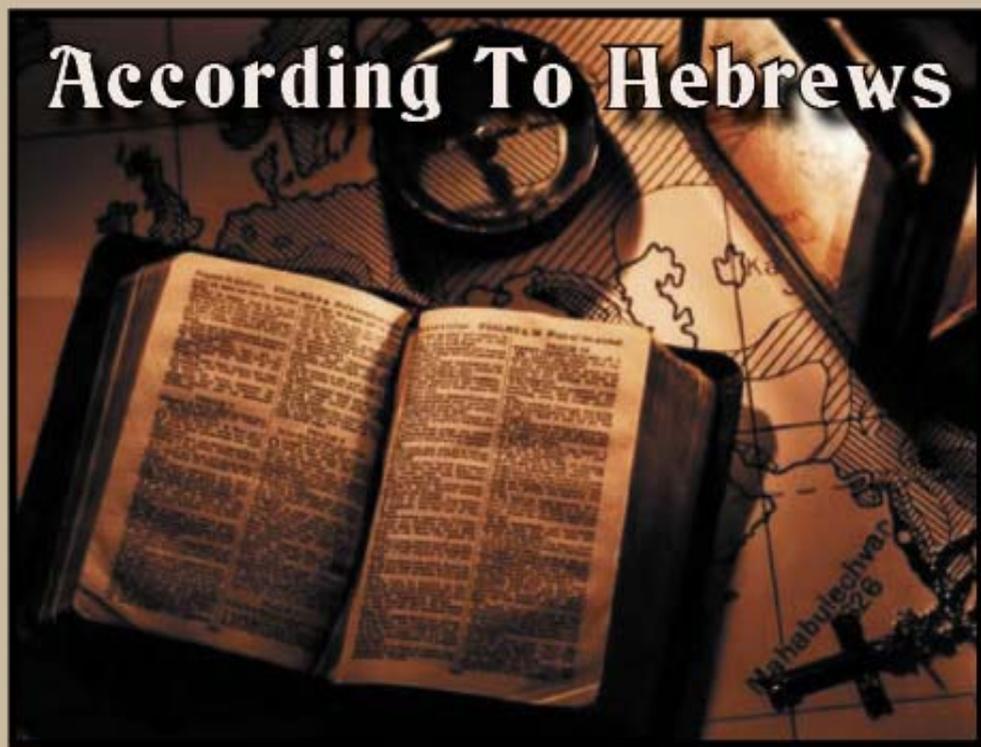


THE GOSPEL

According To Hebrews



*Ascending To The Throne Room
Of The King Of Kings
And High Priest*

DICKSON

The Gospel According To Hebrews

Roger E. Dickson

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Preface

When asked concerning the first time the gospel (“good news” or “good tidings”) was announced on earth, the common answer often falls short of the exact time. The common answer is that during the statements that Peter made on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the gospel was announced for the first time. This is true in reference to the resurrection and coronation of the Son of God. But in fact, the beginning of the announcements concerning the gospel events were made about thirty-three years before the Pentecost of Acts 2.

The gospel was first announced to *“shepherds dwelling in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks at night”* (Lk 2:8). The angel of the Lord, possibly Gabriel (Lk 1:26), made the proclamation, *“Do not fear, for behold, I bring you **good tidings** of great joy that will be to all the people. For to you **a Savior is born this day** in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord”* (Lk 2:10,11). And thus, that which had been planned before the creation of the world began to unfold.

The phrase “good tidings” that Gabriel used is the same root Greek word that is commonly translated throughout the New Testament with the English word “gospel.” What the shepherds heard from Gabriel was the first announcement of the gospel of a Savior being born in a manger in Bethlehem. The incarnation had finally happened (See Jn 1:1,2,14). The Holy Spirit had originally made the unborn babe in the womb of Mary (Lk 1:35), and then the Spirit-conceived babe carried Mary until the time of His birth that was announced by the angel. This was the first announcement to mankind of the first action of the gospel.

We must remind ourselves of the preceding because we often limit the events of the gospel. We focus so much on the cross and resurrection that we often minimize where it all started, and now where the gospel story will continue. The good news of the invasion of the Son of God into this world for the redemption of those of this world, started with His incarnational conception by the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:26-35). The good news, the gospel, of His birth in a barn was the initiation of what would continue into eternity.

The totality of the gospel is the incarnational conception, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation and consummation of this world. It is all about the Son of God who brought mankind through these events of good news. We know Him most from His earthly ministry that began when He was about thirty years of age (Lk 3:23). Matthew, Mark, Luke and John give us both a description of His character and the function of His ministry while He was in the flesh. But something changed at the time of the ascension of the resurrected Son to the throne of God. Paul explained: *“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, **yet now we know Him thus no more**”* (2 Co 5:16).

Most people settle for knowing the Son of God according to the flesh, especially according to the flesh that was nailed to the cross, and then resurrected. But Paul says that we do not know Him as such anymore. We know what He did on the cross, but we need to know what He is now doing on the throne. We want to know Him according to how He now is and what He now does. It was gospel

news that He was conceived and born into this world. It was good news that He was crucified for our sins. It was good news that He was resurrected. It was good news that He ascended on high. And now, it is good news that He is both King and Priest at the right hand of God. This is where the Hebrew writer wants to take us. He seeks to take our minds from the ministry of the flesh and into the inner sanctuary of heavenly places where our Lord Jesus is our King and High Priest. It is here that he seeks to take us in order to reassure us that the Son of God is not finished with His gospel ministry on our behalf. We have seen Him function on our behalf according to the flesh, but now it is time for the Hebrew writer to take us far beyond the flesh and into a heavenly realm of kingship and priesthood.

When we consider documents that

explain the ministry of the babe born in Bethlehem, it is Hebrews that continues the story after the close of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This document in hand is indeed the “gospel according to Hebrews.”

There will be no need for the writing of the last event of the gospel. His consummation of all things will end all things. For now, we must spiritually surround our thoughts with this last document concerning His present gospel ministry. After the gospel of the consummation, we will be in His presence forever in order to enjoy a personal relationship with Him who *“made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men ... humbled Himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Ph 2:7,8).

INTRODUCTION

We give credit to the apostle Paul as the most likely choice of the Holy Spirit to inscribe the words of the Hebrew epistle. Because of his religious background, and ministry to the Gentiles, we conclude that the Spirit could have made no better choice. Paul, formerly Saul, was well seasoned in the religion of the Jews. He would eventually write the following statement in another epistle that was inscribed before the one at hand: *“I advanced in Judaism above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions”* (Gl 1:14).

Though a graduate with high honors from the school of the Pharisees, Paul experienced the frustrations of the Jewish religious heritage that had been handed to him by his forefathers and was taught to him by his professors. He eventually came to realize *“that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus [who gave Himself for our justification]”* (Gl 2:16).

Paul realized that there was no power in the self-sanctifying works of a self-proclaimed righteousness that was inherent in the religion that came from his Jewish forefathers (See Rm 10:1-3). He, and thousands of other Jews like him at the time, believed in

King Jesus in order that they might receive the justification that comes only through the incarnational blood of the Son of God.

A. The fifth defense of the gospel:

Before the document of Hebrews was written, two epistles had been added to the canon of Scriptures through the pen of Paul that dealt with the foundation upon which Hebrews was written. Both Romans and Galatians set forth arguments that were not only given by the inspiration of the Spirit, but were simply logical deductions of honest believers. Paul persuasively argued in those two letters that it is simply not possible for any man to live without sin in reference to any law, whether from God or man. This fact is axiomatic. It is axiomatic because its truth is self-evident. We are human, and because we are human, and weak, we cannot keep any law perfectly.

However, the religion of Judaism sought to make it so, that is, justification through perfect law-keeping. In order to accomplish this humanly impossible feat, the religious leaders of Judaism throughout the centuries were obsessed with adding legal guards around those laws that they

deemed essential in order to be a faithful Jew. For example, they surrounded the Sabbath with a host of trivial rules that one must keep in order to guarantee that he or she did not break the Sabbath. In their thinking, if one kept the trivial laws, then he would be guaranteed not to sin against the primary commandment of the Sabbath law. One could stumble in reference to violating the surrounding trivial rules in reference to the Sabbath, but would still be perfect in reference to the Sabbath. Unfortunately, the trivial laws (traditions) became as important as the original Sabbath law (See Mk 7:1-9).

If there were any infractions of one's efforts to keep any ritual of Judaism, then the religious leaders embedded within their theology a system of self-sanctification. They believed that they could supposedly cleanse themselves when they were stained with sin against their added rites and rituals. The subsequent system of self-sanctification led to a religion of self-righteousness (Rm 10:1-3).

B. Religious self-satisfaction:

As all other religions throughout the world, the satisfaction that Judaism brought to the individual was based on the performance of the individual in reference to his obedience

to religious rites and rituals. Faith could be based on one's performance of all the religious rites and rituals that were a part of the religious conglomeration of Judaism. Judaism, therefore, was a religion of self-righteousness. It was a cultic "religious narcissism."

In such a system of religion there is a sense of self-satisfaction because of one's performance of the religion. Paul later confessed his former attitude in Judaism when he wrote to the Philippians: "*Concerning the righteousness that is in law, [I was] blameless*" (Ph 3:6). He had formerly boasted that he "*advanced in Judaism*" (Gl 1:14). One can determine if he or she is in the bondage of religion if he or she has the possibility of advancing in the religion.

Judaism was subsequently a system of religion that allowed the participants to compete with one another in reference to who was the most righteous by keeping the most rules and works of sanctification. It was a self-fulfilling religion in that it focused the individual on his or her performance. Because it was such a religion, there was a sense of pride in one's own religious accomplishments. And because there was pride, there was a sense of self-assurance in one's good deeds.

Herein was the fatal flaw of Ju-

daism, and all similar religions. If one could boast in his own works of righteousness, then there was no need for faith (trust) in God for one's salvation. In all performance-oriented religions, one believes that his own works of righteous deeds puts God in debt to save one eternally. Since many believe that this presumption is supposedly true, then one can boast in his own performance of law and good works. One feels that he can eventually stand in judgment with a sense of religious accomplishment through good works

Inherent in such systems of religion is not only competition, but also intimidation. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night because he was intimidated (Jn 3:1,2). Peter withdrew from the Gentiles in Antioch because he was not living straightforward according to the gospel, but momentarily slipped back into his old Jewish religiosity wherein he was intimidated by those Jews who came up from Jerusalem (Gl 2:11-13). It was this system of intimidation that kept everyone in line with the religious customs of the Jews.

It was this same intimidation that evidently faced some Jewish Christians to whom the Hebrew letter was addressed. They were in the process of bowing to intimidation, and thus turning away from the gospel of King

Jesus to the bondage of their former Judaism. If the apostle Peter and Jewish Christians in Antioch were intimidated by the Jewishness of the times, then what would happen if Jewish Christians in great numbers in the first century would also succumb to the same intimidation (See Gl 2:11-13)? The Hebrew writer inscribed this gospel defense in order to turn a great number of Jewish Christians from forsaking the gospel in order to return to the religion of Judaism.

C. Looming doom:

As we approach this most valuable document in reference to the gospel of the Son of God, a national catastrophe was soon to face the Jews in the near future. We must understand that the prophecy of Jesus concerning the destruction of national Israel was approaching at the time the Hebrew letter was written (Mt 24).

Rome had determined to deal with the "Jewish problem" by subjugating the Jews, even to the point of destroying Jerusalem. And such they eventually did in A.D. 70. But in the few years leading up to this finality in A.D. 70, any Jew who was living in the region of Palestine was greatly intimidated to join the ranks of the Jewish resistance against Rome.

Jewish Christians who were ad-

dressed in this letter had been Christians for many years. At the time the letter was written, however, something was bearing on their emotions to the point that they were intimidated to forsake the gospel in order to return to their nationalistic religion of Judaism. We do not know all the particulars concerning what was causing their imminent apostasy, but one point is certainly clear. There was great social intimidation that moved them to forsake the gospel of Jesus Christ and return to a system of religion that promoted self-sanctification through an earthly priesthood and the blood of animals.

The recipients of the letter were returning to a system of religion from which they had turned many years before in their obedience to the gospel. The political, social and religious environment in which they lived was evidently so strong that they were willing to sacrifice the love of God through Jesus for the cold formalism of Jewish religion. Therefore, we must never underestimate the appeal that self-righteous legal religion has on the souls of men.

At the time of writing, the gospel that was preached to the Jews was in the balance. If the readers' apostasy to Judaism prevailed among the Jewish Christians who were addressed by the Hebrew document,

then Christianity would have been greatly attacked at the very roots of its origins. And if this apostasy prevailed, then many in the world of the Gentiles would consider Christianity to be just another sect of Judaism, a sect that was finally brought back under the control of the religious establishment in Jerusalem.

If the Jewish Christians to whom the Hebrew writer addressed this gospel defense accomplished their journey back to Judaism, then the entire Christian Gentile world would question their base in the fulfillment of the prophecies of Jesus as the Messiah and final King of Israel. If their faith could not keep them connected with Jesus, then the unbelieving world would have questioned the validity of their faith as Christians. If He were not the Messiah of Israel, then their faith was vain; they too were yet in their sins. As the Jews, they too would have been subjected to wait again for the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Redeemer.

If all the Messianic prophecies were not fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, then the Jews had to wait for another Messiah. For such the majority of Jews throughout the world have waited since the Hebrew document was first penned. In some way, the Hebrew writer did not accomplish all

of his desires through the letter, for most Jews in the first century did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Nor do they today accept Him as the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies concerning His present kingship and priesthood. Their rejection of Him then and now reveals their rejection of the gospel.

D. The majority rejection:

Hebrews is an apologetic of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. All that the incarnate Word was before and after His ascension is defended vigorously throughout the epistle. By the time the writer comes to the end of his arguments, there should be no question concerning the gospel function of the present reigning King Jesus.

Unfortunately, most Jews at the time the letter was written rejected the arguments of the document. They still do today. It is for this reason that any doctrine that focuses on the restoration of Jews to Israel in the future in order to be established as a nation is devoid of truth. The Jews' continued rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel disqualified them in the first century as the people of God. It still does today. Here is the point: *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There*

is neither Jew nor Greek [in Christ Jesus]" (Gl 3:27:28). In the eyes of God, national Israel was consummated when Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies concerning the Messiah. National Israel was only God's ethnic vehicle to bring all men to Christ. *"But now that faith [in Jesus] has come, we are no longer under a headmaster"* (Gl 3:25).

