Israel (See Is

8:18). In the same way, Jesus led the faithful out of the apostate Israel of His day in order that they enjoy the final rest that God would give to those who obey the gospel. Jesus is thus pictured by the writer as leading the faithful under the protection of His blood and His ministry as our high priesthood.

The writer’s quotation of Isaiah in reference to this ministry of Jesus was appropriate: “*Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.*”^{2:13} God had given a faithful remnant to Isaiah. In the same way He had given a faithful remnant into the protective hands of the Son of God. It was to these that the Hebrew writer was writing a word of exhortation in order that they remain faithful to their calling through the gospel.

Chapter 1

The Divine High Priest

A letter concerning the heavenly ministry of the Son of God could not have been introduced in a better manner than what is stated in verses 1-3. Indeed, “*God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets.*”^{1:1} The Gentile king and priest Melchizedek will later be introduced as one of these prophets. God did speak directly to the people through prophets as Melchizedek. In particular, God spoke directly to Moses “face to face” (Nm 12:8). So in the succession of prophets, Jesus’ statement to the Jews in John 14:10 is significant: “*The words that I speak to you I do not speak from*

Myself. But the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works.”

Jesus’ Jewish audience understood this statement, though they highly disagreed with His claim that the Father was speaking through Him. Many of the religious leaders rejected Him as one to whom God would speak directly, but the Hebrew writer wanted to first remind his Christian readers that they at one time believed this claim of Jesus. So the Hebrew writer validated Jesus’ claim with the statement that God “*has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the universe.*”^{1:2}

The writer has now taken our minds into the realm of Deity, a realm of existence for which there is no comparison with anything or being on this earth. In order to captivate the minds of his readers, he exalts the One we do not know according to the flesh. It is this One who is now the sustainer of all creation. “*And He [Jesus] is the brightness of His [the Father’s] glory and the exact image of His nature, upholding all things by the word of His power.*”^{1:3} It does not get better than this when we search for knowledge that functions as the foundation for our faith.

In making the statement of verse 3, the Hebrew writer essentially humbled those who would purport angels as elegant in comparison to the Son of God. They were misguided. The reason is simple. Jesus became “*so much better than the angels.*”^{1:4} Those who are obsessed with angels often minimized the significance and being of the Son of God. It may be that our obsession with angels reveals either our lack of understanding of who the Son of God now is, or our efforts to avoid judgment by Him in the end (At 17:30,31). At least some feel comfortable with angels because angels will judge no one.

We must now move into the present tense of the verbs in the context. Since we do not now know Jesus according to the flesh in which He tabernacled among us during His earthly ministry (2 Co 5:16), the Hebrew writer wants us to refrain from using the verb “was” in reference to the Son of God in the flesh. We thus move into the present tense of the

verb in order to understand who Jesus is now and His present ministry. When speaking of the present existence and function of Jesus, past tense is used only when the Greek verb is perfect tense, that is, something that happened in the past that has continued results in the present, and into the future. But when we seek to know Jesus as He now is, and not according to the flesh, it is Jesus in the present tense. He continues in the “flesh” of His resurrected body. We will be changed into this “flesh” when He comes again (1 Jn 3:2). But He is not now in the flesh of His earthly ministry.

So in comparison to angels—and there really is no comparison—“*He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they [angels].*”^{1:4} Authority is inherent in the name of the Son of God. Since “*He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*”^{1:3} He has assumed a position that was never given to any angel. Though He lowered Himself through incarnation into the flesh of man, and also lowered Himself to angels in His earthly tabernacle. But now in His heavenly ministry He has authority and existence far above the angels.^{2:7,8}

We can now understand the mandate of belief that Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:16. The writer seeks to move us beyond our knowledge of Jesus according to the flesh in which He tabernacled and ministered among us on earth. It was in that existence that He was lower than angels. But the Hebrew writer takes us on a mental journey to discover the Jesus that is now at the right hand of God, where the Father “*has put all things in*

subjection under His feet."^{2:8}

During His earthly ministry, the apostles had a personal relationship with the "lowered" Jesus. But at the time of the writing of the Hebrew document, their relationship with Jesus was a covenant relationship with One who sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. They, as we, now have a Lord (Master)/servant relationship with the Son of God. In this existence, He has "*become so much better than the angels.*"^{1:4} And it is in reference to this existence that we would not dare claim a "personal relationship" with Him as we would have with one who is of this fleshly world. The Hebrew writer wants us to understand that he is discussing Jesus as God. In no possible way must we seek to humanize this God in order to satisfy our urge to have our own personal God. Our relationship with the Son of God is different from our personal relationships that we have with our friends in the flesh.

God never adopted any angel. But to the Son He said, "*You are My Son, this day I have begotten You.*"^{1:5} (Ps 2:7). Jesus was brought forth into this world through incarnation. "*In the beginning was the Word [Jesus] ... and the Word was God*" (Jn 1:1). The Word, Jesus, preexisted. He could not have given up being on an equality with God if He were not first in the form of God (Ph 2:5-8). John continued to explain, "*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*" (Jn 1:14). There could have been no incarnation if there were no preexistence in the spirit form of God (Jn 4:24). The

phrase "was made flesh" demands pre-existence. The phrase "dwelt among us" demands initial dwelling with God in His preexistent state as spirit (Jn 4:24).

The presumption that the word "begotten" infers that God adopted Jesus because He was a righteous Jew is simply preposterous. Such a conclusion denies the total foundation upon which Christianity is established. If one does not accept the preexistence of the Son of God, as well as His transition into the flesh of man, and now His eternal existence in heaven, then he has no right to take the name Christian. If one does not take ownership of the eternal existence of the Son of God, then he has created a religion after his own misunderstanding of the eternality and divinity of the Son of God. Jesus as the eternal Son of God is not an option to Christian faith. The fact that He is the Son of God is the Christian faith.

The Father brought "*the firstborn into the world*"^{1:6} through incarnation. No angel ever took this journey. And because no angel has ever been incarnate as the Son of God, "*the angels of God worship Him.*"^{1:6} Only Deity is worthy of worship, and since angels are not Deity, then they have no right to be worshiped. The fact that the Son of God is worthy of worship, means that He is far beyond the being and existence of angels.

"*He makes His angels spirits.*"^{1:7} It seems that the writer is now laying the foundation for the resurrected Son to exist in His present state, the nature of which state we know little. All the apostle John could say about Jesus'

present bodily existence was the following: *“But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is”* (1 Jn 3:2). So by faith we will accept the abstract of the expression of Paul that Jesus is now, *“not according to the flesh”* (2 Co 5:16). Angels, on the other hand, must remain as spirits, having never experienced incarnation.

This Jesus whom we are now struggling to know beyond the flesh of His earthly ministry, is enthroned *“forever and ever.”*^{1:8} Righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom reign that extends far beyond submissive servants. He *“has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him”* (1 Pt 3:22). The realm of His reign extends to all things.^{2:8} Those who cannot comprehend the extent of the kingdom reign of the Son, have a limited view of the Son as He now is *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named”* (Ep 1:21). The Hebrew writer explains,

You have made him a little lower than the angels. You have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of Your hands.^{2:7}

Too many theologians have limited the reign of the ascended Son to a church family here on earth. But His scepter of rule comes with all authority over all things, Satan and demons included (Mt 28:18; 1 Pt 3:22). Insurrectionists to His kingdom reign cannot exclude themselves from His authority and the realm

of His reign. All the church of the submitted are under the scepter of His rule, but all the kingdom of His reign is not confined to the church of the obedient. To affirm that the kingdom reign of Jesus is limited only to the church of the submitted, is a failure to comprehend the totality and extent of who the Son of God now is at the right hand of God. If we would impose limitations on the scepter of Jesus' present reign, then we are denying the very proposition that the Hebrew writer is trying to substantiate in this very first chapter. The reigning King Jesus now has and exercises all authority over all things (See Ph 2:9-11).

Though the angels were the companions of Jesus during His earthly ministry (Mt 4:6,11; 26:53), He is now above the angels.^{1:9} The writer takes us back to the beginning of time in order that we understand where Jesus is now. In the beginning, the Word *“laid the foundation of the earth.”*^{1:10}

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him (Cl 1:16).

Only God can create, and thus, Jesus is God with the Father and Spirit. Nothing was created without Him. *“All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”* (Jn 1:3). The writer's argument declares the foolishness of the Jews' exaltation of angels. Some were equating angels with

Christ.

This Jesus Christ from whom they were about to walk away, **was God!** He was the Creator of all things. He now has authority over all things. He reigns supreme over the created world, “**upholding all things by the word of His power.**”^{1:3} If He were to sneeze, the universe would be blown back into non-existence, that from which it came, for “*we understand that the universe was formed by the word of God [Jesus], so that the things that are seen were not made of things that are visible.*”^{11:3}

The religions of Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and an assortment of other misguided religions of the world, all pale in the face of who Jesus now is, and the authority of His reign over all things. To compare this Jesus to Muhammad, the dalai lama, or some other exalted religious leader, is blasphemy in view of the teaching of the Hebrew writer. It has taken the Hebrew writer only one chapter of Holy Script to banish all comparisons of Jesus to any Baal religion of human invention.

And when the end of Jesus’ creation finally fulfills its purpose for existence, He will “*fold them up.*”^{1:12} The earth’s purpose to populate heaven will have been finalized in the end. In fact, when the purpose for which all things has been climaxed, then the end will come. When God deems that the world is worthless to produce any more residents for heaven, then the present existence of this world as it is will be finalized.

But in reference to His existence, we need not fear. “*Your years will not*

fail.”^{1:12} If all that now exists, including all humanity, would be terminated from existence, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit would continue on without end. This Jesus about whom we speak, therefore, does not exist because the world and all humanity exists. All exists because He first existed. They are sustained by the word of His power.

He will continue throughout our existence on this earth until the last enemy is destroyed (1 Co 15:25,26). In order to reassure his readers of the supremacy and reign of the Son, the Father said to the Son, “*Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.*”^{1:13} In this life we need to be assured that Jesus is now at the right hand of God, functioning as our high priest on our behalf. It is this Jesus we want to know. We will thus move beyond the earthly ministry and person of Jesus that is recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and move into the heavenly realm of Jesus that is recorded by the Hebrew writer.

The recorders of the life and ministry of Jesus while He was in His earthly flesh, were limited in their definition of who Jesus now is as God over all things. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were limited by the humanly defined words to which they were confined in defining the person of the God who indwelt the earthly tabernacle of the flesh. In guiding their hands through inspiration, the Holy Spirit knew that it would be difficult for any humanly defined words to explain the God who is beyond our dictionary. And so, through a description of the function

of Jesus as He now exists apart from earthly flesh, the Hebrew writer allows his hand to be moved by the Spirit to describe the One who is now functioning with all authority over all things. However, even with this explanation, we must acknowledge our frustration in trying to comprehend fully this God who is beyond the words we read when we open our Bibles.

We can only assume that part of the problem with the Hebrew audience of this document was that by reason of the amount of time they had been Christians, they should have grown in their knowledge of who Jesus became and was after His resurrection and ascension. They too may have been frustrated. So they remained stuck in “*the elementary principles of Christ.*”^{6:1} Nevertheless, after the length of time they had been Christians, they should have been teachers.^{5:12} They should have moved beyond a legal understanding of who Jesus now is. Unfortunately, they found comfort in remaining within the legal confinement of an elementary knowledge of Jesus.

The problem may have been that they became “*dull of hearing,*” that is, they stopped learning because of their frustrations. The result of their lack of knowledge of Jesus Christ as He now is, laid the foundation for their apostasy from the One who upholds all things by the word of His power. If there were ever

a lesson that we could glean from the life of the Hebrew Christians, it is how to guarantee apostasy from the truth. If one does not continue to grow past the “*elementary principles*” of truth, he is sure to fall when the heat of persecution tests his faith. The Hebrew Christians failed to learn who the Son of God is now, and thus, in their lack of knowledge they were on their way back to that from which they had come. They were going back to a legal religiosity in which they experienced a sense of security. They were sacrificing the abstract for the fleshly religiosity of Judaism.

In order to stop them at the brink of destruction, the Hebrew writer takes his readers on a discovery of what they had failed to appreciate throughout the time they had been disciples of Jesus. He takes them past legal religiosity into the realm of a God who functions on our behalf in the heavenly realm. By understanding the continued ministry of this God, they could better deal with the God who is beyond their comprehension. Through faith they would learn to depend on those things that were beyond their full comprehension. By the time the writer concludes his arguments at the end of chapter 10, the readers will better understand the faith of Noah and Abraham, and the other heroes of faith who remained faithful without all the knowledge we have of Jesus Christ this side of the cross.

Chapter 2

The Incarnational High Priest

In view of what the writer revealed in chapter 1 concerning who the Son of God now is, what better way could he have introduced the details of Jesus' present ministry than with the following statement: *"Therefore, we must give more earnest attention to the things that we have heard so that we do not drift away."*^{2:1}

His exhortation is powerful. Under the Sinai law that was given to Moses for Israel through angels, *"every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment."*^{2:2} The obvious conclusion would be, *"How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation"* that has been delivered to us through the Son of God.^{2:3} If one falls from what the Son of God now offers as our mediating high priest, then he has no escape from condemnation. And thus, it will be as the writer will conclude later, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*^{10:31}

In chapter 2 the writer launches into the opportunities that we have under the reign of King Jesus. And unless one might run to angels for help to escape the certain punishment awaiting the backsliders, the writer reminds his readers, *"For He did not subject the world to come to angels"*^{2:5} We must not forget this. Since the world to come was not subjected to angels, then angels have no right to judge. The writer explained this in clear terms: *"For in subjecting all*

things to Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him."^{2:8} *"We see Jesus"*^{2:9} on the cross making atonement for our sins. But we now see Him in heaven *"crowned with glory and honor."*^{2:9} It is He who is our glorious king and savior.