There is no Jewish nationalism in Christ. Those Jews who are baptized into Christ can remain Jews by race. However, in the eyes of God, both Jews and Gentiles are one man in Christ (Gl 3:28).

The apostasy that the Hebrew writer addressed was the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. Those who were going into apostasy were actually rejecting the gospel of God's grace through His only begotten Son. It was the same story that the prophets wrote of their forefathers: *"They have forsaken the Lord. They have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. They have gone backward"* (Is 1:4). *"But they walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward"* (Jr 7:24). And finally before their captivity, *"'You have forsaken Me,' says the Lord. 'You have gone backward. Therefore, I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you.'"* (Jr 15:16).

E. Salvation only in Christ:

The arguments in Hebrews for the Messiahship of Jesus were valid when the letter was first written. They are still valid today. There is absolutely no salvation outside Christ, for only in Christ is there contact with the blood of Jesus. What Peter said two thousand years ago is still true today: ***“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). Nothing has changed in this statement. This is the premise upon which the document of Hebrews was written. It is a document that affirms the gospel of Jesus’ present reign as King, and His present function as our High Priest.

In our relationship with the Jesus who is identified by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Hebrews takes our minds beyond the earthly Jesus and His ministry. In 2 Corinthians 5:16, Paul explained this transition of our understanding of Jesus into heaven: ***“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh [through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John], yet now we know Him no more.”***

The writing of the document of Hebrews has now revealed how we now know Christ. Our knowledge of Jesus according to flesh was completed when the disciples saw His

body of flesh and bones ascend into heaven (At 1:9). Hebrews takes our knowledge of Jesus on from the ascension into heaven. Therefore, all who would seek a relationship with Jesus today, must define this relationship by their understanding of Jesus according to Hebrews.

Some people in their efforts to relate with Jesus limit their relationship by failing to go beyond Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If one would, as Paul, know Jesus as He now reigns, then their relationship must be based on what we read in the document of Hebrews, which is truly, the continuation of the gospel according to Hebrews. We believe that the Holy Spirit had this in mind when He directed the hand of the holy scribe who wrote this apology of the present ministry of the resurrected and ascended Son of God. We must, therefore, follow the Spirit’s leading as He seeks in this document to define for us the Christ who is now Lord God Almighty over all things (See Is 9:6).

Therefore, the exhortation to those who would venture into the book of Hebrews would be to refer to the last vision of Stephen before He closed his eyes in death for His faith:

Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (At 7:56).

Chapter 1

THE GOSPEL OF THE SON OF GOD

All the revelation from God, both written and real, is about bringing all those who have faith in Him into eternal dwelling with Him. This eternal plan of redemption is focused on what God planned to do before the creation in order to introduce into this world the incarnation of Himself for the purpose of taking all believers out of this world.

Deliverance from this world is good news to all of us who all our lives have realized that this life cannot be all there is. God knew that reasonable people would come to this conclusion. So from the very beginning when mankind was created through Adam and Eve, sincere people realized that it is not possible to live without sin against God. With the creation of mankind, therefore, there was the need for a divine plan of forgiveness for sin that would eventually be introduced into this world. So the promise of a Seed of deliverance was made (Gn 3:15). In view of the Seed to come, those who put their faith in God waited for the mystery that God would eventually reveal (Gn 3:15).

The promise of the Seed of woman continued throughout history from the time when Adam and Eve

were driven from the Garden of Eden until the last century B.C. The fulfillment of the seedline promise was eventually announced with a cry from a babe in a manger in Bethlehem. The good news of the gospel plan of rescue by the incarnate Son of God was finally activated, for the time had been fulfilled (See Lk 2:8-20). *Anno domini* (A.D.) became a paradigm shift in history.

When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, in order to redeem those who were under law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gl 4:4,5).

A. Gospel revelation through the Son (1:1-4):

From the beginning of time, and until the revelation of the Word into the flesh of a babe in Bethlehem, God worked for millennia to prepare the world for the arrival of the One who would redeem souls out of the world. In preparation for the arrival of the incarnate Seed, God, through chosen prophets, laid the foundation of faith for the incarnational birth. He did so through dreams, visions, historical

events, and the preaching of the message of His Seed through His chosen people Israel. All this was done in order to preserve the seedline of woman until the God of our faith was revealed in the flesh.

When Israel was near unto completing her purpose for existence as a nation, God's final message to the world was through the incarnate Son of God. So "*in the beginning [of the world], was the Word [God the Son], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God [divine/deity]*" (Jn 1:1). "*All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*" (Jn 1:3).

"*He [the Father] has appointed [His Son] heir of all things.*" The reason the Son of God was the heir of all things was logically based on the fact that all things were created by Him (Cl 1:16). And thus, it was only right that all authority over all things eventually be given to the Son. It was also logical that He would be given the right to reign over all things (Mt 28:18; Ep 1:21-23; Ph 2:9-11). Since the Son was the origin of all things, then it was only reasonable to conclude that all things should be brought under His control when He ascended on high.

Through the incarnation of the Word (Jn 1:14), the brilliant identity (glory) of God was revealed to mankind (2 Co 4:4). The Son was "*the*

exact image of His nature," in that Jesus reflected the spiritual nature of the Father. Since God is love (1 Jn 4:8), then it was necessary that the love of God through the sacrificial offering of the incarnate God be revealed to man in the form of man. To accomplish this objective, the Son of God, "*being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God*" (Ph 2:6). Therefore, "*He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men*" (Ph 2:7). "*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*" (Jn 1:14). In preparation for His salvational sacrifice, He humbled Himself to death on the cross.

The revelation of the incarnate Word was the "*exact image of His [God's] nature*" of love, for God so loved His creation that He was willing to come in the flesh of man in order to bring a resurrected people of His creation into His company forever (Jn 3:16).

From the beginning, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have upheld "*all things by the word of His power.*" As the Creator, the Son did not create that which would be out of control, or digress into chaos. We must never conclude, therefore, that a chaotic world was created, nor that this world was left to itself to implode into nonexistence. The world will not

be destroyed by any natural catastrophe, or cosmic collision of the heavenly bodies. It will be terminated only when the eternal God determines that it has fulfilled its purpose for its existence (See 2 Pt 3:10-13). Once this world ceases to produce citizens for heaven, then we assume that it will be terminated, for it will have at the time of termination concluded the purpose for which it was created.

The guarantee of our hope is the good news that the resurrected and ascended Word is King of the universe, and thus, all termination of this world is under His control. The present function of His kingdom reign is to sustain all creation. We must view the reign of King Jesus to be far beyond the church of His obedient subjects. If we do not, then these statements of the Hebrew writer make no sense. These statements are not about church (us), but about the totalitarian control of the Son of God over all things. The fact that the universe is not out of control is evidence that His reign is over all that which must be controlled.

When the King has finished the purpose for the creation of both His spiritual and physical kingdom realm, it is then, and only then, that the King will terminate the existing habitat of His reign. It will be then that the prophecy of Paul will become the new reality:

And when all things are subjected to Him, then will the Son also Himself be subject to Him who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all (1 Co 15:28).

But before this finality of world events, the King must accomplish a gospel mission in order to populate His new habitat to come. The gospel mission of the Son was not only to purify us of sin, but also to sit “*down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” in order to reign over His present habitat. It was on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 when the first announcement was made of this galactic gospel reign of King Jesus. And when the multitudes who were present on that memorial day heard of the reign of King Jesus, “*they were cut to the heart*” (At 2:37). It was the gospel of the kingdom reign of the resurrected Jesus that motivated the people to plead for instructions as to how they should submit to the reigning King Jesus. The answer to their pleas was simple: “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ*” (At 2:38).

The incarnate Word, the Son of God, was the good news of the revelation of God’s love for us. It was in His eternal redemptive plan that He became an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Once this mission was accomplished, He was resurrected, and sub-

sequently ascended to the heavenly throne room with authority over all things (Mt 28:18). *“He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”* in order to function as our King and High Priest.

Because of who the incarnate Word is, and what He did for the redemption of those for whom He offered Himself on the cross, He is now *“so much better than the angels.”* And because of who, what and where He now is, *“He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”*

There are those today who view Jesus as simply a good teacher of the Jews. There are those who have exalted Him only to the status of “prophet.” In the historical context of the audience to whom these words were addressed, it seems that some had moved Jesus into being just another angel of God.

But unless we move beyond Jesus as just a man, and beyond the misconception of Him being just another angel, we will never come to a full realization of who He now is as King of kings over all things (1 Tm 6:15). If our understanding of Jesus can never get beyond His presence with His disciples on the roads of Palestine, then we will always have a limited understanding of the power of the gospel. We will know Him only according to the flesh (2 Co 5:16). If

we do not fully appreciate the fact that He ascended to the right hand of God, then we will continue to limit His present kingdom reign. We will suck all the power out of the effect of His gospel reign in our hearts.

And herein is the theme the Hebrew writer seeks to promote throughout the remainder of his defense of the gospel. It was the reigning King Jesus who cut people to the heart on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. It is that same power of His present kingdom reign that will cut people to the heart today. This is the continuing power of the gospel in the lives of those who have obeyed the gospel.

Angels announced the arrival of the One who would be the Savior of the World (Lk 2:8-12). But the atoning sacrifice and eternal priesthood of the incarnate and ascended Son of God goes far beyond Jesus in the flesh. Angels were not sacrificially offered for the sins of the world. Neither has any angel ascended on high. This work and reign belong only to the Christ whom we no longer know according to the flesh.

We may conceive in our own minds the wandering Rabbi Jesus among the Jews two thousand years ago who taught in the synagogues. We may even exalt Him, as did the Samaritan women, to being a prophet (Jn 4:19). And then we may elevate Him to being the Messiah in fulfill-

ment of all prophecies concerning the Messiah (Lk 24:47). Jesus was all these things. However, unless we can move our concept of Jesus into being the incarnate and ascended Son of God who now upholds all things by the word of His kingdom power, His power of the gospel will have only a limited affect on our lives. The less we now consider the power that Jesus exercises as our King, the less power His gospel has on our lives.

B. Gospel authority and reign of the rightful heir (1:5-14):

When comparing Jesus with angels, we must always remember that the Lord Jesus has *“become so much better than the angels.”* Angels never had a father-son relation as the Father and Son, about which the Father said, *“You are My Son ... I will be to Him a Father and He will be to Me a Son.”* Such statements were never made to angels concerning their relationship with God.

On the contrary, angels are spirits and *“His ministers”* who have been sent forth for the sake of those who believe. Only this one statement is made in Scripture concerning the ministry of angels in reference to Christians. We would thus be cautious about making too many declarations concerning the ministry of angels and what they do in our lives.

Nevertheless, the statement is made, and thus we assume that they are not idle bystanders in reference to their ministry for us. They will do their ministry regardless of our feeble understanding of what and how they do their ministry.

But in reference to the gospel ministry of the Son, it was as Peter announced on Pentecost, *“Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (At 2:36). Jesus now functions in a gospel ministry. He was seated at the right hand of God on the throne of authority, which throne is the authority of the throne of God in heaven. It is this authority that God has always exercised over all things. His *“scepter [of a king] of righteousness, is the scepter”* of the present kingdom reign of the One who was at the time the Hebrew letter was written, *“both Lord and Christ.”* He still is today (At 2:36).

The writer seeks to prevail upon our minds with the fact that unless we honor the present kingdom reign of King Jesus, the gospel of His reign will have little impact on our behavior. We are less motivated to be obedient subjects of the King if we believe that the King is limited in reign only to the church of obedient subjects. When we realize that Jesus *“has gone into heaven and is at the*

right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him,” then we too are cut to the heart (See 1 Pt 3:22). Realizing the totality of the gospel reign of Jesus humbles us into submission as loyal subjects. It brings reassurance to our souls to know that all things are under His control.

Therefore, as King, Jesus is above His companions, the angels. He has received all authority in the heavenly realm, as well as on earth (Mt 28:18). Angels have no such place of authority in the realm of heavenly things. In fact, even angels are subjects of His kingdom reign.

In the beginning when creation was first conceived in the mind of God, angels were brought into existence. We do not know if they were created before the creation of the material world, or after. We only know what Paul wrote of this matter to the Colossians: *“By Him [the Son of God] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible”* (Cl 1:16). Through the Holy Spirit, Paul revealed that angels were also the result of the creative work of the Son (Cl 1:16). Angels are not incarnate beings, for they are the “invisible” of that which was created. *“You, Lord [Jesus], in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth.”* No angel ever had the power of Deity to lay the foundation of the

world. That which was created had no power to create.

“They [the created] will perish, but You remain [after they have long passed away] (See 2 Pt 3:10). And according to the second law of thermodynamics, that which was created will wax old. Since that which was created was so created out of that which does not exist (Hb 11:3), then all that was created is not inherently eternal. All that was brought into existence by the Lord Jesus can also be taken out of existence by the same Creator. All material things as gold will perish (1 Pt 1:7). Since we and angels were the product of creation, then neither we nor they are inherently eternal (See Mt 10:28). Our eternal existence is dependent on our being in the presence of Him who is inherently eternal.

But there are those things that are inherently eternal because He is eternal. We *“were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ”* (1 Pt 1:18,19). *“The word of the Lord endures forever”* (1 Pt 1:25). These are eternal things. So Peter reminds us that *“this is the word by which the gospel was preached”* to us (1 Pt 1:25). As opposed to that which is solely of this world, the affect of the blood of Christ will continue into eternity. It is for this reason that through the cross, Jesus *“became the author of eternal*

salvation to all those who obey Him” (Hb 5:9).

“You [King Jesus] are the same” in existence from the beginning of creation. It is not possible for Deity to go out of existence, or to change in nature of existence. Eternality is the definition of God, and thus there is no end of that which God is. Contrary to our need for spiritual growth, there is no need for spiritual growth in reference to the nature of God. Holiness is the nature of His being. He is the spiritual goal to which we strive to grow. “As He who has called you is holy, so you be holy in all manner of behavior” (1 Pt 1:15).

Change in reference to the nature of God would be a logical contradiction concerning His very existence. God is not subservient to the constant changes of man. If there were changes in the nature and character of God, then we would know that we have created a god after our own imagination, for He would be a god who changes. But God is unchangeable, and thus His counsel cannot change (See Hb 6:17,18).

We are not puzzled with the Holy Spirit’s statement in Philippians 2:6,7:

Being in the form of God, [the Son 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.

We find no passage in the entire New Testament that states that this voluntary incarnation on the part of the Son of God was reversed. Since He transformed from flesh and blood before the burial, to flesh and bone after the resurrection, we stand with the disciples who witnessed His bodily ascension as flesh and bones (At 1:9). If we are alive when He comes again, “we will see Him as He is” (1 Jn 3:2). We can only assume that as He was when the disciples witnessed His body in His ascension, so He will be when He comes again. Therefore, we are not of those about whom John wrote:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist (2 Jn 7).

Nevertheless, we say these things in view of what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:16: “Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more.” We assume that Paul’s use of the word “flesh” is in reference to the incarnation. If so, then in some way the incarnate Son is no longer in the flesh as He functions as our . He would thus be in some spirit

form, though His equality with the Father and Spirit was given up in the incarnation. This relationship with the Father seems to have been an eternal subjugation on the part of the Son. This relationship seems to be revealed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3: *“The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.”*

Are these things too difficult to understand by those who are presently in the flesh? Certainly! Nevertheless, we must understand these statements exactly as they read in our text. This is in view of the fact that there are no statements of Scripture that affirm that the incarnate Son will ever return to being equal in form with God, though He never gave up His divinity. For God to give up divinity is an impossibility.

We would assume that the Son would not forsake His deity for the sake of what the Hebrew writer will later reveal in the following chapter. Of course, our lack of revelation on this matter leaves room for our personal assumptions. Nevertheless, we must remain with what has been revealed without frustrating ourselves with present and future realities in the spiritual realm of which we have little revelation (See Dt 29:29).

His love for us beyond angels is tremendously exemplified if there is anything near the notion of an incar-

nation of the Son of God that will exist beyond the time when we see Him as He is in His final coming (1 Jn 3:2). His sacrifice was far beyond the suffering of His earthly existence, including the agony of the cross. His incarnational sacrifice was forever. If we would exalt angels to be in status as the incarnate Son of God, **then we have denied the gospel of the incarnation.**

No angels, therefore, could ever have the following declaration made to them: *“Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.”* Only our Lord Jesus had enemies, and thus only He heard these words from the Father. Angels have no earthly enemies. This statement, therefore, could never have been made to them. Angels are only *“ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who will inherit salvation.”* Any theology, therefore, that would exalt angels above Jesus, or even equate angels with Jesus, is a denial of the gospel.

Our understanding of the gospel must begin with the incarnation of the Word into the flesh of man. His eternity was temporarily suspended while He was in the flesh of man. However, as God, He could not be terminated, though His flesh as a man could. Nevertheless, as we will be in our heavenly body that is yet to come, so also will the resurrected Jesus in His resurrected body be when He

comes again (See 1 Co 15:12-58; 1 Jn 3:2). Through the power of the resurrection, He was proved to be the Son of God with power (Rm 1:4). The power that raised Him from the dead is the same power that works today in the transformation of our lives.

Any efforts to equate Jesus with angels is an attack against the resurrection of the body of Jesus. Angels were never incarnate into the flesh of man in a way that they could be rejuvenated through resurrection into a

body of flesh and bones in which they would dwell with us throughout eternity. God indeed allowed angels to appear before men throughout history. But we must not believe that they were incarnate into flesh and blood as Jesus at the time of His incarnation. If they had, then such would have been an attack against the unique gospel incarnation of Jesus that both John and Paul revealed (See Jn 1:1,2,14; Ph 2:5-8).

Chapter 2

ATTENTION TO GOSPEL MATTERS

Erroneous beliefs have consequences. They have consequences because they are carried out in our behavior. Our core beliefs determine our values, and our values determine our behavior. When the mandate was stated in Scripture to “believe on Jesus,” it was assumed that the believer would follow through with gospel behavior.

Emphasis on the gospel according to Hebrews reveals the inner core of our beliefs, and thus our hearts. Legal religiosity deals more with the head, but gospel deals primarily with our hearts. So the Hebrew writer now takes us into the inner sanctuary of our hearts lest we turn away from our gospel commitment that was initiated

at the time when our belief in Jesus was carried out in our obedience to the gospel in baptism.

A. Gospel announcement (2:1-4):

Because it is the gospel that motivates correct responses in reference to the commandments of God, “*we must give more earnest attention to the things that we have heard so that we do not drift away.*” The writer now brings up the example of the Israelites who did not give the more earnest heed to the things that were spoken to them. Being of Jewish heritage, the readers remembered their apostate history as a nation in the past.

These statements reminded the

readers “*not to drift away*” from those things that they heard. The assumption is that there is always the possibility of apostasy from our initial commitment to the gospel. For the Christian, obedience to the gospel is never a “once-saved-always-saved” conversion. There are no guarantees on faithfulness that work outside our own volition to remain faithful to our call through the gospel. Faithfulness is never enforced by outside influences, nor by the Holy Spirit inside us. Faithfulness is always the responsibility of the individual.

For example, “*The word spoken [to Israel] through angels proved steadfast*” (See At 7:53). Under the Sinai law that was delivered to Moses through angels, “*every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment.*” With disobedience to the word of God through the Sinai law came consequences. Embedded within the Sinai law was the principle that one must be taught obedience to that which was commanded (See Dt 6). Being taught obedience assumed that if one were not taught, then he would fall from the grace of God (See Hs 4:6; 2 Pt 3:18). And this the Israelites did.

The above illustration concerning Israel is understood in reference to turning from something that is far greater than the Sinai law. If the readers “*neglect such a great salvation*”

that came to them through the Son of God, then they must not assume that there will be no consequences. Since the message of the gospel was initially spoken from the mouth of the incarnate Son of God, and then was confirmed by the signs that followed, how can we question the truth of the spoken word of the gospel? How can we escape just punishment if we ever turn from the gospel?

It was Nicodemus who came in the night and said to the Lord, “*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*” (Jn 3:2). In the beginning of the gospel, the Christ-sent apostles initially proclaimed the gospel through spoken words. As did Jesus, they too had their message of the gospel miraculously confirmed (See Mk 16:20).

If the truth of the good news was miraculously confirmed and obeyed, then there is no excuse or escape for those who turn from the gospel. It is not that they have revised or changed some outline of law. They have turned from the blood of the Lamb of God who cleansed them.

The writer will not let this point go, for he will return to the subject of apostasy later in the book (See Hb 6:4-6). He will return to this subject because of the eternal consequences of the one who turns from the gospel. His or her example of apostasy would

be manifested before the world. In another context, the Holy Spirit gave a commentary on this matter:

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).

The spoken word of the gospel was miraculously confirmed, not by miracles being worked on the obedient, but on those who had not yet believed. Confirming miracles revealed the power of God in the messengers of God in order that people believe their message. But once they believed, there was no demonstration of miracles among the disciples for the purpose that they continue to believe the gospel. The Spirit correctly assumed that the power of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and coronation of Jesus Christ would motivate individuals to remain

faithful. These who were on the verge of apostasy in this historical context could not blame God for not working any miracles in their lives in order that they remain faithful.

Once one is obedient to the gospel, then there is no excuse for turning from the heart of God that was revealed on the cross. There is no excuse for rebelling against King Jesus who now reigns. The Hebrew writer thus continues on with his description of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and reign of the incarnate Son of God. The good news of the events were miraculously confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

There is no desire for repentance on the part of those who have willfully turned their backs on this gospel that God has revealed for the salvation of the apostate. The writer seems to indicate that the potential apostates to whom he is writing had all the blessings in order to encourage them to remain faithful to their commitment. However, the lure of legal Judaism was so strong that they were turning their backs on the heart of God that was revealed through the gospel of the Son of God.

It is relevant to mention here that the writer is addressing baptized disciples who had been blessed with the Holy Spirit. From what was transpiring in their lives at this time, the writer made no mention of the Holy Spirit

guarding them from their apostasy. He makes no mention of miracles in their lives to encourage their faithfulness. This is significant in reference to our understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is not the work of the Spirit to guarantee our faithfulness. If we are lost in the final judgment, then we cannot blame the Holy Spirit for not keeping us faithful.

At least we understand from what the writer states in this context that it is not the Spirit's responsibility to guard us from apostasy. It is not because the writer makes no mention of the Spirit being responsible for their apostasy, or for them to call upon the Spirit to guard them from falling. Neither are there any instructions that they turn to the Spirit for help in reference to their faith in the power of the gospel.

There are no calls for miracles in the lives of the potential apostates in order to keep them faithful. The writer's efforts to restore those who were wavering is based solely on reminding them of their knowledge of the gospel of God's grace that was many years before miraculously confirmed to be true. Their problem was that they did not grow in the knowledge of who Jesus now is and the gospel of grace (Hb 5:11,12; see 2 Pt 3:18). The reason for their potential apostasy was their failure to grow

spiritually in order to face the intimidation of those who were drawing them back into religion.

B. Gospel coronation (2:5-9):

It may have been that the readers did not fully understand the atonement of the cross, or the present gospel reign of King Jesus. So the writer takes their minds back to their marginalization of King Jesus through their exaltation of angels. He reminded the readers that the Father "*did not subject the world to come to angels.*" He subjected it to His Son.

Whenever it is revealed in Scripture that something that exists is subjected to someone above creation, then that One to whom all things are subjected is either the Father or Son. Before the gospel coronation of the Son, God the Father was King over all things (See Ps 10:16; 22:27,28; 24:10; 44:4; Is 33:22). But in prophecy during the days of Israel, David spoke of a new King who was coming, and a transition in kingship over all things (Ps 8:6-8).

The "*Son of Man*" was through incarnation made "*a little lower than the angels.*" For this reason we believe that no angel was ever incarnate into the flesh of man. Only the Son of Man made this incarnational journey into the flesh of man (Ph 2:5-8). However, though He was lowered to

the flesh of man from the spirit in which He, as God, was in eternity, the Father “*raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places*” (Ep 1:20). In the coronation, the Son was “*crowned with glory and honor.*” And not only that, the Father “*appointed Him over the works*” of creation.

In the good news event of the resurrection is the fact that the Son of God had to have been in the flesh of man in order to be raised from the dead. In the coronation, He had to be Deity, for only God can reign over all created things. All things could be subjected only to Him who was the Creator, and thus He was above all that which was created (Cl 1:16).

We must not assume, however, that the incarnate Son reversed His incarnation at the time of His coronation. There is no reference in the New Testament that states that Paul’s revelation of the incarnation of the Son of God into the flesh of man that is revealed in Philippians 2:6,7 was ever reversed when the Son ascended on high (See Jn 1:1,2,14). All we know is that one is an antichrist if he or she does not confess that the Son of God is in the future coming in the flesh (1 Jn 3:2). By John’s use of the **present tense** in the following statement that was written at least sixty years after the coronation of King Jesus, we can only make assumptions as to the

present existence of the Son of God:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist (2 Jn 7).

We know that the Son of God will come in bodily form as He ascended (At 1:11). And John reminded us, “*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). If we will be like Him when He comes, then He evidently will return with flesh and bones as He was at the ascension, or as what Paul revealed we will be when our mortal body puts on immortality in the heavenly body (See 1 Co 15:35-57).

However, we must not forget that Paul said that we do not now know Christ according to the flesh (2 Co 5:16). Christ does not now have to be in the flesh and bones as He was after the resurrection and at the time of His ascension (Lk 24:39). He is God and can be in any form He so chooses. At His final coming we will see Him as He will be as our resurrected body. These are things that do not confuse our understanding of what He now is as King and Priest. They are things beyond our understanding.

The writer referred his Jewish

audience to Psalm 8:6-8. Some would assert that David was speaking in this context of man only. David was certainly referring to man in the original context in which the Holy Spirit first had the statement inscribed by the prophet David. However, the original inscription was a metaphorical prophecy in reference to the Son of God. There was an earthly meaning in reference to man at the time David wrote, but a heavenly fulfillment in reference to the ascended Christ at the time the Hebrew writer wrote. This prophecy was not understood in this manner until the Holy Spirit referred the readers back to His library of Old Testament books and quoted the statement in reference to the coronation of the Son of God.

The preceding understanding is revealed in the fact that “subjection” is in the present tense in reference to something that was happening at the time the Hebrew writer inscribed these words. We note that at this time King Jesus reigns over all things. “*You have put all things in subjection under his feet.*” Though the created world was subjected to man’s desires and use from the beginning, the living metaphor is now applied to the Son of Man over all things (See Gn 1:26).

The subjection of all things to the kingdom reign of the Son was complete. The Father “*left nothing that*

is not put under Him.” This is more than the Son being the King of a church of disciples. His kingdom reign extends far beyond the church, for His kingdom extends to all that has been created, both visible and invisible (Cl 1:16; 1 Pt 3:22). The readers’ limited understanding of the kingdom reign of the Son of God may have been one of the causes for their apostasy to make earthly kings, especially the Roman Empire, more important in their theology than King Jesus.

Here is a crucial point to remember in reference to the universal kingdom reign of King Jesus: “***But now we do not yet see all things put under Him.***” We can see the visible church of disciples who are the submitted subjects of the kingdom. However, this visible church of submitted subjects does not constitute the entirety of the kingdom of the Son of Man. His kingdom reign extends far beyond the church, though we in the flesh, with limited perception, do not see His reign over all things, including angels.

We live in a world of rebellion. We live in a world of conflict between good and evil. We do not conclude that this world is out of control, for the writer reassured us previously that everything is under control, for King Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3). However, we must not make the erroneous conclu-

sion that social chaos in this world infers that things are out of control of the One who ascended on high.

Jesus is King and head of all the kings of this world. He is Lord of all the lords of this world (1 Tm 6:15). To assume anything contrary to the totality of His kingship is to minimize His gospel reign. **To assume that His kingdom is composed only of obedient subjects (the church) is an attack on the present gospel reign of Jesus over all things.**

In this context, the limitation of the kingdom reign of King Jesus was one of the points of theology that laid the foundation for the apostasy of those to whom the document of Hebrews was directed. As the writer will reveal later in this document, in their marginalization of the King, they also marginalized the ministry of His present priesthood. And surely, this is what the readers were doing in their comparison of Jesus to angels.

We do not understand why some would believe that angels, as our ministering spirits, would work in the affairs of man for the sake of the saints, while at the same time, Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords supposedly cannot. From the corrections that the Hebrew writer made, however, we conclude that any limitations that we place on King Jesus as He now functions are also limitations of what He now does as our high priest and

mediator between God and man (1 Tm 2:5).