The setting of the text of Hebrews 2:14-18 is verse 10. It was *"fitting for Him,"* the Father, *"to make the author [captain] of their salvation perfect through sufferings."*^{2:10} The saga of Jesus' high priesthood on our behalf began in the beginning when He breathed life into that which He created out of the dust of the earth. He too had to become that which He created. He too had to suffer for those into whom He was incarnate.

Since *"by Him all things were created,"* (Cl 1:16), then by Him only could an atoning sacrifice be made for all. Since *"all things were created through Him and for Him,"* (Cl 1:16), then He had to come in the flesh for those who were created in the flesh for Him. John added, *"All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made"* (Jn 1:3). The Maker had to come for those who were made by and for Him.

Thus, *"it was fitting ... to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."*^{2:10} The perfection of what Jesus created was completed with His perfect blood sacrifice and high priesthood ministry on behalf of the created.

Jesus was perfected as our high priest because He identified with the body that He created in which we dwell. Through incarnation He lowered Himself to be as we are in the flesh (See Ph 2:5-11). *“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”* (Jn 1:14). In order that we not complain about being confined to the flesh wherein we cannot live perfectly according to His directions, He became as we are in order to complete us through His offering for our eternal dwelling.

Since we as His created children *“are partakers of flesh and blood,”*^{2:14} it was only reasonable for Him to likewise partake of the same, *“so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”*^{2:14} Paul explained how Jesus accomplished His incarnation and salvational mission in reference to delivering us from death. He explained that the grace of the Father ...

... has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tm 1:10).

In all our fleshly humanity in which we are confined, therefore, Jesus became the same on our behalf. He too had to be able to die physically in order that He might identify with the fear we have in reference to the destiny of all flesh.^{9:27} He sacrificed His eternality in the form of God in order to bring us into eternity with Him.

As an argument to solidify the mis-

sion of Jesus to bring life and immortality to light (2 Tm 1:10), the writer touches on a point that is sensitive to all men. He reminds his readers that man was not created to live in fear of death. He was not created to live an estranged life from his Creator. On the contrary, man was created to walk with God (See Gn 5:24). Before Adam and Eve took their fateful bite of the forbidden fruit, both were in fellowship with their Creator. But sin changed the fellowship to separation, and thus, death and the fear thereof was introduced into the world (See 1 Co 15:22). Jesus came, therefore, to restore our walk with God in the fellowship of His care (See 1 Co 15:20,21). We now walk with Him in the light because we walk in the continual cleansing of that which separates us from God (See Is 59:2; 1 Jn 1:7). We are not the “walking dead,” but those who walk in the life that comes through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our walk in the light assumes that the source of our life, Jesus, continues to exist. We would assume from John’s use of the present verb tense that there was eternality in reference to His becoming as we are, and as we will be in our changed habitation for eternity. John wrote many years after Jesus’ ascension, *“And we know that the **Son of God is come** ...”* (1 Jn 5:20). And again, *“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God”* (1 Jn 4:2). At the time of his writing over twenty years after the resurrection of Jesus, John affirmed the continued existence of Jesus in His present heavenly state as that which we will be when we

are bodily raised and changed to be as He presently is:

... it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is (1 Jn 3:2).

The Holy Spirit, through Paul, taught that after our death we will not be spooks floating in the air, but will be blessed with a new habitation from God at the time of our resurrection (2 Co 5:1-5). We simply connect the dots and come up with the truth that we will be as we will see Jesus when He appears again. John did not understand the resurrected body of Jesus, though he and the other disciples sat at a table and ate with him (Lk 24:36-43). They touched and hugged the resurrected body of Jesus (1 Jn 1:2). We too will be raised with a changed body that will be as the present body of Jesus. But we keep in mind that Jesus is not at this time existing in the fleshly body in which He dwelt during His earthly ministry. His flesh changed for His ministry that He now carries out on behalf of His spiritual body, the church.

When we speak of the sacrifice that Jesus made by coming in the flesh of those for whom He would be a high priest, we must conclude that His sacrifice through incarnation was more than existing in the flesh of man for a brief thirty-three years. His sacrifice was both in being and in atonement. It was a sacrifice forever, as truly His high priesthood will be for all those who have given themselves to His eternal priesthood ministry.

“He does not give aid to angels.”^{2:16}

There were those to whom the Hebrew writer addressed this document who gave too much honor to angels. But the writer’s arguments of Hebrews 1 crushed the presumption that we should reverence angels above Jesus. Another argument is presented here in reference to the ministry of Jesus on behalf of those for whom He came.

Through His incarnation, Jesus did not have the angels in mind. The redemption through His blood was not for those who were not flesh and blood. The text is saying that Jesus did not incarnate Himself into the form of angels in order to aid them in reference to salvation. His sacrificial atonement on the cross was for those into whose flesh He was found in a manger in Bethlehem. Therefore, He came to *“give aid to the seed of Abraham.”^{2:16}*

It was this seed that needed the aid of His sacrifice, not angels. We would assume, therefore, that angels do not live in the same realm of sin in which we live. They needed no atoning sacrifice for sin. If they sinned, there was no forgiveness. If Revelation 12 sheds any light on the sin of angels, it is banishment from the presence of God to await destruction if there is rebellion against God (Mt 25:41). There was and is no atoning sacrifice appropriated to angels who sin against the One who created them (Cl 1:16). Their existence in the continual presence of Diety restricts them from the opportunity of redemption if they rebel. We have the opportunity for redemption because we exist in the realm of faith. Jesus brought

the angels into existence who eventually rebelled, though they resided in the reality of His presence. Because of their rebellion, He will eventually take them out of existence (Mt 25:41). Jesus offered none of His blood for the redemption of fallen angels.

Unless we might misunderstand who this “*seed of Abraham*”^{2:16} is by faith, Paul explained, “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:26,27). “*And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise*” (Gl 3:29). Jesus aids those who have been baptized into Him. He aids those who have become the seed of Abraham through their obedient faith (Rm 6:3).

The Hebrew writer argued that the incarnation of Jesus was necessary. “*In all things He had to be made like His*

brethren.”^{2:17} The wording, “had to be made,” means necessity. In other words, the Son of God could not have accomplished His atoning mission for the salvation of His creation without incarnation into that which He created. There could have been no redemption if He only stood on the sidelines looking on our suffering. He had to be more than an on-looking coach. In creation, “*the universe was formed by the word of God, so that the things that are seen were not made of things that are visible*” (Hb 11:3). And since the Son of God was invisible to man as spirit (Jn 4:24), then He had to follow His creation into the realm of the flesh He created for man. He had to join in the existence of our suffering. John’s commentary is fitting: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:1,14).

Chapter 3

The Salvational High Priest

In order for the Son of God to function as a high priest on behalf of those whom He confined to the flesh (Cl 1:16), He had to become as they were in the flesh. In order “*that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God,*”^{2:17} He had to become flesh as those for whom He would mercifully function as a high priest. Without the incarnation, therefore, there could have been no “*atoning sacrifice*” on the cross “*for the sins of the people.*”^{2:17} In

this revelation, we discover that the purpose of the incarnation was not only to present a body for sacrifice for the sins of the people, but also to offer to those who are redeemed One who could empathize with their predicament of humanity. In order to be the captain of our team in the game of life, He had to lead among us. In all ways He had to participate in our struggles. And certainly, the cost of His participation in the game of our struggles was severe.

Many years ago the story was told of an American, Mrs. Samuel Untermeyer, who was traveling in Europe. She found a very beautiful Gobelin tapestry she wanted to buy. But the price was a staggering \$25,000, which in today's pricing would have been well over \$100,000. So not to displease her lawyer husband, Samuel, Mrs. Untermeyer sent a telegram to Mr. Untermeyer with the question, "Should I buy the tapestry for \$25,000?" He immediately responded, "No, price is too high!"

When Mrs. Untermeyer returned home with the tapestry, Mr. Untermeyer was quite upset with her, and complained, "Why did you disregard my instructions in my telegram?" Mrs. Untermeyer calmly replied, "I didn't. I followed your instructions in the telegram." And pulling the telegram out of her purse, she read it: "No price is too high!" The telegraph clerk had left out the comma after the word "No," which small error cost Mr. Untermeyer \$25,000. We wonder what would have been the result if Jesus had in the Garden of Gethsemane cried out to the Father, "No, price is too high!" If we were there with Jesus, all of us would have cried out to Jesus, "Leave out the comma!"

There has been debate throughout the centuries concerning the extent to which Jesus went in His incarnation. Our conclusion to all arguments of this debate is that the incarnation was complete. Jesus was truly human in all that we are in order that we might become all that He is now in His resurrected body (1 Jn 3:2).

While in His incarnate existence, Jesus was "*being tempted*."^{2:18} **There would have been no real and complete incarnation if Jesus could not have been tempted to sin as those for whom He came to offer Himself as an atoning sacrifice.** There could have been no merciful Savior if there were no possible way for Him to submit to temptation as those for whom He offered Himself. Therefore, because He could be tempted to sin as we, "*He is able to aid those who are tempted*."^{2:18} We do not have a high priest who is without empathy for our predicament in the flesh.

He "*was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin*."^{4:15} This statement of fact would not be true if Jesus could not have fallen to temptation. This was a fact that Satan knew, and thus he tried his best to submit Jesus to the greatest temptations this world has to offer (See Mt 4:1-11).

In being tempted as we are, then "*He is able to aid those who are tempted*."^{2:18} With this statement verse, we understand that the reference to God in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is a reference to Jesus who now functions as our high priest to aid us in times of need.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man. But God [Jesus Christ as our high priest] is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to endure, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape so that you may be able to endure.

Chapter 4

The Faithful High Priest

The writer continues the revelation of the text of Hebrews 2 into chapter 3 with the conjunctive word “therefore.” He thus draws a conclusion to the preceding arguments of chapters 1 & 2 in order to bring our minds to the point of comprehending the superiority of the high priesthood of Jesus over the priesthood of the Sinai law. He wants his readers to “*consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.*”^{3:1}

Jesus was an “apostle,” that is, “one who is sent.” John the Baptist said of Jesus, “*For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God ...*” (Jn 3:34). “Sent” is from the Greek word *apostolos*. Jesus was sent into the world by the Father in order to function as a high priest on behalf of those He would call through the gospel. He cried out to the multitudes, “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work*” (Jn 4:34; see 5:23). If Jesus had simply assumed the title “apostle” without ever leaving heaven, then there would have been no offering for our sins. It would have been as many today who claim to be apostles, but never leave their homes to go into all the world. If Jesus would have functioned as many self-proclaimed apostles today and stayed home, then He would have never left heaven. We would remain in our sins.

But glory be to God that Jesus was the One sent as an apostle from the Father to minister on behalf of our sins (Ph

2:5-11). In doing so, He did not present to the Father the sacrifice of animals as the priests of the Sinai law. He brought Himself to the throne of the Father, dripping with His own blood from the cross, and eternally given for those whom He had created. On the basis of His apostleship and sacrifice, Jesus could offer to everyone what He stated while in the flesh: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me, has everlasting life*” (Jn 5:24).

Moses was a faithful intercessor to God on behalf of Israel. But the One under consideration in the context of Hebrews 3 “*was counted worthy of more glory than Moses.*”^{3:3} He was counted worthy of more glory because He was the One who built His own house. “*Upon this rock,*” Jesus said to His disciples during His earthly ministry, “*I will build My church ...*” (Mt 16:18), which church is the house of God (1 Tm 3:15). Moses never made any such claims, for it was God who built the house of Israel. Moses only assumed a divine call from God to intercede on behalf of the house that God built (Ex 14:31; Nm 12:7).

Now he who builds “*the house has more honor than the house.*”^{3:3} In this one statement we guard ourselves from glorifying the church over the Builder. We give honor to members who deserve honor (1 Pt 2:17), but we must never forget that Jesus as the Builder has more

honor. Therefore, “*whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Cl 3:17). We must, as Abraham, be “*strong in faith, giving glory to God*” (Rm 4:20). We must remember that “*no other foundation can man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ*” (1 Co 3:11). Jesus built His church on the foundation that He was the Christ and Son of God (Mt 16:18). Moses could not make this claim.

Moses was faithful in the house that God built and gave to him to bring into the land of promise. However, Jesus built the house to which He remains faithful. He will eventually present this house before the Father (Jd 24). Jesus was sent as an apostle from the Father in order to function as a sacrifice that would allow us to be presented before the Father without our sins. If He had not assumed His going forth from the Father as one sent, then we would never have had the opportunity to be presented before the Father through the cleansing blood of the cross (See Ph 2:5-11).

Jesus has more honor than the house simply because He was the creator and the foundation upon which the church was built, and by which the church will be presented before the Father. Paul reminded the Colossian disciples that Jesus has the right to be considered the foundation upon which His house is built. “*For by Him [Jesus Christ] all things were created All things were created through Him and for Him*” (Cl 1:16).

The Hebrew writer wanted to remind his readers in this context of a state-

ment by which he introduced the letter: “*And He [Jesus Christ] is the brightness of His glory and the exact image of His nature, upholding all things by the word of His power.*”^{1:3} Not only was Jesus the creator of all things, and His house, He is the sustainer of all that He created and built. The writer thus affirms, “*He who built all things is God.*”^{3:4} This is the writer’s affirmation that Jesus as God was the creator. We would not, therefore, consider Jesus Christ in His present existence either equal to or less than angels. And for sure, we would not compare Him equal with Moses in any sense. Though those to whom the writer was addressing this defense were considering a move back to the Levitical priesthood, in this context he seeks to shock them into the reality that Jesus is not only our Apostle and High Priest, but our God. He is as Thomas confessed when he finally witnessed the resurrected Christ: “*My Lord and My God*” (Jn 20:28).

The Hebrew writer compares the ministry of both Moses and Jesus. “*Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant.*”^{3:2} However, his servanthood over God’s house was in view of something yet to come. The example of his servanthood was “*a testimony of those things that were to be spoken later.*”^{3:5} And those things that were to be spoken later were the Sonship and Messiahship of Jesus.

Though Moses was a faithful servant over his house, “*Christ was faithful as a Son over His own house.*”^{3:6} Moses could not claim ownership of the house over which God made him a servant. But

the house over which Jesus was and is faithful is His own. It is His own house because He is the Son, the heir of all things. Therefore, He is our faithful high priest who will not give up on that which He built.