So the Hebrew writer gives us a reality shock. We do “*see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels.*” But there was a purpose for His “lowering.” The purpose was to bring “*many sons to glory.*” In order to do this, the atonement of the cross was necessary. His crowning with glory and honor was necessary. All this was necessary in order that “*by the grace of God*” He “*might taste death for everyone.*”

C. Gospel fellowship in the flesh (2:10-13):

Verse 10 is the “gospel verse” of Hebrews. Paul had revealed to the Colossian saints in reference to the now crowned King that “*all things were created through Him and for Him*” (Cl 1:16). Therefore, it was appropriate “*for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things,*” to be the origin also of eternal salvation for those who would seek to be His brethren whom He would bring into eternity. In order to do this, the Son could not remain in the “form of God,” but had to empty Himself into the flesh of man for an offering for the sins of those whom He would bring into eternal glory (Ph 2:5-8).

Those who are sanctified—that is us—and the One who sanctifies—

that is Jesus—are brothers because of the love offering of the Father. The love offering of the Son brought us into brotherhood with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because we have been cleansed of sin by His blood, He can now have a brotherhood relationship with us. This relationship could exist only when the sin that separates us from God was washed away by the blood offering of the Son of God (See Is 59:1,2; compare At 22:16).

It is not, therefore, that we seek to establish conditions for ourselves in order to have a relationship with God. It is He who sought to establish a relationship with us. Through the offering of His Son He has accepted us. It is our responsibility to accept His acceptance of us through our obedience to the gospel of His Son.

In the prophetic context of Psalm 22, David rejoiced in his willingness to proclaim the name of the Father in the assembly of Israel when the Israelites came together for their feasts of celebration. The Hebrew scribe applied David's statement to the Son of Man who would joyfully proclaim the name of the Father in the midst of His assembly (church) of the sanctified (See Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16).

The declaration and celebration of brotherhood between the resurrected Son, and those who were sanctified by His suffering, can be possible

only on the foundation of the gospel of grace that was revealed through the suffering Servant, who at the time of writing, was the crowned King.

Because His brothers had previously risen from the grave of baptism, having washed (cleansed) away their sins in their obedience to the gospel (At 22:16), they were claimed as brothers by the Sanctifier. Our trust is now in Him, not in ourselves. Our righteousness is from Him, not from ourselves in our former religiosity wherein we sought to self-sanctify ourselves through works of merit. *“Therefore, having been justified by faith [in Him], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rm 5:1).

D. Gospel deliverance (2:14-18):

In order to accomplish all the preceding, there was the necessity of incarnation. Without the demonstration of incarnation on the part of Deity, brotherhood between God and man could never have been pronounced from heaven, or made possible on earth. There had to be an eternal sacrifice on the part of the One who brought all flesh into existence. And since the flesh of bulls, sheep and goats are all created flesh, they could never be a satisfactory offering for the sins of humanity against God (See Hb 10:1-4). The offering of animals was

insufficient because animals had no choice in their offering under the Sinai law. The incarnate Son of God, on the other hand, offered Himself (Ph 2:7). Of His own will He made a choice to transition between spirit and flesh in order to be a suitable offering for those who would later seek to transition into eternity.

Therefore, “*since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise partook of the same.*” This is the gospel of the incarnation. Before creation, the Father, Son and Spirit determined the totality of the gospel. Since God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are love, then they had to create that which they could love. But in order for those of “flesh and blood” to respond sincerely with love to their Creator, they had to be created free to make all their moral decisions.

There was thus risk in the creation of flesh and blood. The risk was that the created would have the volition to reject the love of the Father, Son and Spirit. And for this reason, the Son had to volunteer Himself as the reconciliatory offering to bring “flesh and blood” into fellowship with the Father, Son and Spirit (Ph 2:7).

Since the created were in the bondage of “flesh and blood,” they needed to be delivered from the bondage of death. The good news of the incarnation, therefore, was necessary.

But the gospel had to move beyond incarnation. Offering was necessary in order to reveal love (Jn 3:16). Offering was necessary in order to “*give aid to the seed of Abraham,*” whom we are by faith (Gl 3:7). Aid need not to be given to angels, for they are always in the presence of God (Lk 1:19). Therefore, we needed One to stand in the presence of God on our behalf (1 Tm 2:5). So the crucified and resurrected Christ ascended “*to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hb 9:24). He is there as our high priest and mediator.

It was necessary, therefore, that the Son of God would truly give up being in the form of God (Ph 2:6). It was necessary in order that He “*be made like His brethren.*” This was all necessary in order “*that He be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.*” If these things did not transpire in the existence of the eternal Word, then there could have never been an “*atonement sacrifice for the sins of the people.*”

It is not that the Son of God was incarnate with reservations. He could sin. He could suffer. He could be tempted, as we, to sin against the God of His origins (See Mt 4:1-17). And because He was able in all ways to suffer and be tempted as His brethren in the flesh, “*He is able to aid those who are tempted.*” He is a Savior who can empathize with our needs.

Though He is now our King in heavenly places, He understands our predicament in the bondage of “flesh and blood.”

Chapter 3 APOSTATE HEARTS

The writer now turns the readers attention to identifying the inward motivation of those who were on their way to forsaking their allegiance to King Jesus. They were not unlike their ancestors of Israel who forsook God and His designated spiritual leadership of Israel. They were behaving in the same manner that eventually resulted in their forefathers being denied entrance into the promise land. If the readers persisted in their current “unbelief,” they too would be denied entrance into the promised land of eternal heaven.

A. **Defiant hearts (3:1-6):**

It is significant that the writer introduced this section of instruction with the word “therefore.” He is deriving conclusions from what was previously stated. In view of the fact that Jesus is now far above angels, we must not forget that He was the Apostle sent from heaven by the Father on our behalf. He is the High Priest of the confession the readers made many years before that He was the Son of the living God (See Rm 10:9,10).

As the Apostle sent into the world, Jesus was faithful to the Father who offered Him on behalf of our sins. Jesus’ faithfulness was first in respect to His divine apostleship, for He came into a world that did not deserve His offering (Rm 5:8). Though Moses’ example as a leader was insufficient in comparison to Jesus, as the Son of God Jesus’ faithfulness on our behalf was illustrated by the faithfulness of Moses, who against all opposition led Israel out of Egyptian captivity.

The faithfulness of Jesus above Moses was in the fact that Moses led the house of another, which house (Israel) was the house of God. The house was already built in Egypt before Moses arrived. But Jesus built the house that He is now leading unto victory (See Mt 16:18,19). Jesus built the house of the church of the living God by the submission to the gospel of those who believed on Him as their Messiah, Savior and King (1 Tm 3:15). And because He built this house through the submission of disciples to His kingship, He must receive more honor than Moses.

Moses did not build a house because people submitted to him. The nation of Israel followed him because he was designated by God to lead the house of God out of Egypt into freedom. The house that Jesus built was based on the fact that the people accepted Him as the Christ and Son of the living God (See Mt 16:16). For this reason Jesus Christ “*was counted worthy of more glory than Moses.*”

It was in the eternal plan of redemption that a fellowship of believers (house) should be the bride of the offered Lamb of God. This fellowship would eventually join with the bridegroom in the wedding ceremony that is yet to come upon the return of the bridegroom.

Moses was indeed “*faithful in all his house as a servant*” (Nm 12:7). And in like manner, Jesus was our servant on behalf of our sins. Moses’ servanthood was a testimony of the servanthood of the One for whom he illustrated faithfulness. So Jesus said, “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mt 20:28). Moses could not give his life as an atoning sacrifice on behalf of the people. He could not give himself in reference to salvational matters. However, Jesus could and did.

“*Christ was faithful as a Son over His own house*” because He offered Himself as an eternal sacrifice

on behalf of His house. It was through our thanksgiving to Jesus Christ as our Savior that we came to Him, and thus, became His house. But there is a condition to receive the blessing of what Jesus has to offer. “*If we hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end,*” we will remain part of His house until He comes again. If we do not continue to walk in gratitude of the gospel of Jesus, then we remove ourselves from His house. We give up His cleansing blood (See 1 Jn 1:7). It is for this reason that we must not walk in defiance of His leadership through the cross. If we forsake His atoning sacrifice through unbelief, then He can no longer claim us as part of His house.

B. Hardened hearts (3:7-11):

The Israelites failed to walk in gratitude of their deliverance from Egyptian captivity. They walked in rebellion because they hardened their hearts against God’s designated leadership through Moses who brought them out of captivity. The writer’s reference to the hardening of the people’s hearts immediately after their deliverance from Egyptian captivity served as the ideal illustration for the writer to rebuke his readers. The readers’ failure to continue following God’s designated leadership through Jesus revealed their lack of appreciation for

the power of the gospel unto their salvation (Rm 1:16). The writer's reference to Psalm 95:7-11 was appropriate for the verses of the Psalm were originally written by David who exhorted the people in his day not to do the same. David's exhortation, therefore, is a continual exhortation to all in every generation of Christians not to harden their hearts against the gospel.

When the Israelites hardened their hearts against the work of God among His people, it is always as David and the Hebrew writer stated in reference to the heart of God: "*I was grieved with that generation.*" God grieves in His heart when His gospel-delivered children rebel. In the context of the readers of Hebrews, the grieving was certainly intensified in that they "*counted as a common thing the [gospel] blood of the covenant by which*" the hardened apostates were first sanctified (Hb 10:29).

The rebellion of Israel in the wilderness was against God's leadership through Moses. In the case of the Hebrew readers, it was rebellion against God's only begotten Son. If in Israel's days "*every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment,*" then surely those who have trodden under foot the blood of the only begotten Son will not escape (Hb 2:2,3). Therefore, God states that "*they will not enter into My rest*" of

eternal glory. Here is the judgment that **any Christian who forsakes the gospel will have no chance of heaven.** Grace will cover those occasional sins that plague those who struggle to walk in the light of the gospel (1 Jn 1:7). But there is no hope for those who step outside the cleansing blood of Christ.

C. Evil hearts (3:12-15):

This context of Scripture should frighten us. "*Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.*" "Unbelief," therefore, is defined as that which results in disobedience. If our belief does not motivate us to stay away from religions as Judaism—the religion to which the apostates in the text were headed—then we have developed within us "*an evil heart of unbelief.*" It is this evil heart that leads us to depart "*from the living God.*" Religion, therefore, is a move away from God. Gospel, on the other hand, is a move into the heart of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"*But exhort one another daily.*" This is in contrast to those who have relegated their exhortation of one another only to a Sunday morning "hour of worship" once a week. The writer here emphasizes that in some way disciples, either in whole or part, need to be in contact with one another on a

daily basis. Since departing from the living God to follow after religion is self-deception, then we need one another's admonition on a daily basis in order to remain true to our confession.

This does not infer that all the disciples must be in one another's presence on a daily basis. However, it would infer that each disciple makes some contact with another disciple in some way on a daily basis. The exhortation infers that the appeal of religion to draw one away to self-righteous religion is very strong.

Being deceived by a religion that takes one away from focusing on the gospel of Christ is easy. If one narcissistically focuses on his own life, it is deception that leads one away from focusing on the gospel of Jesus Christ. The more we focus on our own needs, the less we have the mind of Christ to focus on Christ and others. Self-centered religiosity is a different paradigm than gospel living. Jesus taught this principle in John 13:17: "*If you know these things [serving others], happy are you if you do them.*" But our basic desire to have our own needs served first leads us to create a religion after our own desires, or to seek one that is self-righteously focused. Christianity, on the other hand, focuses our faith on Christ and serving others.

All religion is self-centered, for

religions are systems of self-sanctification through one's obedience to the rites and rituals that bring a sense of self-fulfillment. And when one is self-centered in his performance of self-sanctifying rites and rituals, he is self-deceived, and thus led astray from focusing on King Jesus. Religion focuses one on one's self, whereas gospel focuses one on Jesus Christ and others.

"We have become partakers of Christ" only if we focus exclusively on Christ while we live for Christ in this life of serving others. There is only one way to continue to focus on Christ. One must continue to "*grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Pt 3:18). Those who are not diligent Bible students have allowed themselves to be deceived by leaders who know little about the Bible. James had these deceivers in mind when he wrote, "*Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive the stricter judgment*" (Jas 3:1). Those who seek to lead through teaching will be held accountable for their teaching. The teacher who has little knowledge of Jesus Christ is in trouble. We can grow in our knowledge of the **present** ministry of Jesus only through a study of Hebrews and the New Testament letters. If teachers (leaders) refuse to study their Bibles, then they are as Jesus said: "*They are*

blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch” (Mt 15:14).

D. Rebellious hearts (3:16-19):

The readers had heard, for they had many years before obeyed the gospel. By this time a second generation of younger Christians were coming into their midst. So the illustration of the first generation of apostate Israelites was appropriate. The writer is using the first generation of Israelites who witnessed the ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt. Likewise, this generation of Christians to whom the writer inscribes this letter also experienced the miraculous confirmation of the message that they heard (Hb 2:3,4). In both cases, the first generation of believers have no excuse because God revealed to them the most vivid evidence of His message. If they failed to remain faithful, then they would take back to religion with them the second generation of Christians.

In asking a series of questions, the writer assumed that the readers could respond correctly. The first generation of Israelites had all the blessings of the miraculous confirmation by God when He was leading them to freedom through Moses. Likewise, the immediate readers of the Hebrew document were the first generation of

followers whom He led into freedom from sin through Jesus Christ. They had witnessed the miraculous confirmation of the gospel message they heard (Mk 16:20).

The readers had been Christians for several years. But if they did not remain faithful to their commitment to the message of the gospel, then as the bodies of the rebellious Israelites fell in the wilderness, their “spiritual bodies” would fall in the wilderness of sin. They would be left behind when King Jesus eventually called home the faithful into eternal glory.

“They could not enter in because of unbelief.” The unbelief of the Israelites led to their disobedience. When one weakens in his faith in the gospel of Jesus, his obedience will subside. He will become as Jesus many years later indicted the Ephesian disciples for losing: *“I have this against you, that you have left your first love”* (Rv 2:4). Or, it will at least be as the disciples in Laodicea: *“Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth”* (Rv 3:16). These statements of judgment were made to those who had been Christians for several years.

In reference to faithfulness, there is no possible way to separate unbelief from disobedience. If disobedience arises in one’s life, then it is a sign of unbelief. And herein is the

power of the gospel according to Hebrews. The Holy Spirit guided the hand of the Hebrew writer in order to stir up our belief in the present gospel ministry of Jesus in heaven. If we in any way limit His present heavenly ministry, then we are weakening our

faith. And when our weak faith leads to disobedience, then as God swore that the disobedient Israelites would not enter into the promise land, so He also swears that the apostate Christian will not enter into the promise land of heaven.

Chapter 4

REST FROM LABOR

Once again the writer uses the word “therefore” in order to base the following information on the preceding conclusions. Those in Israel who maintained an obedient faith were rewarded with entrance into the rest of the promised land (Canaan). In order to emphasize this point, the writer assumes that the readers will conclude that only two men, Joshua and Caleb, were eventually allowed to enter (Dt 1:36-38).

The same is true in reference to Christians in their faithful and obedient belief in the gospel. Their faith will take them into the final rest of heaven when King Jesus returns for His people (See 1 Th 4:13-18). But we must keep in mind that God is not interested in allowing great numbers into the final rest. He is interested in the faithful few. Jesus admonished, “*Enter in through the narrow gate*” (Mt 7:13).

A. Rest for God’s people (4:1-5):

“*Let us fear*” because it is not that we are once saved by the grace of God and cannot fall from His grace. If there were no fear of falling, then we would let down our “spiritual guard,” and thus “*come short*” of our expectations. If there is no obedient belief, then there would be no “*entering into His rest.*” The writer’s use of the word “fear” in the text assumes that the life that one now has in Christ can be lost through unbelief and the hardening of one’s heart.

The first recipients of the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coronation were faithful to the One who came into the world to reveal the gospel. Those first messengers of the gospel were truly **gospel preachers** who went into all the world with the gospel (Mk 16:15,16). They were gos-

pel preachers because they preached the gospel.

It is significant to understand that the Greek word here translated “preach” is *euangelizo*. It is a word that means “to tell or announce good news” (See Lk 4:18; 7:22; Rm 1:15). That which gospel preachers announce is the good news of Jesus. The other word that is used in the New Testament in reference to announcing the gospel is *kerusso*, meaning “to cry out or proclaim as a herald” (See Mt 4:17,23; 9:35). Both *euangelizo* and *kerusso* are used in reference to heralding the good news (gospel) to mankind. The words are not used in reference to those who are teachers among the saints. A gospel preacher is one who stands before unbelievers and announces the good news of Jesus. The apostles, therefore, were the “gospel preachers” who were sent forth by Jesus to announce the gospel to the world. Those who stand before the saints are teachers, not preachers, for the saints already know the gospel.

But the “*preached word* [of the Sinai law] *did not profit*” those in Israel who refused to continue in faith. It did not profit them “*because it was not united with faith.*” The word of God that came to the Israelites from Mount Sinai became empty in their lives because the people did not faithfully respond to God’s continued in-

structions through their Levitical teachers. Because of unbelief and disobedience, therefore, they were not allowed to enter into the promised land.

But those among the Hebrew readers who have continued to believe the gospel would “*enter that rest*” of eternal heaven. Their entry through faith was in contrast to those unfaithful Israelites about whom God swore that “*they will not enter into My rest*” of the promised land. And since they were not allowed to enter the promised land, their example of disobedience became an illustration for all those who through unbelief will not enter the eternal rest of heaven.

God had certainly predestined these things before the creation of the world, but His predetermined plan could not be changed. The plan was predestined, but the individuals who either accepted or rejected His plan were not. Though individuals are accountable for their personal decisions, they will still be accountable though they collectively as a group make a decision to be disobedient.

The Hebrew recipients needed to remember that the bad decision of individuals as a collective group in Israel resulted in the whole not being able to enter the rest. Therefore, the readers needed to remember that they too will not enter into the rest of heaven even though they collectively as a group decide to turn back from

the blood of the Lamb.

“*God rested on the seventh day from all*” His work of creation. The point is that His **resting** was qualified by His **work**. There would have been no resting if there had been no working. The illustration for the Hebrew readers is direct. Because there was no obedience on the part of the Israelites because of their lack of faith, they would not be qualified to rest in the promised land. They were not qualified to “*enter into My rest*” that God had planned before the creation of the world. In other words, no work, no rest.

And thus those who claim to have faith without the qualification of works are disqualified from the eternal rest in heaven. “*Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Js 2:17). A workless faith is dead in reference to receiving the rest of eternal heaven. So James correctly asked, “*But are you willing to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*” (Js 2:20). “*You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only*” (Js 2:24).

If the theology of a religion in reference to salvation is by faith only, then the religion that is produced from such an inactive faith is dead from the beginning. “Faith only” salvation produces “faith only” religions. A faith that produces no works is dead. Those who are adherents to such religions,

are, according to James, dead (Js 2:14-26).

Since both James and the Hebrew writer were addressing Jewish Christians around the same time in the middle 60s, we wonder that possibly the Hebrew readers were giving no effort to what Paul wrote in Colossians: “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Cl 3:17). The Hebrew readers were falling back to a system of religion wherein they would rather give credit to the name of Moses, or possibly some angel. If they were doing nothing in the name of Jesus, then it would have been a simple thing for them to escape ridicule by switching out the name of Jesus for the name of Moses.

B. Hardened hearts restricted (4:6,7):

Those to whom the opportunity was first made to enter the promise land on the command of God were not allowed to enter because of their unbelief in the command of God. However, those twenty years of age and older were not allowed to enter (Nm 14:29). Eventually, only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter. The Hebrew scribe thus offers a note of exhortation: “*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*” (See Ps 95:7,8) This was a warning.

Disobedience is evidence of a hardened heart. A hardened heart is evidence that one is not listening to God's destiny that our purpose for being created was to enter into the eternal rest of heaven.

The reason for not being allowed into the eternal rest is obvious. Heaven is no place for hardened hearts. Heaven will not be a place to generate faith, and thus a receptive heart. One must have faith and the heart of God before he or she arrives at the judgment.

C. The final rest (4:8-10):

The writer now turns the readers' attention to the final rest of heaven. His use of Israel's failure to enter the rest of the promise land was somewhat metaphorical in reference to the reality of something greater in the future. "*If Joshua had given them rest*" in the promise land, then certainly there would have been no encouragement for them to look forward to the final rest in heaven. Those who remained faithful in obedience, however, were looking for a greater rest beyond Palestine. For all those who walk by faith, "*there remains, therefore, a rest [in eternal heaven] for the people of God.*"

D. Strive for the final rest (4:11-13):

In view of the final rest that is set before us, "*let us labor to enter into that rest.*" Here again the writer connects "labor" and "rest." Without the first, there cannot be the second. "Rest" stands on the foundation that it is awarded to those who have labored faithfully. There is no faith, therefore, without the witness of labor. James gave a commentary on this point: "*But someone may say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*" (Js 2:18). Both James and the Hebrew scribe agree that works, faith and rest are all inseparable, for all reveal that one's heart is not hardened against God.

This is the Hebrew writer's definition of living the gospel. Those Israelites who were initially delivered from Egyptian captivity were not grateful enough to walk in thanksgiving for what God did for them. Their faith in God's care was thus weak. Subsequently, they were not allowed to enter the rest of Canaan.

Those whom the Hebrew writer was exhorting with this illustration of their forefathers were also turning from their thanksgiving for being delivered from sin through the gospel of the cross. They too were not walking in gratitude of what God did for them at the cross of His Son. So the question the writer asked in chapter 2

was still appropriate in this context: *“How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation”* that was provided by the blood of the offered Son of God (Hb 2:3)?

What God says He means. *“The word of God is living and powerful.”* God will not go back on His word. He makes the promise of a rest for those who labor faithfully. He also promises to withhold the final rest from those whose hearts are hardened through disobedience. His spoken promises are *“able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart”* according to the outcome of one’s faith.

No hardened heart will be concealed from God in the judgment, for one’s lack of obedience will reveal one’s heart. *“For if the word spoken through angels [in the Sinai law] proved steadfast,”* then certainly His word to restrict from heaven those who fall into unbelief will also be certain (Hb 2:2). *“Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever man sows, that he will also reap”* (Gl 6:7). If we sow disobedience, then certainly, by the surety of the word of God, we will not enter the final rest.

The problem with deception is that we think we are hiding something from God. However, a hardened heart of unbelief is revealed through disobedience. Therefore, *“all things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him*

to whom we have to give account.”

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Co 5:10).

Accountability assumes that actions have taken place on the part of the ones who will give account. There is no “faith only” relationship with the One before whom we will give account. If faith is not translated into action, then it is dead in reference to receiving rest for our labors. Simply believing in Jesus is not sufficient enough to reap the rest of heaven. Those who trust in their faith alone will never hear the following words from Jesus: *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Mt 25:34).

E. The gospel priesthood (4:14-16):

From chapter 4:14 on in the document, the writer seeks to turn the minds of his Jewish readers from the Levitical priesthood of the Sinai law to the gospel priesthood of Jesus. He seeks to refocus their minds on the good news of Jesus’ continuing ministry on behalf of our sins. While on earth, Jesus ministered an atoning sac-

rifice at the cross. However, at His ascension, the gospel of the atonement continued on into the realm of His heavenly ministry. Since we now *“have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,”* we must refrain from focusing on those earthly Jewish priests who continually serve on earth at the altar on behalf of the sins of the people. Knowing that Jesus continues with the gospel sacrifice in heaven should encourage us to *“hold fast to our confession.”*

It is necessary to know that though we do not now know Jesus according to the flesh (2 Co 5:16), we must remember that initially in the gospel of His incarnation He became flesh (Jn 1:14). *“He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men”* (Ph 2:7). Because He was in the flesh of man, He can now *“sympathize with our weaknesses.”* In the flesh, He could be tempted, but made the choice not to sin. He *“was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (See Mt 4:1-11). Though we do not now know Him according to the flesh, He still functions on our behalf. His being in the flesh, therefore, is not necessary in order that He function as our high priest in heaven.

Because we are weak, we always seek for two things: mercy and grace. Because we know that both mercy and grace continually extend from heaven in abundance, we can come to the throne of grace with confidence. The Hebrew writer thus explains the mental attitude of those who walk according to the gospel of grace. They are assured that in their struggles to walk in the light of the gospel, *“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn 1:7).

We have not missed the point of what the writer is trying to impress on our minds. This is the second time that he has referred to God who produced a spiritual environment of grace and mercy on earth through Jesus. We must step through obedience into this environment. The sympathizing Savior has produced the environment of grace and mercy into which we must come through His offering. There is none of this *“receive Jesus into your heart”* when establishing a relationship with the Father and Son. All that the Father through the Son has done through the gospel has produced the spiritual realm into which we can boldly step. We do not *“receive it.”* We step into it. We *“come boldly to the throne of grace.”* The throne does not come to us.

Chapter 5

THE GOSPEL PRIESTHOOD

(Continued)

(There is no reason why there should be a chapter break between the Hebrew scribe’s discussion that began in 4:14 and what continues on into chapter 5:1-10.)

F. Earthly priesthood versus heavenly priesthood (5:1-10):

It was the function of the Levitical priests to “offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” for those who brought their gifts and sacrifices to the priests. Since he too was a man, the priest could have empathy for those who were “ignorant and misguided” (Hb 7:28). “Because of this” emotional identity with those for whom he offered sacrifices, the sacrifices were not only for those who brought the gifts and sacrifices, but also for the priest himself (Lv 9:7).

The priest was not self-appointed. He was a priest because God had originally called Aaron, the father of the Levites, into priesthood. When God called Aaron, He also called through him all the priests of Israel throughout their history (Ex 28:1).

As God called Aaron, so also was Christ called by God to be our High Priest. When the Father prophesied

of the Son through David, “*You are My Son. Today, I have begotten You,*” it was at this time that Jesus Christ was called into priesthood (Ps 2:7). He was called before the incarnation. When He came into the world, Christ took no glory for Himself for His calling. “*If I honor Myself,*” Jesus said, “*My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me*” (Jn 8:54). Honor goes to the Father for calling His Son into priesthood for our behalf.

The readers must now make a decision. This decision is to whether they will remain under the Father-called priesthood of the Son of God, or return to the Levitical and earthly priesthood that descended from Aaron.

The “*order of Melchizedek*” is the order of having no record of the beginning or ending of the priesthood of Melchizedek. Reference is not to being a priest after the order of the Levitical priests. He functioned as a priest for all mankind because he was neither Jew nor Gentile (Ps 110:4). In this way he is a type of the priesthood of the ascended Jesus. Melchizedek was a priest for all, as Jesus now functions as a priest for all who seek to

live under His priesthood.

In the days of His earthly ministry in the flesh, Jesus offered up “*strong crying and tears*” to His Father (See Mt 26:39,42,44; Mk 14:32-35). Such supplications were evidence of “*His reverent submission*” to the cross. Subsequently, the resurrection was the proof that the prayers of Jesus were answered (See Ep 1:20).

Suffering teaches obedience. Herein is evidence that the Son of God was also incarnate into the emotional existence of man. Through the incarnation, “*He was found in appearance as a man*” in the flesh (Ph 2:8). He subsequently “*humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Ph 2:8). This was the “*reverent submission*” of the Son to the Father. Through the incarnation, therefore, something changed in the relationship between the Father and Son (See 1 Co 11:3). The Son’s spirit of obedience must be assumed by those who would claim to be His disciples. In this way, “*He became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him.*”

Discipleship not only demands faith, but it demands a faith that is revealed through obedience. Jesus gave us His example of obedience by submitting to the cross. This was Paul’s meaning in the statement, “*A man is not justified by works of law,*

but by the faith of Christ Jesus” (Gl 2:16). In another context, Paul further explained that in Christ “*we have boldness and access with confidence through the faith of Him* [Jesus Christ]” (Ep 3:12). Therefore, we seek the righteousness that “*is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith*” (Ph 3:9). Through His own faith in the Father, Jesus went to the cross for us. We have faith in His faith. We must likewise manifest our faith in obedience by taking up our crosses and following Him (Lk 14:27).

It was the purpose of God to make the author of our “*salvation perfect through suffering*” (Hb 2:10). In like manner, we are made perfect through our suffering for the Author of our salvation. Therefore, “*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12).

Since He was “*designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek,*” we can have confidence that He now functions as such on our behalf in heavenly places. “*We have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1).