We are now the house of the Son because we believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (Mt 16:18). We are the house of God "*which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Tm 3:15). However, there

is a subjunctive in reference to remaining a part of this house. The subjunctive is "*if we hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.*"^{3:6} There is no such thing as "once saved, always saved." If one does not hold fast to Jesus, then he relinquishes his right to be a part of the house. He relinquishes His right to receive Jesus as his Apostle from the Father and his High Priest on behalf of his sins.

Chapter 5

The Approachable High Priest

The Hebrew writer introduces the subject of chapter 4 with questions of warning in response to his statement of 3:7,8: "*Today if you will hear His voice do not harden your hearts*" Moses led Israel out of Egyptian captivity, but some rebelled against the authority of God that was invested in Moses.^{3:16} Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness, but those who rebelled by not initially entering into the promised land died in the wilderness.^{3:17} Those who were disobedient because of their unbelief were not permitted to enter into the rest of the promised land.^{3:18,19} "*Therefore,*" the writer calls for the attention of his readers by saying, "*Let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering into His rest, any of you may seem to come short of it.*"^{4:1}

We must fear because "*the preached word did not profit them, because it was not united with faith in those*

who heard."^{4:2} Our faith, therefore, must be unwavering in the priesthood of Jesus. If it is not, then we have forfeited our right to the rest which God has promised in our future.

The argument is that we "*hold fast to our confession*" because our high priest, Jesus, "*has passed through the heavens.*"^{4:14} He not only passed through the heavens, but also, "*we have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*"^{8:1}

The high priests of the Sinai law began with Aaron. They continued throughout the history of Israel. But all those priests died and were buried. Their high priesthood was terminated with their death. The high priesthood of the Son of God, however, continues because He continues to live. He not only continues to live, He resides at the right hand of God.^{8:1} It is because He has made this

journey through the heavens on our behalf that we should remain faithful to Him as our high priest.

We must not forget to understand the phrase “*through the heavens*” from the perspective of the Jewish audience to whom this document was directed. To the Jews, the first heaven was the sky (earth’s atmosphere) in which birds dwell and clouds form. The second heaven was space in which the heavenly bodies dwell. But it was the third heaven unto which Paul was caught up, “*whether in the body or out of the body*” (2 Co 12:3). It was into this heaven that he “*heard inexpressible words*” (2 Co 12:4). To the Jews, this third heaven was the dwelling realm of God.

When Jesus ascended, He went into the third and final heaven wherein, according to Jewish thinking, God dwells. He passed through the first two heavens in order to be seated at the right hand of God in heavenly places, the third heaven.

Nevertheless, though Jesus may have passed out of the sight of us on earth, He has not passed out of mind or existence. Though He ascended so high according to Jewish thinking, He through the weakness of His incarnate flesh, will not forget our weaknesses. It is not, therefore, as that which is theorized by Catholic Church theologians. They teach that Jesus supposedly ascended into the unapproachable realm where He cannot be contacted directly by man. We will not, therefore, develop a theology of Mariolatry wherein it is affirmed by Catholics that Jesus is so far away that we must access Him only through Mary.

It is not as Abbe A. Boulenger, a Catholic theologian who wrote the following in *La Doctrine Catholique*: “... it is by Mary that one goes to Jesus and that one is more certain to obtain the graces of which one has need” (pp. 30,31). It is affirmed by Catholic theologians that the virgin Mary “intercedes for us in heaven and that her intercession is so universal that every grace passes through her hands” (Paul H. Hallett, *What Is A Catholic*, p. 77). If Mary performs such on behalf of the saints, then we would wonder what function is left for Jesus to perform at the right hand of God as our high priest? If Mary does the function of a high priest, then what is the present work of Jesus? The doctrine of Mariolatry is a direct attack against the present high priesthood function of Jesus on behalf of the saints.

Faithfulness to the ministry of the Levitical high priests continued only while they were alive. Adherents could not be faithful to the individual high priests because each high priest died. The people could be faithful only to the law, not to the person. But because Jesus continues to live in the “third heaven,” our faithfulness to Him and of His priesthood is far beyond that of any earthly priest. We are faithful to Him, and in return, He is faithful to function as our high priest on our behalf. Therefore, we must caution ourselves lest our faithfulness to Him diminish through a hardened heart of unbelief. The Hebrew writer pled, “*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.*”^{4:7}

There may be an unspoken reason

why some Jewish Christians were moving toward the existing priests of the Jews. These priests were living people with whom they could personally relate. Jesus, on the other hand, was in heaven and could not be related to in a face to face manner. Some of the Jews simply wanted to hug a priestly man. The prob-

lem in the Jewish converts transition from Judaism to Christianity would have been a change back to the ministry of the Son of God as our high priest in heaven. In their apostasy to Judaism, they were willing to change the high priesthood of Jesus for a personal relationship with priests on earth.

Chapter 6

The Sympathetic High Priest

The Levitical high priest who functioned among the Israelites on earth could sympathize with the sufferings of those for whom they ministered. They too had the same weaknesses and sufferings as those for whom they ministered the sacrifices. Jesus was incarnate into the flesh of those for whom He ministered His sacrifice in order that He might identify with their weakness. Therefore, *“we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*^{4:15}

Jesus was on earth in order that we might relate with Him as a person. He was on earth in order that we understand the One against whom we sin. In order for Him to identify with our sufferings, He had to “pass through the heavens” in order to come to where we are. He came in order that He might be able to empathize with our sufferings. He had to pass through the heavens, and then return to the right hand of God where He now functions with empathy as our high priest.

In reference to the priesthood of

Jesus, we now have another reason for His incarnation. He had to be made in all ways as those for whom He would function as a high priest. Therefore, He, *“being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men”* (Ph 2:6,7). He was God in the flesh on this earth for our behalf concerning things that needed to be rectified for us in heaven (Jn 1:1,2,14). He was incarnate into our flesh in order that He might be tempted in all ways as those whom He would redeem for eternal glory. His incarnation in the flesh validated Him to function rightfully as a high priest from a heavenly position.

The extent of the incarnation of the Son of God is defined by the extent to which He could be tempted. If He did not have the possibility to sin, then He would not have incarnated into the flesh with which we are presently in bondage.

The incarnate Son of God was not a phantom. The Gnostics were wrong.

Since what the Hebrew writer here states is true, then the Son of God was “*found in the appearance as a man*” (Ph 2:8). He was fashioned according to the flesh of this world, and thus, humbled to our weaknesses. Since He was the creator of flesh (Cl 1:16), then He knew before the incarnation the risks that came with the deed of both creation and incarnation. Creation thus necessitated incarnation. This is a concept that none of us can in our most profound knowledge fully understand. But one thing is certain. Those who would categorize Jesus as simply a good Jewish teacher who lived and walked the Palestine pathways have totally missed the One who is here described by the Hebrew writer.

The consequence of His incarnation is our right to “*come boldly to the throne of grace.*”^{4:16} It is not that we live perfectly in the flesh in order to arrogantly approach the throne on the basis of self-justification. We can come boldly before the throne of grace because He too had the possibility to sin through weakness. He “*was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin.*”^{4:15} “As-we-are” qualified Him to be merciful to us who

are confined to the weaknesses of the flesh. We thus boldly come to the throne of grace because of our inability to live without sin. Because of His conquest over sin, though humbled to our state, we can have boldness to approach Him. We know that He understands, and thus can render to us mercy. We thus “*obtain mercy*”^{4:16} because He understands our weaknesses. We “*find grace*”^{4:16} because He knows the difficulty of living in the flesh.

Because He was made in all ways as He made us, He can extend mercy. He understands all the struggle it takes to resist Satan, which thing He did (See Mt 4:1-11). Nevertheless, because Jesus understands that “*there is none righteous, no, not one,*” He must extend grace (Rm 3:10). We are thus “*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). If any would turn away from this high priest, there is no forgiveness. There can be no mercy. So the writer pleaded with his audience, “*Therefore, let us labor to enter into that rest lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.*”^{4:11}

Chapter 7

The Directly-Called High Priest

“*Every high priest taken from among*”^{5:1} the Israelites was appointed for Israel through the original instructions of the Sinai law, which instructions designated that priests come from the lineage of Levi. The function of the Levitical priests was to “*offer both gifts and sac-*

rifices for sins.”^{5:1} Since those priests who were taken from among men were tempted in all ways as those for whom they offered gifts and sacrifices, they too were “*subject to weakness,*”^{5:2} and thus, they also had to offer for themselves. These priests could identify with those

who sinned in ignorance and weakness.

Because the priests of Israel were subject to the weaknesses of the flesh, they were “*obligated*”^{5:3} to offer sacrifices both for themselves and for the people. It was their obligation to offer sacrifices for the people because they were originally called into priesthood by the Sinai law since they were of the tribe of Levi. As the sons of Levi, therefore, they could not deny their destiny and duty as priests.

Levitical priests who offered sacrifices for Israel were indirectly called into a priesthood ministry. They were priests because the tribe of Levi was originally called out by God from among all the tribes of Israel in order to be the priests of Israel. They could not, therefore, boast in being called personally by God as Aaron was personally to be the first high priest of Israel. After the initial calling of the tribe of Levi and Aaron, all priests before the cross were called by God indirectly through the law that God established at Mount Sinai.

Aaron did not call himself to be the high priest for Israel. Neither did Christ “*glorify Himself to be made a high priest.*”^{5:5} Aaron was directly and personally called into priesthood by God. In like manner, Jesus was directly and personally called by God to be our high priest because He was the only begotten Son of God. Because He was the Son of God, He was called by the Father and sent into our world in order to be a high priest on behalf of those whom He had created. As a short story of redemption, Jesus created us to be free-moral individuals with

the ability to love and to sin. And because we all sin, He had to come for us with the destiny of going to the cross on our behalf.

Jesus appeared in our history as Mechizedek. There is no genealogical record of the beginning or ending of the Gentile priest Melchizedek. Genealogy was important to the Jews, for through genealogy the descendants of the original settlers could prove their inheritance to the land that was given to their fathers. In reference to the right of priesthood, genealogy was the validation for one’s priesthood as a descendant of Levi. Genealogy was also necessary in order to prove one’s high priesthood as a descendant of Aaron. But there was no genealogy in reference to the priesthood of Melchizedek. He was a high priest who was called directly by the Father.

Though there was an earthly genealogy of the physical family of Jesus (Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:21-38), there was no heavenly beginning or ending of His existence. Jesus Christ was a high priest “*according to the order of Melchizedek*”^{5:6} because His priesthood will exist eternally as the statement infers, “*You are My Son.*”^{5:5} The Jews accepted the high priesthood of Melchizedek, though he had no genealogy to prove his right to such according to law. Jesus also could not prove His right to priesthood according to the records of Jewish genealogy.

Jesus was personally and directly called into priesthood by the Father because He was begotten by God. “*You are My son. Today, I have begotten You.*”^{5:5} It was not that Jesus became a son at

the time He was begotten by God while He was in the world. His existence was eternal before He emptied Himself into the realm of corruption in the flesh. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God”* (Jn 1:1,2). And so He was eternally destined to priesthood on behalf of those He knew would sin. His incarnation qualified Him for that which was His destiny for us. As the creation of man was deter-

mined by God, so also the priesthood of Jesus. Since the function of priesthood is to offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of those who sin, then Jesus’ priesthood also had to be in the initial plan to create man. The sin of man was not an unforeseen event to God. Jesus knew the first free-moral being would sin. Because He foreknew the sin, He also foreknew His priesthood before the beginning of all things.

Chapter 8

The Resurrected High Priest

“In the days of His flesh,”^{5:7} assumes that Jesus was in a state of possible termination in His incarnate body. We often do not understand the extent of the incarnation because we recoil from the possibility that in reference to the Son of God, the word “death” would have the same meaning as when it is applied to our carnal flesh. But the Hebrew writer makes the statement that the Son of God *“offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him [the Father] who was able to save Him from death [termination].”*^{5:7} Was this salvation from the termination by death as it would apply to our mortal existence, or was it salvation from the experience of death?

His prayers and supplications were based on **His godly fear**. His godly fear existed because of the possibility of the finality of something in reference to His being while in the flesh. Could it have been that the word “death” in this con-

text means more than the actual experience of the termination of the body? When Jesus cried out from the cross, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* (Mt 27:46), could it have been that it was at that time that Jesus could have been forsaken to eternal separation from the Father in death because He bore the sins of the world? In answer to His prayers and supplications, we better understand what the Holy Spirit wrote in prophecy through David in reference to His death: David *“spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see decay”* (At 2:31; see 1 Pt 3:18-19). It could have been, therefore, that His soul would have stayed in Hades if it were not for the Father’s deliverance of Him from the Hadean existence.

Though not recorded, there was certainly an end to the life of Melchizedek. So in Jesus’ priesthood *“according to the order of Melchizedek”*^{5:6} there may have

been the possibility that He could have been terminated in death, confined to Hades, as all the priests of the Old Testament because He personally took on the sins of all men. But glory to God for our salvation. *“He was heard because of His reverent submission.”*^{5:7} Only through *“strong crying and tears”*^{5:7} Jesus was heard by the Father, and thus, He escaped the corruption of the flesh in death and the confines of the Hadean world.

We would conclude, therefore, that we can come to the throne of grace because of the *“strong crying and tears”* by the One who went to the cross for us. His redemption continues because He remains alive. Since He was heard by the Father, the Father was *“able to save Him from death.”*^{5:7} It seems that only the Father was able to do the deed of resurrection. The Spirit directed Paul to write that the Father *“raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places ...”* (Ep 1:20).