DULL OF HEARING **(Interlude: 5:11-14)**

There is a change of focus in the text at this point. With this brief in-

terlude, the writer turns his attention from the primary subject of the document to the readers to whom he wrote. The writer had many things to say, but some “*hard to explain.*” The reason why he made this statement infers why the readers were considering a move away from the gospel priesthood of Jesus to the order of the Levitical priests

This is the same problem that Peter experienced with some Jewish Christians who had a difficult time understanding what Paul said in some of his writings. In reference to being “untaught and unstable,” Peter wrote that there are “*some things hard to understand*” for those who turn from studying the sacred writings (2 Pt 3:16). These “hard to understand” things were not impossible to understand. They were only “hard to understand” because of the “untaught and unstable” minds of those who read them. People who do not study their Bibles have a difficult time understanding their Bibles.

The same was true of those readers of the Hebrew document. In such situations, it may be what Paul wrote to some Corinthians: “*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to carnal, as to infants in Christ*” (1 Co 3:1). In the case of the Hebrew readers who had been Christians for many years, they simply became “*dull of hearing.*” It

is hard to explain fundamental truths to those who have grown weary of hearing the truth of the gospel. Knowing that his readers were also growing wearisome of the gospel, Peter exhorted them with the following statement: “*Therefore, I will not be negligent to always remind you of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth [of the gospel]*” (2 Pt 1:12). The Hebrew readers had evidently become dull in being reminded of first principles. And because they became tired of hearing these things, they were on their way away from the gospel kingship and priesthood of Jesus.

Because his readers had failed to responsibly take ownership for their own spiritual growth throughout their many years as Christians, the writer chastised them: “*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God.*” He was not finished: “*You have come to need milk and not solid food.*” They were “old babies” in the faith because they had become weary of rehearsing the grand story of the gospel of the Son of God.

Discipleship to Jesus means that one must take ownership of his or her study of the word of God. If there is no study, then one leaves himself open to the criticism of the Holy Spirit that is listed in this text. There is no ex-

cuse for ignorance of the word of God on the part of disciples after they have been disciples for some time.

The writer here infers that they are “spiritual babies.” They are immature. Because of their failure to grow in the gospel of God’s grace, they could not have “*their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*” In other words, their lack of growth through study should be embarrassing since they had been Christians for so many years. They had failed the Holy Spirit’s exhortation in 2 Peter 3:18: “*Grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*” If in this text it is mentioned that a lack of growth in the knowledge of the gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is inexcusable, then it is the responsibility of every Christian to assume his or her responsibility to study the Bible. It is spiritually immature not to do so.

No teacher is here blamed to have failed to teach the people. The readers had been formerly taught. They were simply falling from that which they were taught many years before. No elder is here exhorted be-

cause of his failure to teach the sheep. The responsibility for apostasy was laid directly on the individuals who had failed to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. If one ends up in judgment fallen from the gospel, then his or her condemnation will not be deflected to the teachers who labored to remind the people continually of the things that he was taught in his early years as a disciple.

It is worth mentioning in this context, therefore, that the readers were on their way back to the legal religion of Judaism. Whenever a faith is legalistically based, it is a religion in which one has no need to study the Bible. If all the laws of the religion are established, then the adherents to the religion are not challenged to continue to study. If all “truth” is settled, then it is unsettling to study in search of more truth, for in one’s study something might be discovered that would contradict the established rites and rituals of established “church doctrine.” One can determine if he or she is in the bondage of religion if he or she has little motivation to study the Bible.

Chapter 6 MOVING ON

The writer now moves on from those who may have already turned back, to those who may be consider-

ing the same apostasy. There is a sense of resignation in his words. However, instead of wasting time on

those who “*crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame,*” he and the readers must move on to more important things. The important things unto which he must move his readers were those things concerning the present gospel reign and priesthood of Jesus that brings great blessings and comfort to the faithful.

A. Moving on from debates over elementary principles (6:1-3):

“*Leaving the elementary principles of the Christ*” does not mean forgetting. Neither does it mean minimizing important principles. A possible understanding of the writer’s thoughts here would be that we must build on first principles in order to spiritually grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (King) and Savior (Priest) (See 2 Pt 3:18).

“*Let us go on to perfection*” assumes that it is our responsibility to go on to the goal that he has already introduced: “*By this time you ought to be teachers*” (Hb 5:12). One must grow in his or her knowledge of the word of God to be able to share it with others. This is not the context of James 3:1: “*Let not many of you become teachers.*” James was discussing leadership. The Hebrew writer is discussing the responsibility of each disciple to study his or her Bible in

order to discuss the gospel with others.

But there may be another problem involved in the background of this context. The curse of Judaism was that it was based on self-righteousness (See Rm 10:1-3). It was a religion that was maintained by the performance of the religious traditions of the fathers (See Mk 7:1-9). And being performance based, meritorious works of the religion were “*dead works*” in reference to being justified by works of law. The works were dead in reference to one meritoriously justifying himself before God.

Herein may be the identity of the problem of those who were tempted to go back under the meritorious religion of Judaism. The appeal of a legal-oriented religion was reassuring in the sense that one trusted in his performance of his faith and not in the gospel of the grace of God. Grace demands faith in God, whereas legalistic religiosity often produces reassurance in one’s performance of all the rites and rituals of one’s religion. It may have been, therefore, that some had succeeded in bringing into Christ the meritorious legal righteousness of Judaism. At least the entire book of Galatians was written to address this “*other gospel*” that had come in among the Galatian disciples. Without a review of the entire book of Galatians, it is noteworthy to quote

the key statement that addressed the scope of the entire book:

... knowing that a man is not justified by [meritorious] works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law, for by works of law no flesh will be justified (Gl 2:16).

If the preceding statement needs interpretation, then one may be in the bondage of legal righteousness, right where the Hebrew readers were in reference to their faith toward God. They had legalized the law of Christ as they did the Sinai law.

Self-righteous religiosity was a curse to the faith of the Jews. Ezekiel dealt with the problem centuries before the arrival of the righteousness of God through Jesus. Through the following pronouncement, God judged Israel for their self-assurance in their own self-righteous creeds:

When I say to the righteous that he will surely live, if he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, all his righteousness will not be remembered. But because of his iniquity that he has committed, he will die for it (Ez 33:13).

Even under the Sinai law, self-righteousness could not remit sins. Therefore, when one has confidence in his own righteousness as an offering for his iniquity, he is living with a false hope.

As some in Galatia, over the years some Jewish disciples were legalizing Christianity as they had legalized Judaism. In doing this, they were not living the gospel of grace. They were doing the same thing as Paul said some in Galatia were doing. They were preaching “another gospel” (Gl 1:6-9).

If one turns the true gospel of grace into a legal system of meritorious righteousness, then it is easy to exchange one religion for another. Even today many jump from one religion to another without ever understanding what they are believing and doing. All they are doing is changing the rites and rituals of one religion for a different set of rites and rules in another religion. They never realize that in whatever religion into which they move, they are perpetuating “another gospel” that is different than the gospel of grace.

In the context of chapter 6, the Hebrew writer mentions some of the subjects of their ongoing legal debates. Some debates were about “baptisms,” some about “laying on of hands,” and others about the “resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.” Their problem was that they

had brought into Christ the legal system of hermeneutics of Judaism that was producing an apostasy from the gospel blood of the cross.

Whenever there are debates over issues about which one determines his beliefs through legal hermeneutics, division into different camps of common agreement always follows. Whenever there are debates over legal issues of opinion, the debaters always take their focus off the gospel of grace.

In this context it may have been that the debates over these issues became so great that the combatants decided to drop the debates by finding common ground in the legal structures of Judaism. At least in Judaism they would have the courts of the scribes and the policemen of the Pharisees to settle their disputes.

But the Hebrew writer wanted to move on from controversies over debatable issues. Such was Paul's exhortation to both Timothy and Titus in reference to involving themselves in senseless discussions over matters of opinion. He wrote to Timothy, "*Avoid foolish and unlearned questions, knowing that they generate strife*" (2 Tm 2:23). Titus may have been in the same arena of debate that was typical among many Jewish Christians at this time in the history of the church: "*But there are many rebellious and idle talkers and deceiv-*

ers, especially those of the circumcision [Jews]" (Ti 1:10). So Paul exhorted Titus: "*Avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless*" (Ti 3:9).

This may have been part of the problem in which the Jewish Christians were involved at the time of writing. Therefore, the writer reminded the faithful that they must move on from such controversies, "*for they are unprofitable and worthless.*"

B. Impossibility of repentance from religion (6:4-6):

When the writer used the word "impossible," he introduced a reality that must be faced by every Christian who is led by the heart of God. The "impossible" was in reference to those who were once saved by their obedience to the gospel, but forsook the blessings that they had in Christ through the sanctifying blood of Jesus (Ep 1:3,7). They were giving up all their freedom in Christ in order to put themselves back into the bondage of Judaism (See Gl 5:1).

These were "*once enlightened.*" They knew that they were saved in Christ. This was not a problem of ignorance. It was a problem of sacrificing freedom for bondage. They "*tasted of the heavenly gift*" (See Jn

4:10). They formerly rejoiced over the freedom that they had received by being delivered from the bondage of Judaism. And not only that, they had the empirical witness of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the early messengers of the gospel (See Mk 16:20). The gospel message “*was confirmed to us by those who heard Him*” (Hb 2:3).

Some of them may have had hands laid on them to receive gifts of the Holy Spirit (See At 8:18,19). They had powerful works of the Holy Spirit manifested among them (Gl 3:2,5). They had “*tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.*” They had witnessed the best that God had to offer in reference to confirming the messengers who first preached the gospel.

They had all the blessings of witnessing the power of the gospel and the confirmation thereof. In his use of the word “if” (subjunctive), the writer seems to indicate that they were not quite gone in their apostasy. But if they go out from among the disciples, it would be impossible “*to renew them again to repentance.*” It would be impossible for them to repent because they had tasted all the good witness that God had to offer through the gospel to move one unto repentance. If they turned from His witness of the gospel, then there would be no more appeal of the gos-

pel to their hearts.

There is no forgiveness in this case. If some would “*crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame,*” then there is no forgiveness from God simply because they are sinning unto death. This is the sin about which John wrote: “*There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he [a fellow disciple] should pray for this*” (1 Jn 5:16). The sin unto death is the sin of which one will not repent, and thus there is no forgiveness (See 1 Jn 1:8-10). This is willful rebellion against the gospel of the One who was crucified for the sinner.

The apostates in this context, therefore, were bringing upon Christianity the mockery of the unbelieving world. If what they received in obedience to the gospel, plus the witness of the Holy Spirit, did not keep them in the faith, then certainly the Gentile world would conclude that Christians were no better than the Jews. In fact, the unbelieving world would conclude that it was true what they said of Christians. They were just another sect of Judaism (See At 24:5). Because the apostates were bringing shame on the name of Christ, the writer would pronounce that these apostates would not be spared “*severe punishment*” (Hb 10:29).

C. Burning thorns and thistles (6:7,8):

In a similar context of apostasy from the grace of the gospel, the Holy Spirit warned the readers,

Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows [meritorious righteousness] to his [works of the flesh] will of the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap eternal life (Gl 6:7,8).

The preceding statement must not be misunderstood. The entire book of Galatians is about gospel living that is in contrast to living by the “other gospel,” the gospel of meritorious religiosity. Sowing to the flesh of meritorious works is in contrast to sowing to the Spirit of the righteousness of God. So the warning to the Galatians is the same as the warning to the Hebrews. The Spirit warns both groups of potential apostates with the following statements: “*If you are circumcised [as a merit of righteousness], Christ will profit you nothing*” (Gl 5:2). In fact, the Spirit added, “*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace*” (Gl 5:4). And herein is where the Hebrew apostates found themselves. If they continued in their move toward legal religiosity, they too would be “fallen from grace.”

When the seed of the kingdom, the gospel of God’s grace, is sown in the hearts of believers, it will bring forth fruits of the gospel. But sometimes the hearts into which the gospel is planted are not hearts that emulate the heart of God. This is always the problem with legal-oriented religionists who come into Christ. If one depends on his own meritorious religiosity as opposed to the love that flows from the heart of God at the cross of His Son, then his heart is not fertile soil for the gospel of grace.

The context here is similar to the heart about which Jesus said, “*You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?*” (Mt 7:16). The principle of Jesus in this statement identified the state of the apostate Hebrews: “*Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit, but a bad tree brings forth bad fruit*” (Mt 7:17). The potential apostates among the Hebrew readers were “bad fruit.” Therefore, they were “*near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.*” In A.D. 70 this would literally come to pass. As Jerusalem burned, so did the fruit of legal Judaism.

D. God does not forget faithfulness (6:9-12).

The writer was speaking as a father to his children. His speaking was

instructive, and shrouded in warning as to children who might not heed his instructions. So in order to instill confidence, the instructor is “*confident of better things concerning*” his children. These better things are salvational, for they are in reference to continuing to live the gospel they had obeyed many years before.

They had been Christians long enough to have worked and labored for one another out of love. Therefore, “*God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love.*” This may have been similar to the Ephesian disciples many years after the beginning of the church in Ephesus. Jesus said of the Ephesian disciples, “*You have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary*” (Rv 2:3). However, this praise came with a shocking judgment: “*Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works*” (Rv 2:5). They had fallen because they had left their first love (Rv 2:4).

The Hebrews were in a similar situation. They had “*ministered to the saints, and still are ministering.*” But something was tragically wrong. It may have been that their ministry was self-sanctifying righteousness. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ep 2:10). However, we must remember that we are not saved by the merit of our works, but by grace through faith (Ep 2:8). It is grace that moti-

vates us to work in appreciation of what we already have in Christ (See 2 Co 4:15).

The writer desired “*that each one of you show the same diligence.*” Regardless of the apostasy of any group, apostasy is still individual. God considers us as individuals in reference to forsaking the gospel of His Son. So the situation may have been that some individuals among the group had become “sluggish.” Their indifferent sluggishness was rubbing off on others. Their lukewarmness was cooling the whole (See Rv 3:15,16). So again James’ exhortation is needed: “*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*” (Js 2:18).

It was the responsibility of the sluggish to “*imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*” Since faith without works is dead, then faith that is combined with the expression of works is alive (Js 2:26). Solomon had some good advice for the sluggard: “*Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider his ways and be wise*” (Pv 6:6; see Pv 6:9). “*The soul of the sluggard desires and has nothing, but the soul of the diligent will be made fat*” (Pv 13:4).

E. Hang on to the promises (6:13-20):

From what is stated in this con-

text, we might assume that the readers had in some way lost all hope. It may have been in times of social distress wherein national Israel was coming to its consummation as the Roman army marched toward Jerusalem. Since the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 had not yet been fulfilled, we assume that the writer addressed disillusioned Jewish readers who failed to believe Jesus' prophecy concerning Jerusalem: "*Do you not see all these things [of the temple and Jerusalem]? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down*" (Mt 24:2).

The Hebrew writer addressed his distraught readership a short time before the A.D. 70 calamity of national Israel and the fall of Jerusalem. They needed to remember the message of the early messengers of the gospel as they went from synagogue to synagogue, announcing that the end of national Israel had come. The time was fulfilled.

Therefore, it was a time to follow the example of Abraham, to whom "*God made the promise.*" God swore to Abraham upon the basis of His own existence that He would of Abraham's seed make a great nation (See Gn 12:1-4). It was only because Abraham patiently waited for the birth of his firstborn son, Isaac, that he "*obtained the promise.*"

The Jewish readers of this exhortation were living in an era when the promise to Abraham concerning a great nation was coming to its consummation. The nation of Israel that was built through the seed of Abraham was now coming to a close in the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24. But prior to the consummation of national Israel, God, through the gospel, brought both Jews and Gentiles into one spiritual nation: "*You [Jews and Gentiles] are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*" (Gl 3:26). In Christ "*there is neither Jew nor Greek*" (Gl 3:28). "*If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise* [that was made to Abraham]" (Gl 3:29).

Since God swore to Abraham by His own oath that He would of Abraham's seed make a great nation, any dispute concerning the fulfillment of the promise was over when God swore by the oath of Himself. As Abraham trusted in the promise that was sworn under the oath of God, so the readers must do the same in the times of distress in which they were at the time of the writing of this epistle.

The "*two unchangeable things*" are in reference to the hope of the gospel: (1) The first foundation upon which God's promises come to their fruition is that His promises are based

on His oath as God. (2) The second unchangeable foundation upon which God makes His promise is that it is not possible for God to lie (Ti 1:2). If we assume that God can lie, then we have created the wrong god in our minds.

The readers had in the beginning when they obeyed the gospel, placed their faith in the “truth of the gospel.” Paul used this phrase in his exhortation of those in Galatia who might come into doubt concerning the actual events of the gospel (Gl 2:5). The truth of the gospel was not an outline of laws or an order of ceremonies by which we would justify ourselves before God. On the contrary, the “truth of the gospel” is in the fact of the gospel. The Word did become flesh (Jn 1:14). The flesh and blood of the Word was crucified, resurrected and ascended to the right hand of the Father. And the resurrected Son of God was reigning at the time the Hebrew document was written. This is the truth of the gospel.

If one does not live according to the motivation of this gospel (See Cl 3:1-17), then he is not living “*straightforward about the truth of the gospel*” (Gl 2:14). In their doubt concerning the promises of God, the Hebrew readers were not living according to the gospel because they were forsaking their faith in the events of the gospel.

On the other hand, the faithful “*have a strong encouragement*” in the hope of the gospel only if they take refuge in the “truth of the gospel.” If he had the time, the writer would have also wrote the following that Paul wrote to the Colossians. They also could be presented “*holy and blameless and beyond reproach in*” the sight of God. They could be presented as such only ...

... if you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was preached to every creature that is under heaven (Cl 1:23).

It is this hope of the gospel that “*we have as an anchor of the soul.*” The promises of God are sure and steadfast because they are based on His oath and the fact that God cannot lie. Therefore, the writer exhorts that if we are to enjoy the fulfillment of the promises, then our living in the hope of the gospel must be sure and steadfast. Since our forerunner, Jesus, in the function of His priesthood for us, ascended in order to enter behind the veil of heaven to minister in the holy of holies (Lv 16:2,15), then we must remain committed to His present position and ministry.

If we would—and we should—honor the common Greek definition

of the word *ionios*, then the emphasis of Jesus' high priesthood is not on time without end ("forever"), but surety. It is sure and certain because the promise of God is based on the oath of God and the fact that He cannot lie.

In this text, the steadfastness of Jesus' priesthood goes far beyond the Levitical priests who were minister-

ing at the temple when this epistle was written. That priesthood would soon terminate in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. But the priesthood of Jesus would be steadfast throughout the destruction of the order of the Levitical priests. It would be as the "*order of Melchizedek*," and thus remain steadfast.

Chapter 7

STEADFAST PRIESTHOOD

Melchizedek was significant in his function as a priest of God. His ministry took place before the existence of the nation of Israel. Therefore, he was a high priest of God to the Gentiles, including Abraham. His priesthood is symbolic of Jesus' present universal priesthood on behalf of all the saints throughout the world, and for all time. Jesus' present priesthood is good news for those who seek to live daily in response to the intercession that He now provides for His brethren.

A. King and priest (7:1-3):

The writer begins this apology (defense) of the priesthood of Jesus with the most significant reason why Melchizedek illustrates the present gospel function of Jesus as our High

Priest. Melchizedek was both king and priest "*of the Most High God.*" He encountered Abraham after Abraham returned "*from the slaughter of the kings.*" (See Gn 14:18-20). It was on this occasion that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, by whom he was also blessed. When speaking of Melchizedek we must keep in mind that both he and Abraham lived about five hundred years before the giving of the Sinai law.

Before the tithe was given to Israel as a precept of the Sinai law, it was given to the designated priests of God who ministered on behalf of the people. So Abraham, a Gentile, gave to Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of his conquest over the kings he defeated.

Melchizedek illustrates the position of King Jesus in His present func-

tion on behalf of the worldwide brotherhood of saints. Melchizedek was king of righteousness (the spiritual kingdom), king of Salem (the realm of his kingship), and king of peace (the function of the priest to bring harmony between God and man). Melchizedek functioned in all these realms and capacities in his mediatorship between God and man. And now, *“there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tm 2:5).

Melchizedek is the best illustration of the unending priesthood of Christ Jesus. There is no Old Testament record of the birth or death of Melchizedek. Therefore, he is *“made like the Son of God,”* for he *“remains a priest continually.”* It is not that he functions as a priest today, but that his priesthood on earth without a recorded beginning or ending illustrates the unending priesthood of the Son of God.

B. The lesser blessed by the better (7:4-10):

The writer now uses Abraham to illustrate that “the lesser” (Abraham) paid tithes to “the better” (Melchizedek). Abraham, the father of the Jews paid tithes to a Gentile priest. In doing this, all the Jews under the Sinai law also paid tithes to the Gentile priest through Abraham.

Because “the lesser” (Abraham) paid tithes to “the better,” the lesser was blessed by the better. Abraham, to whom the promises were made, was blessed because he paid tithes to Melchizedek. Therefore, *“without all dispute the lesser [Abraham] is blessed by the better [Melchizedek].”*

While Levi was yet in the body of his ancestor Abraham, he, as a high priest of Israel, paid tithes. While in the body of the father of the Jews, Levi and all priests who followed him, also paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham. If the current readers were considering a move to the priesthood that descended from Levi, then they were returning to a lesser priesthood than that of Melchizedek, after whom Jesus was pronounced to be a priest with an oath from God.

C. Necessity to change law (7:11-13):

From the preceding mention of Melchizedek, the writer now gets to the point of the illustration. The example of paying tithes through the representation of another illustrates the point. *“If perfection [of priesthood] were through the Levitical priesthood,”* then why would there be any need for a change from the Sinai law to another law? If the Levitical priesthood, which was established by the Sinai law, were perfect, then why

a need for a change? Why was there a need to change from the Levitical priesthood to the order of the Gentile priesthood of Melchizedek?

The change was necessary, not only because Jesus was of another tribe than the tribe of Levi, but also because the existence of the priesthood of Melchizedek that was without beginning or ending illustrated the priesthood of Jesus. Why not continue with the priests “*according to the order of Aaron*”? The answer to all the questions in these matters is in the fact that the Levitical system could never illustrate the present gospel priesthood of Jesus, which is eternal.

Jesus is now both king and priest. No Levitical priests ever functioned as such. Therefore, there had to be a change in the law that designated only the sons of Levi to be priests. There had to be a change in order that Jesus could be both King and Priest. Since only those of the tribe of Levi could legally be priests under the Sinai law, then Jesus, who was of the tribe of Judah, could be a priest legally on His throne only if there were a change in the law.

Since the Sinai law has been changed in order to legalize the priesthood of Jesus, then it is evident that Christians, since the change of the law, are not under the Sinai law. If there are those who seek to invoke the Sinai law in order to support some le-

gal matter of doctrine, then their efforts are contrary to what is taught in this context.

At the cross, the present High Priest wiped “*out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*” (Cl 2:14). Therefore, any effort to bring the Sinai law into force in the lives of Christians is an effort to establish again a legal religiosity that is “*contrary to us.*” Such efforts are an attack against the present gospel priesthood of Jesus who can legally be a priest only if the law has been changed.

The tithe of the Sinai law is a good example of the efforts of some to establish again the legal system of the Sinai law, for the Sinai law included the law of the tithe. But when the Sinai law was nailed to the cross, the tithing law was nailed with it. To invoke this law today establishes a law that is contrary to the freedom that we have in Christ.

Christians, therefore, are not under the Sinai law of the tithe. They are under the law of grace and faith. And under this law, giving often goes beyond the ten percent tithe that was required by the Sinai law. If Christians must confine their giving to a specific amount, then they often give grudgingly just to give that amount (See 2 Co 9:5). But if they give in

response to grace, their giving is with generosity. Christian giving under grace was illustrated by the disciples in Macedonia, who, “*in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, **abounded in the riches of their liberality***” (2 Co 8:2).

Law works contrary to those who seek to be released in order to abound in their thankful response to the grace of God. Law hinders giving, whereas grace inspires cheerful giving. The curse of religion in reference to giving, therefore, is that religionists seek to establish laws for giving. On the other hand, gospel inspired “free-will giving” abounds, even from those who are in deep poverty.

D. The better hope (7:14-19):

Since Moses said nothing concerning priests coming out of the tribe of Judah, then the law that mandated that priests come only from the tribe of Levi had to be changed. There had to be a change in the law because our Lord came from the tribe of Judah (See Gn 49:8-10; Is 1:1; 11:1; Mc 5:2). And since Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, and not from the Levites as mandated by the Sinai law, then it was reasonable that if He would come into the world without beginning and ending, then Melchizedek only could be an illus-

tration of His priesthood. No priest of the Levitical order that was mandated by the Sinai law could ever be symbolic of the priesthood of King Jesus. Since the priesthood of Jesus is without beginning and ending, then no law in reference to earthly priests could ever illustrate the unending priesthood of the Son of God. Therefore, King Jesus is “*a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*”

It was not possible that the Sinai law produce the eternal life that every person craves. The Sinai law, as any law, is weak because through obedience to law no one can be justified before God. The reason for this is logical. No one can keep any law perfectly in order to be justified before God through perfect law-keeping. When considering law, therefore, we must always remember that “*there is none righteous, no, not one*” (Rm 3:10). “*All have sinned [against law] and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rm 3:23).

Law was never given by God as a means of salvation, but as a road map to follow in our faith response to God. The road map is perfect, but those who follow it often take wrong turns. Consequently, “*the wages of sin [against law] is death*” (Rm 6:23). And for this reason, the law is unprofitable in reference to producing life.

Therefore, the Sinai law “*made*

nothing perfect” for eternal dwelling. Nevertheless, the fact that law can never be the means by which one can live justified before God, necessitated the establishment of a law with “*a better hope*.” It is because of this “better hope” that we are drawn near unto God. So it is true as Jesus said during His ministry, “*No one can come to Me, except the Father who has sent Me draws him*” (Jn 6:44). And how does the Father draw all men unto His Son? Jesus answered, “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth [in the crucifixion], will draw all men to Me*” (Jn 12:32).

Jesus has already been lifted up to the cross. He has already been raised up from the dead. He has already ascended to the right hand of the Father. Therefore, “*we have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1). Therefore, we preach the gospel priesthood of Jesus in order to draw all men unto Jesus. Our message does not stop at the cross. It continues into heaven in order to announce to the world the good news of our High Priest at the right hand of the Majesty of God.

We must not miss this point. We preach the present gospel priesthood of Jesus in order to draw men to Jesus. If we preach the sacrifice of the cross only, then we are falling short of the total power of the gospel. The incar-

national offering took place at the cross. However, the power of the gospel is not only in the cross, but in the ascension and current priesthood of Jesus who is our only mediator with God (See 1 Tm 2:5; Hb 8:6).

The sin offering was made at the cross. But the function of His offering continues active through His present priesthood. Though the offering was a onetime event, the functioning of His priesthood is active from the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. This is the message that those on Pentecost heard from the lips of the apostle Peter.

When the people heard that Jesus was raised up and seated on the throne of the Majesty of heaven, and there made Lord and Christ, it was then that this gospel message cut them to the heart (At 2:36). They were drawn to Christ Jesus by something that was **present**, not just by something that had happened seven weeks before. Peter’s message was on the present function of the ascended Savior, which function was qualified by the cross. And what was functioning at the time he preached was that Jesus was King and Priest on David’s throne in heaven. This is the better hope “*through which we draw near to God*.” People are drawn to God through the offered sacrifice of the One who is now functioning on our behalf in reference to our sins.

E. With a better covenant comes a better priest (7:20-25):

The priesthood of Jesus was established on the foundation of the oath of the Father. Unfortunately, the Levitical priests did not come into the priesthood with such an oath. As the descendants of Levi, they were born into the priesthood. But when we consider the priesthood of Jesus, we understand that with an oath the Father said, “*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*” Those Jewish Christians who were considering a move back to the order of the Levitical priests were leaving a Priest who was sworn in by God to be such. They were wandering back to those who were priests simply because they were born of the tribe of Levi.

Jesus is presently our priest in heaven, and thus “*a guarantee of a better covenant*” because God, who cannot lie, swore with an oath that King Jesus would function as a priest of the covenant that we now have with God. So Jesus “*has obtained a more excellent ministry*” than the priest of the Levitical priesthood (Hb 8:6). Therefore, He is “*the mediator of a better covenant that was established on better promises*” (Hb 8:6).

Ours is a better covenant than the Sinai covenant that God established with the nation of Israel. Our cov-

enant has better promises. The headmaster of the Sinai law brought those of faith “*to Christ so that we might be justified by faith*” (Gl 3:24). “*But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a headmaster*” (Gl 3:25). We are in a covenant relationship with God that is based on our faith in Jesus Christ.