Though we might meander in our thinking concerning the possible termination of the Son of God, we would conclude that it was His incarnate body that would be terminated, not His being, **for God cannot die**. All emphasis in reference to Jesus’ death and resurrection concerns His incarnate body. It was His body that was not allowed to see decay (At 2:31). It was His body that was resurrected (At 2:32). And it was His body that ascended before the eyes of the disciples (At 1:9,10). According to John, it is in this present body that He continues to exist and will come again. It is not a body according to our flesh, but it is in-

deed a resurrected and changed body as we will have at the time of our resurrection (1 Jn 3:2). It is our task to know Him now according to His present bodily existence. The theme of Hebrews is to take our minds from Jesus’ fleshly body ministry on earth, to His spiritual body ministry as our high priest in heavenly places.

However, before His resurrection and ascension, suffering in an earthly body was necessary. *“He learned obedience by the things that He suffered [in His earthly body].”*^{5:8} His suffering, with the possibility of termination in the flesh, manifested that He was in all ways as we should be, that is, obedient to the Father.

We must not forget that at the time of His incarnation, the Son of God gave up being on an equality with God (Ph 2:6,7). Before the incarnation, there was an equality with God that He sacrificed for His humanity. And so we learn another reason for the incarnation. **He had to be made in all ways as we exist in order to be obedient as we should be.**

He could have appeared in a form that would endure no suffering of the flesh. Since the Gnostic could not handle a complete incarnation, he affirmed that the Son of God appeared only as a phantom. But such an appearance would have been far short of that which would have been required for a sufficient sacrifice for sin. The Son of God was thus *“made perfect”*^{5:9} through His suffering in the flesh. Only in this way could He become *“the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him.”*^{5:9} Without His model of obedient suffering in the flesh,

we would have no encouragement to do the same. Peter reminded his readers of this truth: *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps”* (1 Pt 2:21).

Our joy is that His high priesthood was predestined to suffering before the incarnation. His destiny was revealed when the Father raised Him to be seated at His right hand.^{8:1} We have a high priest, therefore, who has been personally designated by God *“a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*^{6:20} We thus have hope in the priesthood of Jesus because it will continue without end in

His present resurrected body. When we all transition into a realm of heavenly dwelling, we can be assured that Jesus will dwell among us in His present form into which we will also be transformed (1 Jn 3:2). Therefore, by the unchanging promise and oath of God, we *“have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.”*^{6:18}

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters within the veil where Jesus, the forerunner, has entered for us, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.^{6:19,20}

Chapter 9

The Legal High Priest

In the context of Hebrews 7, the Hebrew writer continues his argument for the priesthood of Jesus with a question. It is a question he knows his readers can answer correctly. *“If perfection were through the Levitical priesthood,”* the writer questioned, *“what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek?”*^{7:11} The writer knew that his readers reasoned that there was no perfection from sin through the ministry of the Sinai law priests who offered gifts and offerings for the people. However, when they came to the priesthood of Jesus, they knew enough about His priesthood that they could conclude that the Levitical priesthood and its offerings were insufficient.

The writer knew that his readers

would understand that there was no sufficient offering for sin by the blood of bulls and goats.^{10:1-4} It is interesting to note that when men reason correctly concerning sacrifices, they come to the conclusion that the offering of animals as a sacrifice is futile in reference to reconciling one to an eternal God. The priests who officiated at the altar according to the Sinai law, certainly reasoned that this was true. Nevertheless, in respect for and obedience to the law, they continued to offer animals in hope of a better sacrifice that would surely come in the future.

But now a problem had arisen in the minds of some Jewish Christians in reference to Jesus functioning as a high priest. He came forth from another tribe than Levi. Jesus was born of the tribe of Judah.^{7:14} Therefore, when Jesus became

our high priest, there was also the necessity to change the law in order that His priesthood be according to the declaration of God.

Under the Sinai law, no one who was of the tribe of Judah “*officiated at the altar*.”^{7:13} The law, therefore, had to be changed in order for Jesus to lawfully function as our high priest. But the only one who could change the law was the One who originally instituted the law. And now we understand what Jesus meant in the following statement: “*For verily I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled*” (Mt 5:18). When He was seated at the right hand of God to function as our high priest, the law was fulfilled, and thus, the law could be changed. The Sinai law that validated only the sons of Aaron to be high priests, had to be changed in order that Jesus locally function as our high priest. Therefore, God took away the Sinai law in order that His Son be validated as our high priest.

When every “jot and tittle” of the Sinai law was fulfilled in Christ, it was time to go away. When Jesus proclaimed from the cross, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30), more was included in His statement than the conclusion to the eternal redemptive sacrifice. We must also conclude that all was finished that brought Israel to Him on the cross. The purpose for the Sinai law was fulfilled in the atoning sacrifice of the cross. The school master (tutor) that brought Israel to Christ had fulfilled its purpose (See Gl 3:24,25), and thus, it was finished. Christians do not live un-

der the Sinai law that was to bring Israel to Christ.

When Jesus came to fulfill the law through the cross, there may have been a question in the minds of some Jewish Christians concerning His right to officiate as a priest under the first law. The fact that no one of the tribe of Judah “*officiated at the altar*.”^{7:13} constitutes an argument from the silence of the Scriptures. “*Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood*”^{7:14} from the tribe of Judah. Though he spoke nothing, it would have been unlawful under the Sinai law to choose a priest from the tribe of Judah. Therefore, if the Sinai law were still in force, Jesus could not lawfully officiate as our high priest under the law.

When God commanded that priests come from the tribe of Levi, that silenced any priest coming from any other tribe of Israel. The Sinai law did not have to contain a commandment against a priest coming from any other tribe. All that God had to do was state that which was the law. And when He stated the law, **all other means by which the law could be fulfilled were made unlawful**. In other words, when God stated that priests would come only from Levi, then that silenced priests coming from any other tribe of Israel. This restriction would have included Jesus if the Sinai law were still in force today.

Jesus, therefore, had to come after the order of the Gentile priest Melchizedek. **Melchizedek became a priest after the direct calling of God before the existence of the Sinai law, even before the Jews existed as a nation.**

The Sinai law had to be nailed to the cross (Cl 2:14). Under the new covenant and law that was instituted at the cross, Jesus could ascend to the throne of God contrary to the restrictions of that law, in order to reign as king and priest as Melchizedek. Because the Sinai law and covenant died at the cross, Jesus could lawfully be called into priesthood when He ascended on high.^{8:1} He could function after the priestly order of Melchizedek, and not after the law for priests under the Levitical priesthood.

Jesus' priesthood is *"not according to the law of a carnal commandment."*^{7:16} The validation of His priesthood is not dependent on the temporary Sinai law that legally declared one a priest. On the contrary, Jesus' priesthood is *"according to the power of an endless life."*^{7:16} He was directly and personally declared our high priest by the Father: *"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*^{7:17}

Validation of priesthood under the Levitical system could only be made while the law lived. But when the law died at the cross, the validation of the priesthood of Jesus had to be based on His being called directly by the Father. It is for this reason that the Father testifies concerning the priesthood of Jesus.

Jesus is our high priest in heaven. He is continually making intercession for us. He is a high priest *"appropriate for us"* because He was appropriated to us by the Father. He functions as such because He is *"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and exalted above the heavens."*^{7:26} He does not continu-

ally have to offer sacrifice for our sins. He needed to offer no sacrifices for His sinless life. On the contrary, He offered *"once for all when He offered up Himself."*^{7:27} His was a onetime and eternal sacrifice, and since it needed to be offered only once, then it was sufficient for all eternity.

The high priests before the cross were weak in that they had to offer sacrifices for themselves because they too sinned. But our high priest, Jesus, has been designated such by the oath of God *"which came after the law."*^{7:28} The statement "after the law" affirms that **the Sinai law passed away in order that Jesus be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.** His priesthood was mandated by the direct call of God, not through the Sinai law.

The Father has appointed *"the Son who has been perfected forever."*^{7:28} The Sinai law, which validated the high priests of the Old Testament era, was temporary. When the Sinai law passed away at the cross, the appointment of high priests could only come according to the order of Melchizedek. And coming according to the order of Melchizedek meant that the Father had to be directly involved in Jesus' call to high priesthood. The Father, therefore, directly appointed Jesus as our high priest, not according to the Sinai law, but by His own right to appoint high priests as He appointed Melchizedek.

Since the oath of the Father is eternal, then the high priesthood of Jesus is eternal in the heavens. He has appointed the Son once and for all eternity to be

our high priest. In other words, the Father's appointment of Jesus as our high priest has been perfected, that is, it has been completed once and for all eternity.

There will never be another appointment of any other high priest, and therefore, the high priesthood of Jesus must be without end.

Chapter 10

The Better-Covenant High Priest

Covenants are based on the trust of the covenanted parties. Each party obligates himself to conditions for the establishment of the covenant. Once the covenant is established, then each party is obligated to keep the conditions of the covenant (See Book 24, *Authentic Church*, chapter 5, BRL, africainternational.org).

The Sinai covenant that God made with Israel was guaranteed on the basis of God's initiative and was sanctified with the offering of the blood of animals. But as our high priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus was "*made a guarantee of a better covenant.*"^{7:22} The guarantee of this better covenant "*was with an oath*"^{7:21} from God. It was based on God's promise that Jesus would continually be our high priest. The Father said to the Son, "*The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'*"^{7:21}

Before the Sinai covenant, the high priesthood of Melchizedek was without beginning and ending. Melchizedek was the king of Salem. The word "Salem" means peace, and thus, the reference was fitting for Jesus to be the king of peace among the redeemed.^{7:2} (See Ps 110). Therefore, it was appropriate for the He-

brew writer to illustrate the unending high priesthood of Jesus as an eternal blood offering that sanctified the new covenant which was also eternal. The result of His offering was without end since we must always live under a covenant relationship with God if we would live forever.

The new covenant is better because it came with a high priest who was designated such as Melchizedek. God appointed Melchizedek directly as a high priest. And in such a manner He designated Jesus as our high priest. The God who never changes His mind in reference to covenants, swore through the cross that Jesus would be a priest forever. And because of the eternity of Jesus, He is made the guarantee of the better covenant that will not pass away. The eternity of the covenant is based on the eternity of the priesthood of Jesus.

The ministering priests of the Sinai covenant had a "death problem" in reference to their officiating on behalf of the people. The problem was that it is appointed that all men die.^{9:27} And because the priests of the Sinai covenant died, "*they were prevented by death from continuing*"^{7:23} their priesthood before God on behalf of the people.

But with the Son of God, everything

changed. “*Because He continues forever,*” Jesus ministers with “*an unchangeable priesthood*”^{7:24} for a covenant that is without end. It is for this reason, therefore, that “*He is able also to save those to the uttermost who come to God through Him.*”^{7:25} In contrast to the changing of the priests of the old covenant, Jesus is unchangeable. He officiates as “*an unchangeable priesthood.*”^{7:24} The reason is that “*He always lives to make intercession for them*”^{7:25} (See Rm 8:34). His intercession on behalf of the people continues without end because He is without end.

Jude was so confident of the intercession of Jesus that he concluded his short letter with the words,

Now to Him [Jesus] who is able to keep you from falling and to present you fault-

less before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy ...” (Jd 24).

All religions that are invented by men function with holy men, priests, witch doctors or a dalai lama. The problem with these religions is that the spiritual leaders die. If the faith of the adherents is based on the existence of the spiritual leader, then the faith often dies with the death of the spiritual leader.

Israel was reminded at the funeral of every high priest that their faith would have been terminal if God had not ordained that an heir of Aaron would always take the place of the dead high priest. But the frail humanity of the high priest of the Sinai law came to an end in the Son of God who was “*made a guarantee of a better covenant*”^{7:22} “*Such a high priest was appropriate for us*”^{7:26}

Chapter 11

The Heavenly High Priest

By chapter 8, the Hebrew writer comes to the main point, or conclusion to the things he has defended. Jesus is three things in reference to the inadequacies of the Levitical priesthood: (1) Jesus is our high priest who is seated in heaven at the right hand of God.^{8:1} (2) Jesus is a minister of the sanctuary and tabernacle that the Lord built.^{8:2} (3) Jesus is our mediator of the new covenant.^{8:6} By this ministry we now know Jesus. And because Jesus functions “*in the heavens,*”^{8:1} we seek to maintain our covenant relationship with Him because of the “*more excellent ministry*”^{8:6} He performs on our

behalf.

There is a difference between the priesthood of Jesus and the Levitical priests who came through the mandate of the Sinai law. The Levitical priests under the Sinai law were priests of this world, having been appointed by the law. Their service was thus confined to this world. But we “*have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*”^{8:1} The Hebrew writer’s argument to those Jewish Christians who were considering a move back to the Levitical priesthood was that they were being earthly. They

were certainly theologically unwise to exchange the heavenly priesthood of Jesus for a priesthood that was confined to this world. The writer thus argues by contrasting the heavenly priesthood of Jesus with the earthly priesthood of the Levitical law. One was appointed by the direct pronouncement of God, and the other through the mandate of law.

The Levitical priests of this world ministered in an earthly tent that continually wasted away in the weather to worthless rags. It had to be rebuilt every few years. The sanctuary of this tent was thus temporary. But in contrast to the earthly sanctuary of the tabernacle that wasted away with use, Jesus has gone into a heavenly sanctuary, having built the “*true tabernacle that the Lord pitched, and not man.*”^{8:2} Since it is heavenly, and thus not of this world, it will not waste away as all things of this world.

(We are sure the Levitical priests wearied themselves with the continual moving of the physical tabernacle of the Old Testament from one place to another. But the tabernacle in which Jesus now functions as our high priest is heavenly. It will never wear out. It is not as the tabernacle of Israel that had to be moved and rebuilt continually throughout the centuries. We can understand why David, who was frustrated with moving the tabernacle, offered to God the option to build a permanent temple (tabernacle) that would not wear out. At the time, God knew that Israel would diminish in faithfulness to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. He thus relinquished to David’s desires. Solomon, David’s son,

therefore, built the temple.)

Under the Levitical system, the high priest had to offer gifts in a physical tabernacle. This all transpired before Jesus ascended to heaven to assume the function of an eternal high priest. He offered only one sacrifice. After the sacrifice was offered, He began His function as a mediator on behalf of those of His tabernacle. Under the Sinai law, the priests came before the Lord with the offering of “*gifts according to the law.*”^{8:4} Such was the duty of the high priest, for it was appointed to him “*to offer gifts and sacrifices.*”^{8:3} Since Jesus came to the Father as a high priest, He too had to come with “*something to offer.*”^{8:3} And that which He had to offer was the offering of Himself for the people on whose behalf He would mediate.

We must conclude that what Jesus sacrificed was something that was forever. It was not only His sacrifice on the cross, but something that would continue throughout eternity. Since His was an eternal sacrifice, then there had to be eternal residuals on His part as to what He gave up for those He would eternally mediate. When He gave up His form of God through incarnation, we surmise that the incarnational sacrifice He made for us began with the cry of a babe in a manger in Bethlehem, but did not end with a cry from the cross, “*It is finished*” (Jn 19:30). He completed the plan of redemption at the cross, but the results of the redemption continued after the cross. The sacrificial offering for the redemption of those who walk by faith was finished, but the extent of His commitment to dwell

among His brethren as their high priest was not.

His incarnate and sacrificial body was changed in the resurrection. That into which it was transformed was eternal. The apostles witnessed the changed body of Jesus after His resurrection, which body they saw ascend into heaven (See At 1:9,10). John personally witnessed and touched the resurrected body of Jesus (1 Jn 1:1). But he confessed,

Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is (1 Jn 3:2).

Jesus is not a ghost floating around in a heavenly realm. In His resurrected body, He ascended. John affirms that we will see Him as He now is when He appears again. We will not only see Him, but our bodies will be transformed into what His body now is. Paul called this a mystery, and such it is. In our resurrection, our mortal bodies will put on immortality; our perishable body will be changed into that which will not decay away (See 1 Co 15:35-57). All this is enough to make us greatly wonder what we will be. But we can be assured that we will receive a new habitation from God, one that is not confined to the sufferings of this world, but one that will be eternal as the Son (See 2 Co 5:1-8). It will be in this new habitation that we will be personally present with our eternal high priest. It is then that we will have a truly personal relationship with the Son of God.

Now if Jesus “*were on earth*,”^{8:4} none of this would be possible. He could not be our high priest since the Sinai law provided priests who continued to minister the sacrifices. From the time the Sinai law came into force at Mount Sinai, there were “*priests who offer gifts according to the law*.”^{8:4} However, what the earthly priests served was only “*a copy and shadow of heavenly things*.”^{8:5} All the services the priests under the Sinai law ministered were a copy and shadow of that which was to come. The copy was not the true substance from which it came. The shadow was not the substance. It was the substance that casts the shadow, to which substance the Old Testament priests looked forward.

God commanded Moses to make the tabernacle according to the pattern that was given to him on Mount Sinai. Those who ministered in the shadow of the substance, ministered according to the pattern that was revealed on Mount Sinai. Moses was instructed to make correctly the shadow in order that Israel not misunderstand the substance when it arrived. At the time the Hebrew writer wrote, Jesus was ministering according to the true tabernacle that He constructed, which tabernacle He was, when through incarnation, He tabernacled with men. It was the priesthood of Jesus that casts the shadow of those things that led to His tabernacle and priesthood.

Jesus has now “*obtained a more excellent ministry*”^{8:6} than the ministry of those who ministered in the shadow from Sinai to the ascension of Jesus. His ministry is more excellent because He is “*the*

mediator of a better covenant that was established on better promises."^{8:6} The foundation upon which His ministry is established is far better than what the Sinai law could provide. The Levitical high priest to whom the Hebrew writer referred at the time of writing needed to make a decision. He needed to decide

whether he would continue to minister in the shadow, or hand over his high priesthood to the One who cast the shadow. Of course he refused, and subsequently, God had to physically remove him when the temple worship was destroyed in A.D. 70.

Chapter 12

The Offered High Priest

The high priests who were under the Sinai covenant could not come before God without offerings for the sins of themselves and the people. But it was different with Jesus. When Jesus was presented before the "*Majesty in the heavens*,"^{8:1} He too had to come with an offering. It was "*necessary that this high priest [Jesus] also have something to offer.*"^{8:3} However, it was not "offerings" in the plural, but in the singular, for He offered Himself once for all time. And it was not an offering for His own sins, for He was without sin.

The earthly priests "*served a copy and shadow of heavenly things*,"^{8:5} and thus their function was an illustration of that which was to come after them. They were in preparation for that which casts the shadow. And that which casts the shadow was the offering of Jesus on the cross. The insufficiency of their offerings and priesthood exemplified the necessity of the offering of Jesus that was yet to come.

Moses was instructed that he "*make all things according to the pattern*"^{8:5} (Ex 25:40). The "pattern" was for the taber-

nacle and the order of priesthood for Aaron and his sons. If the pattern was not followed, **then the people would have been confused concerning the substance that was to come.** The people would have had a distorted view of the "*excellent ministry*"^{8:6} of Jesus and His offering. Their function according to the pattern was maintained in order to present a true understanding of the substance that was to come. For this reason, therefore, we understand that the pattern for priesthood that was given at Mt. Sinai was not from man, but from God.

In chapter 7 Jesus was the "*guarantee of a better covenant.*"^{7:22} In chapter 8 He is the "*mediator of a better covenant.*"^{8:6} God's personal oath that established Jesus as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek guaranteed the better covenant that we now have with God. Because of this guarantee, "*He has obtained a more excellent ministry*"^{8:6} of mediatorship of a new covenant. "*Therefore, He is able also to save those to the uttermost who come to God through Him, seeing He always lives to make intercession*"^{7:25} And since "*there is one*

God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” then we do not hesitate to approach God through Jesus Christ (1 Tm 2:5). There is absolutely no other medium through whom men must approach God (At 4:12).

The expectation of the Israelites was encouraged by one very important fact concerning the conditions for keeping the first covenant. In order to keep the covenant, and in order to find redemption through animal sacrifices, the conditions of the covenant had to be kept perfectly. But the people knew that this was an impossibility. In reference to the law of the covenant, the people knew *“that a man is not justified by works of law”* (Gl 2:16). **One cannot be justified by perfect keeping of law simply because it is impossible for any man to live perfectly under law.** All sin (Rm 3:23). And one sin makes a lawbreaker, and a violator of the conditions of the covenant.

So the Hebrew writer introduces his readers to the “fault” of the law of the Sinai covenant. *“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second.”*^{8:7} This statement might lead us to conclude that there was a problem both with the covenant and the law by which the people were to live in order to keep the covenant. But this would be a wrong conclusion. We must not conclude that there was any fault with either. On the contrary, *“the [Sinai] law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good”* (Rm 7:12). The Sinai law and covenant were perfect for what they were designed to accomplish.

Paul explained, *“The law was our headmaster to bring us [Jews] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith”* (Gl 3:24). One of the purposes of the Sinai law was to preserve the faithful of Israel until the coming of the Redeemer. When that to which Israel was brought finally arrived, then there was a change. Paul continued, *“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a headmaster”* (Gl 3:25). The headmaster (the law) served its purpose. And once the purpose was fulfilled, then there was no more a need for the Sinai law.

The fault was not with the law, **but with the people who were under the law.** There was no possible way for them to justify themselves through perfect law-keeping, though the Jews were to keep the law as best they could until it had accomplished its purpose (See Gl 2:16).

The Hebrew writer clarified the problem of the Jews’ efforts to keep the law: *“For finding fault with them,”* he explained, *“... the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant”*^{8:8} **The fault was with the people who could not live sinlessly under the law.** Regardless of what law God would give to man, we must understand that **no law is given by God for the purpose of producing salvation.** On the contrary, law in and of itself brings death, for no one can keep law perfectly in order to justify himself before God.

The reason law cannot produce salvation is because those to whom the law is given are at fault. Those who lived under the Sinai law knew this. And for this reason, Paul reasoned with some

Jews on his first mission journey that by Jesus “*all who believe are justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses*” (At 13:39).

There should be no difficulty in understanding the Holy Spirit’s argument on this main point. **Since there is no justification under law through perfect obedience, then there is no salvation under law alone.** Something else was needed to maintain our covenant relationship with God. A new law and covenant were needed. And that which was needed with law was an eternal atoning sacrifice that was sufficient to continue redemption to those who violate law.

Since the honest sinners under the Sinai law knew this, they groaned for deliverance from law in order to be justified by mercy and grace. Several centuries after the giving of the Sinai law, and the failure of those who lived under that law who were on their way into Babylonian captivity because they lived contrary to the law, God promised through Jeremiah, “*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*”^{8:8} (See Jr 31:31).

At the time the Hebrew writer penned the above quotation from Jeremiah 31, the spiritual relief had already come through Jesus. The new covenant came with Jesus. And with the new covenant, there came a new law. So the writer concluded with the following statement: “‘*A new covenant,*’ **He has made the first obsolete.**”^{8:13} At the time

he wrote these words, the old was “*becoming obsolete and growing old.*”^{8:13} It was “*ready to vanish away.*”^{8:13}

At the time the letter of Hebrews was written, the old Sinai law had years before been nailed to the cross in A.D. 30. The new covenant was in force. However, at the time he wrote, the priests of the Sinai law were continuing to “*offer gifts according to the law.*”^{8:4} But this ministry of offering the blood of bulls and goats was also about to conclude within less than a decade after the letter of Hebrews was written. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would bring a total end to the Sinai priesthood ministry in that the temple and the altar would be completely destroyed. The Jewish priesthood would be either killed in the destruction or dispersed throughout the world as slaves of the Roman Empire.

We conclude, therefore, that a subliminal purpose for the writing of the letter of Hebrews was to save lives, particularly the lives of those Christian Jews in Jerusalem who persisted in continuing the offering of the sacrifices at the temple altar (See At 21:17-25). The writer pleads his case for Jesus in order to discourage the first Jewish recipients throughout the Roman Empire from going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and to participate in the offerings that had long vanished away in Christ (See Gl 3:26-29).

God gave the Jews forty years to transition from the cross in A.D. 30 to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The death of the covenant and law came with the establishment of the new high

priest in heaven. It was now time for all Israel to flee from all the shadows of God's covenant with national Israel that was established 1445 years before at Mount Sinai. The historical statement of God in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was that His covenant and law

with national Israel were over. Through the Hebrew writer, God was telling potential apostate Jewish Christians not to turn back to that which will physically terminate in the destruction of Jerusalem.^{10:39}

Chapter 13

The Sanctifying High Priest

The good news is that Jesus in His ministry on earth was not all there was of Jesus. In fact, He appeared to make the way for the obedient to find their way to the best there is now. And what the Son of God is now in heaven is our hope for what will be in the future. This is the meaning of Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:16: "*Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more.*" Our knowledge and appreciation of who the Son of God is now is the foundation of our hope. We thus seek to move beyond knowing Jesus only according to His fleshly ministry. We seek to have assurance through His present ministry.

"*Christ appeared as a high priest of good things to come.*"^{9:11} The wording in this statement is significant. The statement says that He came as a high priest, that is, He did not come to become a high priest. The babe lying in a manger in Bethlehem was our high priest. When he was about thirty years of age, He began the function of His high priesthood ministry in the flesh while on earth. His earthly ministry was in preparation to procure the sacrifice of Himself, with

which sacrifice He entered into the sanctuary of heaven at His ascension.

In contrast to the Levitical high priest, Jesus' priesthood was not finalized with His death. His high priesthood continues today and into our future in His heavenly existence. During His earthly ministry, therefore, Jesus was the offering of God in preparation for the altar of the cross. He was a sacrifice without blemish (without sin^{4:15}) who was destined to take His own flesh to the cross as a sacrificial offering on our behalf (See Jn 10:15-17).

The Old Testament tabernacle (tent) was made from the wool of sheep. It was temporary. God gave instructions in the Old Testament for its remaking every few years. But in comparison to that tent that wasted away in the heat of the sun and weather, Jesus came with "*a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands.*"^{9:11} It is thus not a tabernacle that originated from anything that is "*of this creation.*"^{9:11} The tabernacle in which Jesus functions as our high priest was not made with wood and wool of this world. It is not, therefore, temporary as the things of this world.

Since the tabernacle of Jesus is not of this world, then with His blood He was able to redeem those who compose His tabernacle. Under the Sinai law, *“the blood of goats and calves”*^{9:12} were fruitlessly used to deal with the sins of the people who lived.^{10:1-4} The high priest of the Sinai law entered into the holy of holies of the tabernacle on the day of atonement every year. He entered with the blood sacrifice of animals for the people. But in his reasoning, the high priest knew the futility of offering the blood of bulls and goats for the sins of the people. He rationalized that there must be something better that was coming. Therefore, out of legal obedience to the law, he faithfully carried on with the offering of animal blood.

“By His own blood”^{9:12} Jesus entered into heaven on behalf of the sins of those who now compose His spiritual tabernacle. The gospel news is that *“in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace”* (Ep 1:7). And in contrast to the repetitious annual entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies under the Sinai law, Jesus *“entered once for all into the holy place”*^{9:12} (See Lv 16:12-15). There was finality to the sacrifice on the cross. And thus, He *“obtained eternal redemption”*^{9:12} through His blood for all those who sign up for a covenant with Him.

The “eternal redemption” happened only once. In other words, the cross was a once-and-for-all-eternity event that had eternal consequences. Jesus does not have to offer Himself continually on the

cross to redeem His people. The matter of our redemption was a onetime event in history. “Eternal” in this context thus focuses on the result of the redemptive offering. The redemption continues into eternity because of the absolute of the cross. Redemption was accomplished at the cross, and thus, it is made sure because of the eternity of the One who made the sacrifice. Jesus will never offer Himself again for that which continues to exist.

The Hebrew writer now turns to the reasoning of his readers. A question is asked. The question is that *“if the blood [of animals] sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,”*^{9:13} then *“how much more the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works ...?”*^{9:14}

If there was sanctification of sin under the Sinai law in view of the cross, then while living in the reality of sanctification this side of the cross, would it not be reasonable to conclude that the reality gives greater assurance than the shadow of animal blood? Those living under the Sinai law offered in expectation of something that would accomplish sanctification. The high priest knew that that which was of this creation could not redeem those in the flesh in order that they be sanctified before God who is not of the flesh. With every animal sacrifice, there was the realization that there was an insufficiency in the blood of animals. We assume that the priests of the Sinai law expected something to come, but no one had any idea that it would be

a blood offering of the incarnate Son of God. This mystery was hidden from the minds of men until the event happened (See Ep 3:4,5).

But when the One who was without blemish was offered on behalf of our sins, we have assurance that His sacrifice was final and sufficient. It was sufficient even for all those who lived before the cross who faithfully offered the blood of animals. They too were sanctified by the cross. It was through Jesus *“whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God”* (Rm 3:25).

The cleansing blood of the cross was offered for all men for all time. Since there was no satisfactory cleansing power in the blood of animals,^{10:1-4} then the cross was necessary for those who were confined to the sacrifices of the Sinai law. But now, Jesus *“is the mediator of a new covenant, so that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant, those who have been called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”*^{9:15}

The cleansing power of the cross was applied to sin in retrospect when any animal without blemish was offered for the sins of the people under the Sinai law.

It was not that the sins of the people were rolled forward to the sacrifice of the cross. The sanctification of the cross was rolled back to those who by faith offered the blood of animals for their sins. There was forgiveness of sins before the

cross, but the forgiveness was only accomplished in view of the cross. The sacrifices of the Sinai law were offered, therefore, in hope that there was something coming that would accomplish that which the people knew could not be realized with the blood of animals.

God sees our time from beginning to end. He thus functioned in reference to redemption from the perspective of “beginning to ending.” He could forgive before the cross because He knew the certainty of the cross. There was redemption through the blood of Jesus before the cross, therefore, though the people were ignorant of the sacrifice of the cross. The redemption was based on the faith of those who obediently offered animals in expectation that God had something greater for the faithful than the shadow in which they lived.

Our knowledge of the cross today gives us no advantage in sanctification over those who through faith obeyed what God required for an offering under the Sinai law. We only have the advantage of the knowledge of the cross, but it is still our faith that gives us assurance of forgiveness in the cross. Because the blood of the cross was sufficient through the faith of those who lived before the cross, then they too *“receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”*^{9:15} Their walk with God was based on promise. Ours is based on the reality of the cross. But the end result of both is the same.

The Hebrew writer concludes the “once-and-for-all” offering at the cross, by contrasting it with the annual offerings of the high priest of the Sinai law.

If the offering of sufficient as a onetime event in history, then He would have had *“to suffer often since the foundation [creation] of the world.”*^{9:26} The sufficiency of His offering is in the fact that *“now once at the end of the ages He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”*^{9:26} Jesus needed to suffer only once. And because He needed to suffer only once, demands the conclusion that the offering of the cross was entirely sufficient for all sins for all time.

“Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.”^{9:28} When He comes again, it will not be for offering, *“but for salvation.”*^{9:28} Because His offering was sufficient, then He can appear again for our salvation, not for our condemnation. This is the function of our high priest on our behalf. And for this reason we can come to the throne of grace with boldness. We can therefore patiently wait for Him because our faith is in the eternal redemption we have through His blood.

Chapter 14

The Redemptive High Priest

In contrast to the old covenant and law that God established with Israel at Mount Sinai, Jesus Christ *“appeared as a high priest of good things to come”*^{9:11} ... ***by His own blood.***^{9:12} So the Hebrew writer concludes with Jesus’ right to function as *“the mediator of the new covenant.”*^{9:15} His offering to function as the mediator of the new covenant was based on the sufficiency of His blood sacrifice with which *“He entered once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption.”*^{9:12}

The sufficiency of His sacrifice is exemplified in the fact that it was not only for our sins this side of the cross, but for those, who through faith, were obedient to the law of the Sinai covenant before the cross. Therefore, He is the mediator of the new covenant, *“so that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant,”* they too may *“receive the prom-*

ise of eternal inheritance.”^{9:15}

The writer of Hebrews has now set forth the reason why a new covenant had to be established. He explains why it had to be sanctified by death. *“For where a covenant is, the death of the one who made it must be established.”*^{9:16} This is necessary because *“a covenant is ratified upon death.”*^{9:17} A person may write a will (testament) concerning all things that he seeks to leave with those who follow him. But as long as he lives, his will (testament) has no legal power to distribute his possessions. And so it is with a covenant, *“since it has no force while the one who made it lives.”*^{9:17} There must be the death of the testator before his testament (will) is activated.

The Holy Spirit wants to remind us that the first covenant was inaugurated through the death of something that was living (See Ex 24:5-8). When Moses had finished reading before the people all the

law of the covenant, “*he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book [of the law] and all the people.*”^{9:19} A great number of animals died in order that blood could be used to ratify the covenant. Moses’ actions came with the pronouncement, “*This is the blood of the covenant that God has commanded you.*”^{9:20}

In order to sanctify all the instruments the priests were to use in their ministry of the covenant Moses “*sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry.*”^{9:21} The reason for all this “sprinkling” was that death must occur in order to provide the blood that is used to set apart (sanctify) that which was to be dedicated to God. The Hebrew writer wanted us to reflect on the fact that “*without shedding of blood there is no remission,*”^{9:22} that is, there is no bringing into force the benefit of a covenant with God for those who seek to be set apart for God. In this way, therefore, because of the blood of the covenant, God is able to establish a covenant with the obedient. Through the blood of Jesus, the sins that have separated us from God are remitted. In reference to our covenant with God, “*everything is to be cleansed with blood.*”^{9:22} Under the new covenant, death had to occur in order that blood be provided to cleanse us of our sin that continually separated us from God before we obeyed the gospel.

“*Therefore, it was necessary that the copies of things in the heavens should be purified [through blood] with these.*”^{9:23} “*But the heavenly things*

themselves [must be sanctified] with better sacrifices than these [sacrifices of animals].”^{9:23} It was not possible for Jesus to take any blood of any animal on earth in order to enter into heaven. His function as our high priest of the new covenant had to be founded upon His blood. There was no redemption through the blood of animals.^{10:1-4} **And since there was no redemption through the blood of anything that originated from this world, then redemption had to be provided by that which was not of this world.** If we would be permitted to use the word, it took an “amalgamation” of the heavenly and the earthly in order to provide an effective sacrifice for those who would transition from the earthly to the heavenly. This was the end result of incarnation, and thus, an explanation of how the eternal Son of God became that which was a sufficient sacrifice for humanity. The Word “*was in the beginning with God,*” but “*the Word was made flesh...*” (Jn 1:2,14). The Word was made flesh in order to offer a sacrifice that would transition those of the flesh into the eternal realm of being with God.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He did not go without blood. The priests on earth “*entered into the holy places made with hands.*”^{9:24} But Jesus entered into the true substance of that which casts the shadow to the earthly, which substance was not made with hands. Jesus entered “*into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*”^{9:24} He did not ascend unto God “*with the blood of another,*” that is, the blood of an animal.^{9:25} Neither did He have to

enter continually with blood into the presence of God as did the priests of the earthly tabernacle. In contrast to the priestly ministry of the Sinai covenant, the Hebrew writer informs us that Jesus has “*now once at the end of the ages ... appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*”^{9:26} When Jesus entered into heaven on behalf of all those who

are now in a new covenant relationship with God, He did it once with His own blood. Therefore, when it comes to blood sacrifices in reference to covenants with God, all killing of animals for sacrifices was finalized in Christ. With His own sacrifice He has cleansed forever those who would draw near unto God through Him.

Chapter 15

The Sacrificial High Priest

We have come unto an awesome sacrifice, one that has eternal consequences. With this appreciation, we can understand how foolish the readers of the Hebrew document were in their efforts to return to the animal sacrifices of the Sinai law. We can understand the uselessness of all those today who carry on with similar animal sacrifices in their system of humanly devised religiosity.

It “*was necessary that the copies of things*” should be purified with sacrifices, but “*the heavenly things themselves*” must be purified “*with better sacrifices than*” those that originated from this earth, that is, animal sacrifices.^{9:23} We have now come into a covenant that has the better sacrifice of Jesus.

We can only imagine the frustration of the Levitical priests of the Sinai covenant. Theirs was a futile effort of “*daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices that can never take away sins.*”^{10:11} They knew that the blood of a killed animal could never rectify the spiritual gap that exists between man and God. They knew that a sacrificed ani-

mal was useless in mending the separation that was caused by their inability to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God (See Is 59:2). Theirs was a ministry of frustration. Nevertheless, they remained faithful in offering animal sacrifices in view of the fact that something greater must be in the final plan of God.

When the fullness of time came, the better was revealed when God sent forth His Son (Gl 4:4). And “*by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*”^{10:14} The cross was a day of historical celebration. What was a momentary time of grief for the immediate friends of Jesus who stood at the foot of the cross, later became a joyous event when they encountered Him alive after the resurrection. On the day of Pentecost, it was revealed that the cross was the event for which all the sons of Abraham by faith had waited for millennia.

A new covenant relationship was activated with the words from the cross, “*It is finished*” (Jn 19:30). What Jesus had finished on the cross had been in the foreknowledge of God since the first day

He breathed into Adam the breath of life. The sacrificial offering of the cross declared God just in creating those whom He knew could not live perfectly before Him. If there had been no plan when the first "Let there be ..." came forth from God (Gn 1:3), then God would have been fiendish to create those whom He knew could never live a life of self-justification. The foreplanned blood offering of God was thus in place before the first human existed who needed redemption (See 1 Pt 1:17-21).

Our encouragement comes from the fact that *"by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."*^{10:14} Such was not the promise of the old covenant relationship that God had with Israel. Since those who lived under that covenant assumed that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins, they looked forward to the One whom God promised to raise up from among them as He raised up Moses (Dt 18:15). It would be this One who would bring in what the prophets foretold: *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days"*^{10:16}

The new covenant that was enacted was different because it was based on something far different than the old Sinai covenant. Under the old covenant, Israel as a nation was in a covenant relationship with God. Therefore, when a babe was born, he or she was born into a covenant relationship with God. And because Israel was in a covenant relationship with God, then sacrifices of necessity had to be made for the people as a nation. As children grew up under this

covenant, they had to be taught the reason for the sacrifices.

But under the new covenant everything changed. God had promised under the new covenant, *"I will put My laws in their hearts and on their minds I will write them."*^{10:16} (See Jr 31:33). Sacrifice under the new covenant was necessary, but the sacrifice that was made resulted in the declaration, *"And their sins and iniquities I will remember no more."*^{10:17} Since *"it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins"*^{10:4} under the old, the priests had to stand *"daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices"* that could never take away sins.^{10:11} Under the new, however, Jesus *"offered one sacrifice for sins forever,"* and then He *"sat down at the right hand of God."*^{10:12}

But there was a difference between the old and new in reference to the time the sacrifice was made for those who would be in a covenant relationship with God. Under the old Sinai covenant, a Jewish babe was born into a covenant relationship with God. The newly born babe had no choice concerning the establishment of this covenant. And thus, from childhood the Jewish child had to be taught the law (conditions) of the covenant. The sacrifices were then offered year by year as one sought to remain in his covenant relationship with God. The sacrifices, therefore, were made **after** the acts of sin.

But under the new and better covenant, everything changed. The offering for sin has been made once and for all

time **before** we sinned. Jesus has “*offered one sacrifice for sins forever.*”^{10:12} For all those who have life **after** the cross, during His earthly ministry Jesus revealed to His audience the key to understanding what would come in the lives of His immediate audience: “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*” (Jn 3:14). Jesus continued, “*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He ...*” (Jn 8:28). And why? Jesus revealed, “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Me*” (Jn 12:32).

We are drawn to Christ because we are drawn to the sacrifice of the cross that has already taken place. We realize in this sacrifice of the past that we have the promise, “*their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.*”^{10:17} It is not that one is born into a covenant relationship with God today as under the old Sinai covenant. **We are drawn into the new covenant relationship with God because of what God did for us in the past. The drawing power of the cross is determined by our knowledge of the Son of God and His offering.**

Our present relationship with God continues if we continue to grow in the knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18). The Hebrew writer cautioned, “*But if any man draws back, My soul will have no pleasure in him.*”^{10:38} Throughout the book, therefore, the writer emphasizes the emotional power of understanding the function of the cross in our lives. It is our knowledge of the function of the blood and cross that draws us to Jesus. Through

the cross we have “*a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*”^{7:19} Therefore, let us continue to “*draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ...*”^{10:22} If in our hearts we lose the drawing power of the cross, then we will “*draw back to destruction.*”^{10:39}

It is at this point in the Hebrew document that we understand what the writer previously meant when he said that his readers had become dull of hearing.^{5:11} Their knowledge of Jesus and the cross had waned, and thus, the drawing power of the cross had subsequently waned. When the sacrifice of the cross fails to bring a gasp of awe in our hearts, then we know that we have become dull of hearing. And if we have become dull, then it is time to study this document of the Holy Spirit.

In order to prepare His disciples for the cross, Jesus held up the cup during His last Passover meal and said to His disciples, “*For this is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission of sins*” (Mt 26:28). And now we know why Peter said to those who believed on Jesus on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.*” His Jewish audience knew that there was no remission without blood. They also knew that unless one somehow connected with that blood of sprinkling, then there would be no sanctification. Peter’s statement on the day of Pentecost explained how they could connect with the blood of Jesus, and thus, receive the redemption that is in Christ through His blood.

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace” (Ep 1:7). When one is baptized into Jesus (Rm 6:3), he is baptized into the realm of the continual cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7). The minds of about 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost had not become dull of hearing. They were willing to hear, and thus, they asked what to do in order to reconnect with God (At 2:37).

By faith, individuals responded on that day to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. They were drawn to Jesus, and subsequently sought remission of sins in the cleansing blood of Jesus that flows from the cross. When one comes forth from the grave of water, and subsequently comes into a covenant relationship with God in Christ, he has been washed of sins because of the cross of the past (At 22:16). This is not all.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7).

The story only gets better when we are delivered from this body of death into the loving arms of the One who made a onetime sacrifice in the past that drew us into a covenant relationship with God. In this covenant, we do not need to be taught to know the offering of the cross. It was because of our knowledge of the sacrifice of the cross that we were drawn to Jesus. It was our own volition to establish a covenant with God based on that knowledge, as opposed to those who

lived under the Sinai covenant who had to be taught to “know God” because they were already in a covenant with God.

Because the Jewish child was in a covenant with God at the time of his birth, he had to be taught the conditions of the covenant that God had established with Israel. But because we are taught to know Jesus before we make a decision to be drawn into a covenant relationship with God, we already know the conditions of the covenant at the time we are cleansed with the blood of the covenant. And because of the continual cleansing blood of Jesus as we walk in the light, God promises every day, *“Sins and iniquities I will remember no more.”*^{10:17} Those sins that were washed away in baptism, are gone forever. Those sins that we commit while faithfully walking in the light are also gone because of our continual confession and the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in the past. We do not, as Israel under the Sinai covenant, have to remember our sins throughout the year, and then again at the end of every year, they had to be remembered when the high priest on the day of atonement offered the blood of animals.

And just in case we might forget the beauty of the new covenant we have with God, the Hebrew writer made one last statement in reference to the continuing effect of the cross.

Now the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, equip you in every good work to do His will.^{13:20,21}

The covenant we have established with God through our faith response to the cross, has eternal consequences. When one establishes this covenant with God through obedience to the gospel, he enjoys the blessings of an eternal sacrifice. It is eternal because of the effect of

the sacrifice. Jesus “*offered one sacrifice for sins forever.*”^{10:12} Even when we come into heaven we can be assured that the covenant continues because the effect of the sacrifice continues. It is an eternal covenant because of the eternal effect of the cross.

Chapter 16

The Blood-Offered High Priest

In Conan Doyle’s book, *The History of the Boer War*, Doyle described one of the skirmishes that the British soldiers had with an overpowering South African Boer (farmer) regiment during the Anglo-Boer War. The occasion was that a British regiment of soldiers was surprised at one time by a Boer regiment that was twice their number. Under fire, the British troops were able to retreat to their camp. However, many of their wounded lie in the field between the two armies, dying of their wounds. Among the British soldiers was a corporal of the Ceylon Mounted Infantry. He later reported that the British troops needed something to stop the fighting in order to help their wounded. He later recounted, “We had a pillow, but no red paint.” He recalled that some British soldiers took their own blood and made a cross on the white pillow, and held it high on a pole. They knew that the African farmers (Boers) were God-fearing men after the spirituality of their leader, Paul Kruger. The result was that the attack was terminated by the Boers and the British were allowed to retrieve and administer to their wounded.

Hebrews 10:19-23 is a conclusion to the writer’s arguments that Jesus and His blood sacrifice are far superior to that which was only a shadow of good things to come. It was His blood that was held high on the cross in order to stop the impending annihilation of all those who sought healing from their wounds of sin.

The writer uses the conjunction “therefore” in 10:19 to lead his readers, and us, into his final conclusions. His arguments have been so strong that he will make a final statement at the end of chapter 10 that “*we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*”^{10:39} We will not fall back into the futility of the insufficient sacrifices of high priests who died one after another under the Sinai law. If we do, that fall is to destruction, not life. In the preceding dissertation, the writer is confident that he has proved his point. If one would leave Jesus Christ, the Son of God, then he has gone back into that which will only lead to destruction (See 2 Th 1:6-9). The writer concludes that his readers must find a pillow and blood at the foot of the cross in order to stop the impending de-

struction. Only Jesus can supply the blood.

“Therefore,” the writer pleads, we must have “*boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus.*”^{10:19} Our acceptance of the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God is sufficient to bring us boldly unto the throne of God. “*For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father*” (Ep 2:18). Our boldness, therefore, is not based on our meritorious works that we would presume to be sacrificial offerings for our sins. Our boldness is based totally on the blood that flows from the cross. Our right to enter into the holy place is guaranteed only by the blood of the One who has passed through the heavens to the right hand of God.^{8:1} Those who do not live under the sanctifying shield of His blood, therefore, have no right to enter into His presence.

Under the Sinai law, only the high priest was allowed to enter into the holy place. He could enter only if He came with the blood of animals. It would be unthinkable for the high priest to enter without sacrificial blood. If there were no sacrifices, then there could have been no entrance into the holy place.

The Hebrew writer now places us in the position of the priest who would enter the holy place. We are the holy priesthood of God (1 Pt 2:5,9). We now have the privilege of entering into the holy place “*by the blood of Jesus.*”^{10:19} If there is no blood of Jesus with us, then we cannot enter. Since Jesus has offered us His blood, then by His blood we have the right to enter. Therefore, it is necessary to determine how one would appro-

priate the blood of Jesus to his own soul in order to have the right to enter the holy place. If we would enter with boldness, then we must access the blood of the Son of God.

We not only enter into the holy place, but we can go beyond the veil into the holy of holies with the blood of Jesus. This is the “*new and living way that He has consecrated for us.*”^{10:20} It is “new” because it is not as the priests of the Sinai law who entered the holy place on behalf of the people with the blood of animals. As priests of God ourselves, we cannot personally enter on our own behalf. It is a “living” way because we have applied to ourselves the blood of the One who is the way. Jesus affirmed, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me*” (Jn 14:6). To think that there are other ways to the Father except through Jesus, is to be detoured by our own ignorance of the sanctifying power of the blood sacrifice of Jesus (See At 4:12). We must never forget that it is only by the cleansing blood of Jesus that we are allowed into the presence of God.

By pouring out His blood on the cross, He went before us into the place He has now allowed us to go. Jesus is thus our “*high priest over the house of God,*” which house we are in Christ (1 Tm 3:15). When Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life,*” He essentially said, “Follow Me and I will take you where no high priest on earth can take you.” He also meant that we are not to be detoured by man-made faiths that supposedly lead us into the eternal realm

of God without the appropriation of the blood of the Lamb of God.

The Hebrew writer is so confident with these conclusions that the Spirit moved his hand to write a note of assurance. He adds that with “**full assurance**” we can draw near “*with a sincere heart.*”^{10:22} We now have “*a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*”^{7:19} We are able to draw near through the blood and the water. Moses sprinkled the blood of animals on the tabernacle and priests in order to sanctify (set apart) that which was to function in service to God (Ex 24; 29). With the background of this historical illustration, the Spirit directed the hand of Peter to word it differently in reference to the time when he knew that we had contacted the blood of Jesus:

The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience to God—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pt 3:21).

We can boldly draw near to God “*in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from the evil conscience ...*”^{10:22} That by which our hearts are sprinkled is the blood of Jesus. But the story is incomplete without “washing.” The writer asserts that we can “*draw near with a sincere heart ... having ... our bodies washed with pure water.*”^{10:22} The Hebrew writer reflects on Jesus’ words, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit he can-*

not enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5). There is no drawing near unto God without passing through the waters of baptism, **wherein one comes into contact with the sanctifying blood of Jesus.** Ananias meant the same when he with urgency said to a sinner, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (At 22:16).

There is no cleansing power in water. There is no salvational result from a legal obedience to “being baptized.” It is only at the moment of baptism that we can have a good conscience toward God. It is only then that we know that we have done all that was required of Him to come into contact with the blood of His Son. It is then that we can have a good conscience before God, knowing that we have obediently completed all that He requires for our sins to be washed away. Sins are washed away by the blood, not by the waters of baptism. It is at the event of baptism that God appropriates the blood of Jesus in order that our sins be washed away. Our faith brings us to the water, but it is God’s work to wash us clean in the blood of His Son. It is not the literal water that washes away sins. However, there is no greater illustration to demonstrate the washing of the blood of Jesus than when one is literally immersed in water for remission of sins..

Since God knew that we needed a point of reference in our lives where we could confidently affirm that our sins were gone, then He promised He would do His work of forgiveness when we manifested our faith in Him at the point

of our obedience to the gospel through immersion.

If we “*hold firm to the confession of our faith without wavering*,”^{10:23} then we can have full assurance that He will deliver on His promises because our faith delivered us to obedience of the gospel. In fact, the text actually says that we should hold fast to our confession “*for He is faithful who promised*.”^{10:23} Because of the faithfulness of Jesus who went to the cross for us, we should be faithful to go through suffering for Him in order to reach our eternal redemption because of the blood of the cross.

“Morality may keep you out of jail,” Spurgeon wrote, “but it takes the blood of Jesus Christ to keep you out of hell.” The statement “*Let us hold to the confession of our faith without wavering*”^{10:23} is certainly an affirmation that one could possibly let go of the cross. But if he does, he has condemned himself to hell. The one who draws back from the blood of Jesus, is without hope. “*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*.”^{10:26} One can surely fall from the faith, and thus, fall from the cleansing blood of Jesus. Those who “willfully” turn back to the Sinai law, or any religious invention of men, have no hope of entering into the holy place with the sacrificial blood of Jesus. They have thus, drawn “*back to destruction*.”^{10:39} If one becomes dull of hearing about the cross, then he will fall back into destruction. When the preaching of the cross becomes boring, then one knows he is gone. We are reminded of

the sincere desire of Peter in reference to his message to his readers:

I will not be negligent to always remind you of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it right, as long as I am in this tent to stir you up by reminding you ... (2 Pt 1:12,13).

The statement of Hebrews 10:37 is significant in view of what Jesus said in Luke 18:8. Verse 37 is not a quote from the Old Testament. It is a reference to the context of Jesus’ prophecy in the context of Luke 17:20 – 18:8 concerning the termination of national Israel. On the occasion of the prophecy, the Pharisees questioned Jesus concerning the coming of the kingdom of God (Lk 17:20). Contrary to their thinking concerning the kingdom, Jesus said to the Pharisees that “*the kingdom of God does not come with observation*” (Lk 17:20). The kingdom of God is spiritual, not physical. The Pharisees’ physical kingdom of Israel was coming to an end, but the spiritual kingdom of God would continue forever.

In answer to the Pharisees’ misunderstanding of the kingdom of God, Jesus responded by saying that “*the days will come when*” they would yearn for the days of peace in which they lived while the Son of Man was with them on the earth (Lk 17:22). Jesus said of these days that were coming in their lives, “*For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world to this time [of His ministry], nor ever will*” (Mt 24:21).

Jesus then took the questioning Pharisees into an era when turmoil would engulf them because of their rejection of Him as the Son of Man. A time was coming as “*the days of Noah*” (Lk 17:26,27). “*The flood came and destroyed*” the wicked (Lk 17:27). The wicked were taken and the righteous Noah and his family were left. A time was coming when it would be like Sodom when “*it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all*” (Lk 17:29). The wicked were taken and righteous Lot was left. Jesus concluded, “*In this way it will be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed*” (Lk 17:30).

Jesus was prophesying His coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. What the self-righteous Pharisees did not understand was that they were the spiritually dead body around which the Roman army would gather. Jesus said of them, “*Wherever the body is, there will the vultures be gathered together*” (Lk 17:37). The Roman army would gather around the dead body of national Israel in A.D. 70 in order to consume it.

After giving a parable of the pleas of the persecuted Christians—those who accepted Jesus as the Son of Man—Jesus concluded, “*I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*” (Lk 18:8). Reference in the context to what Jesus states is to the Pharisees and the destruction of Jerusalem. This is the event about which the Hebrew writer refers in Hebrews 10:37.

We affirm that the reason why some

Jewish Christians were considering an apostasy to the Sinai law was that they were being intimidated by the radical Jewish zealots who were at the time rising up in insurrection against the Roman Empire. The insurrection became so great that Rome once and for all decided to terminate the Jewish problem. The Hebrew writer wanted to remind his readers of what Jesus had prophesied, and what was in their near future. Those to whom the Hebrew writer directs his warning were going into apostasy. If they continued on their course, they would be taken away in the destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 70. They would be taken away just as the wicked in the days of both Noah and Lot. So the following translation of Hebrews 10:39 is appropriate: “*But we are not of those who draw back to destruction*” The writer was warning that if his readers went back to Judaism, they were going back to destruction, which future destruction they learned from Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (See Mt 24; Lk 21).

Every judgment of God in time is an illustration of His judgment that will take place at the end of time. Those Jewish Christians who were contemplating a return to the Levitical faith of national Israel, were in danger of suffering the consequences of God’s judgment on national Israel in A.D. 70. It is not surprising, therefore, that after Jesus spoke of the judgment of God on Israel in time in the context of Matthew 24, that He would continue to warn everyone in Matthew 25 of God’s judgment that is coming at

the end of time. For everyone on earth there is an impending judgment placed on the world that will come. In this judgment that is yet to come, the disobedient will be separated from the righteous. The disobedient will suffer the same fate as the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41). The righteous will go into eternal life (Mt

25:34,46). We give heed to the exhortations of Hebrews, therefore, as the readers to whom the writer initially directed the letter. If we turn from Jesus Christ, we too will be drawing back into destruction that will come at the end of time when Jesus comes again (2 Th 1:6-9).

Chapter 17

The Only High Priest

Because of the grandeur and finality of the sacrifice of Jesus, we can now understand why there is no forgiveness for those who would turn away from not only the person of Jesus, but also the eternal sacrifice of the cross. If the compelling arguments and statements of eternal facts that the Hebrew writer has given to this point in the book do not convince one to hold faithfully to the blood of Jesus, then there is no hope for that person. Peter's metaphorical description of such apostates from the blood sacrifice is appropriate:

*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. **But it has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow that was washed,***

to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pt 2:20-22).

Peter speaks of those of whom the Hebrew writer states, "*if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*"^{10:26} Those who turn away from the cross have made the sacrifice of the cross void in their lives because they have turned from the only hope one has for eternal salvation. There is a condition, therefore, for enjoying the eternal blessing of the sacrifice of the Son of God. The condition is to walk faithfully in the light of the covenant conditions (1 Jn 1:7).

The Hebrew writer is specific in reference to the apostate who turns from the sacrifice of Jesus. He is emphatic in the following statement:

***For it is impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.^{6:4,6}*

Two things are certain that we can draw from this pronouncement of the Hebrew writer: First, one must willingly be drawn to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. There is no such thing as being destined by God to be drawn to the cross. Being drawn to the sacrificial offering of Jesus must be based on one's own choice. If one is predestined to be born into this salvation, then Jesus' use of the word "drawn" would be meaningless and without emotion. Why would He even speak of being drawn to the sacrifice of the cross if God had predestined one to do so without his own volition? Being drawn infers individual volition and emotion, not prompting by the Holy Spirit, or preprogramming by God.

Second, once one is drawn to the cross, he or she must obediently submit to being born again. But there is no guarantee that once he is saved by obedience to the gospel he will continue to be saved. Every statement of Scripture that speaks of Christians falling from the faith is a teaching against the misunderstanding that once one is saved, he cannot fall away. The entire audience to whom the Hebrew writer was addressing his arguments of the book was on the verge of apostasy from the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus. Those who would assert that once one was saved he cannot fall from the grace of God, are not comprehending the book of Hebrews. The writer was addressing Christians. They had been Christians for many years. But now they were on the verge of forsaking the blood and present ministry of Jesus, and thus, putting Jesus to an open shame.

They were giving up the blood sacrifice, and like dogs and pigs, returning to their former religiosity of futile sacrifices.

The Hebrew writer's statement of 10:26 is a complete refutation of those who believe that once one is saved by the blood sacrifice of Jesus, that he is continually and forever saved, and thus, cannot fall. The writer's illustration of the truth of verse 26 goes back to the Sinai law of Moses. Under that law, "*anyone who has set aside Moses' law died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses*"^{10:28} (See Dt 17:2-6; 19:15). If the testimony of two or three witnesses was sufficient to have one condemned to stoning under the Sinai law, then the testimony of one's rejection of the sacrificial blood of Jesus will be revealed when one stands before Jesus Himself in final judgment (2 Co 5:10). What is awaiting those who would stand before Jesus without His blood is nothing but terrifying destruction at the time of the final coming of Jesus (2 Th 1:6-9). What is awaiting is "*a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries.*"^{10:27}

If telling the old story of Jesus from the word of God does not stir emotion, then we are cold in reference to the cross. The Holy Spirit has revealed the knowledge of the cross in the Bible. It is our responsibility as disciples of Jesus to grow in this revealed knowledge of the truth. If we conclude that it takes a direct act of the Holy Spirit to generate any emotional response to the cross, then we are saying that the Spirit failed in revealing the knowledge of the cross through

the written word of God. We make the Spirit pick and choose those in whom He would generate a response. And if no emotional response to the cross is generated, then we want to blame the Spirit.

We must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit did not blame Himself for the Hebrews' dullness of hearing the story of the old rugged cross. Those dull of hearing could only blame themselves. It is not the work of the Spirit in our lives to keep us emotionally charged about the sacrifice of the cross. We can blame only ourselves if we fall into a state wherein it is impossible for us to be renewed to faithfulness. When our dullness embarrasses the Son of God, then it is not the Holy Spirit who is to be blamed.

The words of the Hebrew writer in this text are meant to terrify any Christian who would by chance even consider turning from the blood of the cross. In view of the profound arguments and statements of fact that he has already made in the previous chapters concerning who Jesus is and what He did on the cross, and how He now ministers on behalf of the saints, he asks his readers a question that he knows they can answer correctly:

Of how much severer punishment do you suppose will he be thought worthy who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted as a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?^{10:29}

Those who have turned from the blood of the cross, and the existing intercession of Jesus from the right hand of God, are truly like the dogs who return to eating their own vomit. They are like pigs who were washed, but then again return to filth. If two or three witnesses could condemn the lawbreaker of the law of Moses, then in horror will be the words of Jesus in the final day who have turned from Him: *"Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Mt 25:41). Those who would turn away from the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God will suffer an eternal destruction, for they have *"insulted the Spirit of grace."*^{10:29} And for this reason, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*^{10:31}

We must not deceive ourselves. God says, *"Vengeance is Mine."*^{10:30} *"The Lord will judge His people."*^{10:30} If one claims to be a child of God, then certainly with fear and trembling he or she should guard their walk in the light of His Son's will. The Hebrew writer reminds his readers of the words of God: *"But if any man draws back, My soul will have no pleasure in him."*^{10:38} If any would "draw back," then he will "draw back to destruction."^{10:39} So if anyone would ask concerning the Hebrew writer and those faithful with him, he would reply, *"But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."*^{10:39}

Chapter 18

The Eternal High Priest

By chapter 11, the Hebrew writer has concluded his arguments for one to remain faithful. He has warned against apostasy from the sacrificial blood of Jesus with the statement, *“The just will live by faith.”*^{10:38} If one would live justified before God, therefore, he must totally trust in God and the current ministry of Jesus Christ on behalf of the sons of God.

The writer concluded chapter 10 with a warning that those to whom he was writing should guard themselves against returning to the futility of animal sacrifices and the inferior Levitical priesthood. In reaffirming that the justified will live by faith, he wants to remind his readers of the faith that they must maintain. He called on them to *“remember the former days in which, after you were enlightened, you endured a great conflict of suffering.”*^{10:32} He thus encouraged them to be *“of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”*^{10:39}

They indeed needed the following exhortation: *“For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.”*^{10:36} Their confidence in the blood sacrifice of Jesus *“has great reward.”*^{10:35} But if they allowed their faith to wane in the face of persecution, then there would be no reward, but *“a fearful thing”* of falling *“into the hands of the living God.”*^{10:31}

Chapter 11 is the writer’s final ex-

hortation and encouragement to remain faithful. After giving illustrations of enduring faith, he will come to the conclusion, *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises.”*^{11:13} But those to whom he was writing had received the promises, and thus, there was no excuse for them.

Several illustrations of faith are presented. But there is something interesting about many of those he personally named. These heroes of faith **lived before the giving of the Sinai law.** *“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice”*^{11:4} *“By faith Enoch was taken up”*^{11:5} *“By faith Noah ... moved with fear, prepared an ark”*^{11:7} *“By faith Abraham ... obeyed”*^{11:8} *“Through faith even Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed.”*^{11:11} All these remained faithful though they did not experience the fulfillment of the promises. *“But having seen them afar off were assured of them and embraced them”*^{11:13}

The argument of the Hebrew writer is very powerful. He is writing to Jewish Christians about Gentiles who lived before the existence of the nation of Israel, even before the event of Jesus and the cross. These faithful heroes had not witnessed the dividing of the Red Sea. They had not witnessed the terrifying event of God descending on Mount Sinai in order to establish a covenant with His people and deliver His command-

ments. They had not witnessed the enduring youth of Moses as he walked among them for forty years without growing old. The pre-Sinai heroes of faith had no history of how God worked through the judges and prophets of Israel. **Their endurance was based solely on their faith in God and His promises.** We must conclude that the Hebrew writer wants to somewhat embarrass those of his readership who were thinking about giving up on Christ, even though they had all the knowledge of the Christ.

Those to whom the Hebrew writer addressed his message, as well as we who live today, are totally without excuse if we follow the trail of dogs and pigs back to vomit and mire. The apostate Christian has no excuse for insulting the sacrificial Son of God with a life of denial. With all the miraculous testimony that God has given through Jesus and the apostles, any who would fall from the grace of God after the cross are without excuse. Jesus had this in mind when He said in reference to those Jews who refused to believe in Him, *“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin. **But now they have no excuse for their sin**”* (Jn 15:22). The Son of God stood before them and worked the supernatural power of God. And yet, they would not believe. Paul had the same concept in mind when he wrote of those who refused to listen to the testimony of the created world:

*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are **clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are*

*made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are **without excuse*** (Rm 1:20).

This was certainly in the mind of the Hebrew writer who spoke of those who would turn away from the awesome testimony of God through the resurrected Son. They condemned themselves in following after a dead covenant and law that had long been nailed to the cross. Therefore, *“if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.**”*^{10:26} For those who chose to reject all of God’s historical witness to the sonship of Jesus Christ, the Hebrew writer stated that *“... **it is impossible** ... to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify to themselves the Son of God and **put Him to open shame.**”*^{6:4,6}

Harsh warnings are in order for those who would fall from their faith that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. Once one has forsaken his belief that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God, he has denied the foundation upon which Jesus built the church (See Mt 16:18,19). Therefore, what some were contemplating was truly trampling under foot the blood of the Son of God. If one leaves the foundation upon which the church of Jesus Christ is built, then he has left the fold of the saved and returned to a religion that will profit him nothing in reference to eternal existence.

We must not miss this point. Throughout all the arguments of Hebrews, there is one central theme. Peter concurred with this theme in the following statement: *“**And there is salvation***

in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (At 4:12).

This is the proposition of Hebrews. All those religions of the world whose adherents do not believe that which was set forth by the Hebrew writer concerning the Son of God, are only the futile efforts of religious people who invent religions that conform to their own desires by seeking to shun accountability for their sins. If salvation were based on ignorance of Jesus, then there would have been no reason for Him to incarnate into this world. If salvation were based on ignorance of Jesus, then one would have to assume the argument that one can be saved through meritorious works, regardless of what he believes. One would have to conclude, therefore, that there is atonement in good works. It is for this reason that the Hebrew writer argues earnestly and convincingly with those who were about to give up the grace that was revealed through Jesus, and return to a meritorious system of law-keeping wherein there never was forgiveness of sins through animal blood.

Those heroes of faith who died without realizing in their lives the promises of God, trusted that God would eventually bring forth the One who would redeem them. They walked by faith in “*having seen them* [the fulfillment of the promises] *afar off*,” and thus by faith they “*were assured of them and embraced*

them.”^{11:13}

It is faith that focuses our minds on that which is before us, not on that which is behind. There is a little of “*Lot’s wife*” in all of us, since we often seek to turn back to a life that is consumed with this world. But Jesus warned, “*No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Lk 9:62). In this manner, the heroes of faith that the Hebrew writer uses as an illustration of faith, were those who were determined to look forward, not backward. Because they “*confessed that they were foreigners and pilgrims on the earth*”^{11:13} through their faithfulness, they declared “*plainly that they seek a homeland.*”^{11:14} “*And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they came out, they would have had opportunity to return.*”^{11:15} But they were as Paul:

Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. But one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before (Ph 3:13).

The reason the Christian looks forward is because he desires “*a better country.*”^{11:16} It is a heavenly country that will not pass away. Those whose faith keeps them looking forward to the heavenly country, make God proud. “*God is not ashamed to be called their God*”^{11:16}

Chapter 19

The Unshakable High Priest

In chapter 4 the writer introduced his readers to the boldness by which we can now approach God through our “*great high priest who has passed through the heavens.*”^{4:14} In view of our mediator Jesus who is now our high priest at the right hand of God,^{8:1} “... *let us come boldly to the throne of grace, so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*”^{4:16} We can have boldness to approach unto God through Jesus because He “*was in all things tempted as we are*”^{4:15}

In chapter 10 the writer gave the reason by which we can have boldness before God. By a new and living way we can have “*boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus.*”^{10:19} Through our obedience to the gospel, the blood of Jesus has been appropriated unto our souls, and thus we do not enter into the holy place by our works or perfect keeping of law, all of which come short in making us just before the One we seek to approach. **It is the cleansing blood of Jesus that gives us boldness**, for we know that we can come before the One against whom we sin by having been cleansed of our sins. He is thus the One who remembers our sins and iniquities no more.^{10:17} “*So we may boldly say, ‘The Lord is my helper and I will not fear.’*”^{13:6}

In the section of encouragement found in Hebrews 12:18-25, the writer seeks to remind those who are tempted to draw back from the blood that they

“*have not come to a mountain that might be touched and that burned with fire.*”^{12:18}

They are not in a situation as Israel was at the foot of Mount Sinai. The heavenly mountain unto which we have now come was not as the mountain from which God spoke to the nation of Israel. The physical circumstances that surrounded the giving of the law on Mount Sinai must have been terrifying to the Israelites who stood at the foot of the mountain (See Ex 19 & 20). The mountain burned with fire. Anyone who dared to touch it would be consumed. There was fire, thunder, lightning on the mountain, and danger everywhere as God came down on the mountain to deliver the law to Moses. The danger was so imminent that even if some unfortunate animal touched the mountain that animal was to be stoned to death. The people recoiled in fear at the sight and sound. Even Moses was exceedingly fearful, and thus, cried out to God, “*I exceedingly fear and tremble.*”^{12:21}

Now in contrast to that scene of terror, the writer encourages us by saying that we “*have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels ...*”^{12:22} Through the blood of Jesus, we can come boldly to the throne of grace. We have come “*to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than the blood of Abel.*”^{12:24}

Therefore, the writer cautions us that we “do not refuse Him who speaks.”^{12:25} Those who violated the sanctity of Mount Sinai when the law was given, did not escape punishment. God spoke to them from the mountain on the earth, and thus, they could not escape. “For if they did not escape when they refused Him who spoke on earth, much less will we escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.”^{12:25}

Writing in view of the coming judgment on national Israel in A.D. 70, the writer compares the shaking of the earth when the law was given and the covenant instituted with national Israel, with the time in a few years when both will be shaken out of existence. “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also heaven.”^{12:26} And this “yet-once-more” signified “the removing of those things that can be shaken.”^{12:27} And those things that can be shaken are those things that were temporary. The law brought Israel to Christ, but now it was time for the cus-

todians of the law to be shaken, for the law had been nailed to the cross. When the Jews obeyed the gospel, they were made dead to the law. They became “dead to the law through the body of Christ.” (Rm 7:4). They had been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Co 12:13), and now they were no longer under that which was fading away. They were “receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.”^{12:28} In view of the fact that “our God is a consuming fire,”^{12:29} it is incumbent on us to hold on to the present kingdom reign of Jesus our high priest that will never be shaken. We have received the kingdom reign of Jesus. It is indeed comforting to be reminded of the following words in reference to the present high priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ:

You [the Father] have put all things in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we do not yet see all things put under Him.^{2:8}