Those who were considering a return to the Levitical priests, who ministered at the temple when this letter was written, needed to take heed to these words. The temple would be destroyed shortly after the writing of this letter. It would be then that they would certainly discover some sense in what the writer was here inscribing concerning a comparison between the priests who administered at the temple and the Priest who would continue to live beyond the destruction of the temple. We assume, therefore, that this point would be understood when many of those priests who administered at the temple would be killed by the Romans when Jerusalem fell and the temple destroyed. The writer is inscribing these words in order to guard his brethren from returning to the fellowship of those who would die at the hand of the Romans in A.D. 70.

But if the readers continued with Jesus, they would understand that He is able “*to save those to the uttermost who come to God through Him.*” We

cannot ignore that there may have been a literal understanding of this statement beyond the spiritual. Those who returned to the carnal, would reap the consequences of the destruction and death that was coming. We cannot ignore the fact that the Hebrew writer was writing out of desperation to save the lives of his Jewish brethren who were making a move back into that which God had determined to consummate in the destruction of national Israel. “*To-save-to-the-uttermost*” seems to indicate that the writer had Jesus’ prophecy of Matthew 24 in mind. More was in the writer’s mind than spiritual matters.

But in reference to salvational matters, Peter’s pronouncement to the Jews in Jerusalem was correct: “*There is salvation in no other [than Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (At 4:12). The only medium through whom any man can come to God is to come “*through Him.*” And since “*He always lives to make intercession for them,*” then we can always come with confidence that His blood continues to function in our lives (1 Jn 1:7). Jesus said, “*I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me*” (Rv 3:20).

F. The appropriate high priest (7:26-28):

The writer now lays out his appeal to those who would even consider a comparison between Christ Jesus in His present function as high priest, and those earthly priests who are connected to the temple. Jesus is **holy**; they are men in the world. He is **harmless**; they are men with human motives. He is **undefiled**; they are defiled by the world. He is **separate** from sin; they live among sinners. He is **exalted** to the right hand of God in heavenly places; they are confined to an earthly ministry that is connected with an earthly temple. His priesthood is **continuing**; they must awake every morning, put on their priestly clothes, and go to work, knowing that as the priests before them, they too must die. But in view of the consummation of the Levitical priesthood in A.D. 70, Jesus’ priesthood will continue.

Most important of all, Jesus lived without sin, and thus His atonement in sacrifice was not for His own sins. On the other hand, those priests who ministered at the altar must offer up sacrifices for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people (Lv 9:7; 16:6).

The effectiveness of Jesus’ offering is discovered in one phrase. He

offered Himself “*once for all*” for our sins. The results of His offering are without end. The drawing power of the gospel is emphasized beyond religion in this statement. Those who seek to justify themselves through their own systems of meritorious self-sanctification overlook this point. Sanctification through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus was complete and for eternity. It is not possible, therefore, for anyone to subsidize Jesus’ offering for sin through their own efforts of self-sanctification. The sacrifice of Jesus was completely sufficient for the sins of all humanity.

And herein is the weakness of the priesthood of the law. There was the necessity under the Sinai law to continually make offerings for sin in order to sanctify the people. This was

the weakness of both the priests and the law. The offering of animal “*sacrifices that they offered year by year continually*” could never “*make perfect those who draw near*” to God (Hb 10:1). The reason for this was that “*it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*” (Hb 10:4).

On the other hand, by the oath of the Father, the Son, “*who has been perfected forever*,” offered and continues to be the sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people. And for this reason, Jesus “*always lives to make intercession*” for His brethren (See Rm 8:34). His is a continuing intercession because His blood continues to flow from the sacrifice that was offered once for all eternity.

Chapter 8

THE MORE EXCELLENT PRIESTHOOD

The writer now comes to the pinnacle of his theme in reference to the present gospel priesthood of Jesus. Since the ascended Jesus is now far above angels, and certainly far above those priests on earth who ministered at the temple altar, then the writer reinforces his argument with the fact that neither angels nor earthly priests can in any way compare with the kingdom and priesthood of the One who

is seated at the right hand of God.

A. The more excellent priesthood (8:1-6):

The “*main point*” is that “*we have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*” It cannot get any better than this. This news in reference to who Jesus now is, and

what He now does is good news. The heavenly sanctuary of the tabernacle (tent) in which Jesus now ministers is true in comparison to anything associated with the temple and the priests who minister on earth. In contrast to the temple in which the earthly priests minister, Jesus ministers in “*a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation*” (Hb 9:11). At His ascension, He did not enter “*into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hb 9:24). This is the writer’s reminder of the good news of the ascension, and the good news as to where Jesus now continues His gospel mission (See Ph 2:9-11).

The words “seated” and “right hand” are respectively metaphorical of position and authority. The resurrected Jesus is now with the Father, exercising authority over all things from the position of authority in heavenly places (Mt 28:18). He is now reigning as King of kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tm 6:15). “*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name [authority] that is above every name*” (Ph 2:9). His authority is “*far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named*” (Ep 1:21). He will continue in this position of authority

until the last enemy is destroyed. When death is destroyed by the resurrection of all in the last day, then the Son will submit Himself to the Father who submitted all things to Him (See 1 Co 15:26-28).

The writer emphasizes this position and authority of King Jesus in order to establish a comparison between who Jesus now is and that from which the possible apostates were turning. They were thinking earthly, while the gospel focuses on the present exaltation and authority of King Jesus over all things.

Every priest on earth is designated with the responsibility of offering gifts and sacrifices, both for himself and for the people (Hb 5:1). For this reason, it was necessary that Jesus also have something to offer when He ascended unto the Father. “*Since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law*” at the altar of the temple on earth, Jesus brought the offering of Himself to the Father in heaven.

As we look from this side of the cross, a shadow was cast back to the copy of the offerings that the Levitical priests made in anticipation of the true offering to come in their future. The true offering was the Son of God. The “*pattern*” for that which was to come in the future of the Israelites was to be built according to what God had anticipated according to His own de-

sign. Once the substance of the shadow appeared, then the shadow vanished away.

There is a stark difference between what the Jews had constructed religiously by the time Jesus confronted them concerning their traditions, and what the substance of the shadow was (See Mk 7:1-9). By the time Jesus arrived, they had actually constructed a new paradigm of religion (See Gl 1:13). Jesus judged them, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*” (Mk 7:9). They sought to establish their own pattern of religiosity, and thus, assumed that the Messiah would fit into their religion. They had made their own “copy” of religion, and sought to continue to live in the shadow. The “true” was looking them in the face, but because they had made their own “copy” (religion), they rejected and crucified the substance of the shadow.

The good news is all about that which cast the shadow. Jesus, as our high priest, has “*obtained a more excellent ministry*” than the shadow. That which cast the shadow is “more excellent” because it is the substance of the shadow. The crucified and resurrected Son of God, therefore, is more excellent than the Levitical priests who ministered according to the Sinai law. Jesus is more excellent because He is “*the mediator of a*

better covenant that was established on better promises” (See Hb 7:22). His new covenant is better because it is based on better promises than those promises of the Sinai covenant shadow.

“*If He were on earth, He would not be a priest.*” Premillennialists miss this point. Premillennialism is the belief that Jesus is coming again in order to reign on this earth for a period of one thousand years. The problem with this theology is that it attacks the present gospel reign and priesthood of Jesus. In reference to the reign, the theology assumes that Jesus will give up His present gospel reign over the galaxies (“all things”) in order to confine His reign to a single planet of the entire universe (the earth).

Consider the preceding supposed future reign of Jesus on earth in reference to His present priesthood. **The writer states that Jesus cannot be a priest on this earth.** Therefore, if He comes to reign on this earth for the supposed one thousand years, **then He will have to give up His priesthood, for He cannot be a priest on this earth.**

B. The better covenant (8:7-13):

The better covenant assumes that there is a better High Priest than the high priest of the former Sinai cov-

enant that God had established with Israel. The first covenant was limited to Israel. But the better covenant that is now in existence is unlimited. It is established with all those, both Jews and Gentiles, who obey the gospel in order to come into a covenant relationship with God.

However, there was no fault with the former Sinai covenant itself. The fault was with those with whom the covenant was established. The writer explained: ***“For finding fault with them”*** assumed that those with whom the covenant was established could find no remission of sins under the covenant. This was true, for animal sacrifices for sins under the old covenant could not take away sins (Hb 10:4). *“The same sacrifices that they offered year by year continually”* could not *“make perfect those who draw near”* (Hb 10:1). The logical conclusion would be that any lasting covenant that God would establish with man must contain a permanent remedy for sin.

The covenant that God made with Israel when they came out of Egyptian captivity failed because those with whom it was established failed to continue in the conditions they were to keep in order to maintain the covenant. When Israel was headed into her final captivity of the Babylonians, Jeremiah wrote the judgment of God that the Hebrew

writer here quotes (See Jr 31:31-34). Since Israel had failed to keep the conditions for the Sinai covenant, God promised the captives that there would be a new covenant in the future under which *“their iniquities I will remember no more.”*

The new covenant would be different. Under the old, every adult had to teach the children to know the laws of the covenant as the children grew up. At birth, the Jewish babe was born into a covenant relationship with God. As the child grew, teaching was necessary in order that the children be taught to know the conditions (laws) for keeping the covenant.

Under the new covenant, it is different. Under the old a baby was born into the covenant relationship that God had already established with national Israel at Mount Sinai. But under the new, one is first taught the conditions of the covenant before he or she is born again in order to enter into a covenant relationship with God. The establishment of the new covenant is made when one obeys the gospel of the incarnate Son of God (Compare 1 Pt 4:17).

Christians are in a covenant relationship with God because they responded to the gospel of the cross where Jesus justified them with His blood. He still cleanses the sins of all those who are baptized in order to wash away their sins (At 22:16). He

appeals to everyone who would respond to His gospel call to be brought into a covenant relationship with Him (See 2 Th 2:14).

The Jews, on the other hand, were formerly in a covenant relationship with God nationally because God established a covenant relationship with the nation at Mount Sinai. However, under the old covenant there was a remembrance of sins every year when the people brought their sacrifices to the altar. But under the new covenant, God promises, “*Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more.*” John explained the benefits of the new covenant in reference to our continued problem of sin,

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).

Hebrews 8:13 seems to have been written in the context of the ful-

fillment of Jesus’ prophecy concerning the termination of national Israel and the temple services that was soon to come in A.D. 70. For this reason, the writer earnestly seeks to remind his Jewish readers that the first covenant was made obsolete when Jesus nailed it to the cross (Cl 2:14). The second covenant from which they were turning was validated by the blood of the offered sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross. Nevertheless, it seems that God was patient with the Jewish Christians, and the Jewish nation as a whole. The writer inscribed that “*that which is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*” At the time of writing, the scribe who penned this epistle seems to realize that the sun in the near future was about to go down on Israel and the Levitical priesthood. In fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus, the sun did set on national Israel in A.D. 70 before the ink dried on this document.

Chapter 9

THE EARTHLY AND THE HEAVENLY

Since the Jewish readers were considering the tabernacle ceremonies and priesthood of their former religious heritage as an option to which to return, the Hebrew scribe takes

them on a journey of comparison between the Sinai ceremonies and the greater blessings of the better covenant. The problem the readers created was in prioritizing something

physical and earthly to be greater than that which is spiritual and heavenly. Because the earthly and ceremonial had a greater appeal to them, they considered forsaking the spiritual and heavenly.

This is a common urge on the part of those who seek to create concrete religious performances after their own earthly desires. People are fascinated with religious structures and observable ceremonies that are performed within the structures of orthodox religiosity. Our observation is that religious people idolize those physical structures that remind them of their religion in which they can meritoriously perform their religious ceremonies. If one would question this obsession, then continue on in this chapter as the writer sets up a contrast between the physical and spiritual. Keep in mind that the readers are in the process of sacrificing the spiritual in order to identify with the physical. They are seeking to sacrifice the spiritual body of Christ for the physical religiosity of Judaism.

It is noteworthy to observe that the writer does not refer directly to the physical temple in Jerusalem in his metaphorical comparison between the physical and spiritual. We would assume, therefore, that the Holy Spirit in this “oversight” is saying that the temple of Jerusalem that Solomon built and Herod reconstructed was

never in the original plan of God for Israel. God intended that the tabernacle (tent) continue with Israel throughout their generations until the arrival of the spiritual temple, the church. The literal temple was only a concession of God to David, for God had given all the instructions in the law concerning the continued reconstruction of the tabernacle throughout the centuries until the arrival of the Messiah. The Hebrew writer is thus writing with the intentions of using the tabernacle, priesthood and ceremonies as God’s preparation for the sending of His Son. The writer is not basing his arguments on the intentions of David who wanted a temple, or the Jews who took so much pride in their temple in Jerusalem.

A. The tabernacle (9:1-5):

The earthly tabernacle was the center around which ceremonial rites and rituals “*of divine service*” were performed according to the Sinai law. The lampstand and table of the showbread were in what was called the sanctuary. The Holy of Holies and sanctuary were two areas of the tabernacle that were divided by a veil (Ex 26:31-35; 40:3). Behind the veil, and within the Holy of Holies was the golden censer (Lv 16:12) and ark of the covenant (Ex 25:10). Within the ark was a sample of manna (Ex

16:33), Aaron's rod that budded (Nm 17:1-10), and the two tables of stone on which God wrote the ten commandments (Ex 34:29; 40:20). The wings of the cherubim overshadowed the top of the ark that was called the mercy seat (Ex 25:20). The tabernacle was never a place in which there were assemblies. It was built as a center of reference for the assemblies of the people when national feasts were conducted for all Israel.

Since the writer was writing of things over one thousand years in the past history of Israel, he knew that his readers identified these things only by what they read in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. At the time the Hebrew writer inscribed these words, none of the original tabernacle articles about which he wrote were in existence. It may have been his argument that those who were seeking to sacrifice the true and actual that they had in Christ, were in a futile effort to return to something that no longer existed. The ceremonies continued around the existing temple because the tabernacle had long been replaced by the temple. The furniture and articles that were within the tabernacle had also long been lost or destroyed.

B. The ceremonies (9:6-10):

It is at this point that the writer is subliminally identifying the urge

that many have in reference to a religiosity that draws people into the legal performances of rituals. When the tabernacle was built and the furniture placed within it, it was then that the priests began their legal performances of the rites and rituals according to the law.

One of the most important functions of the high priest on the annual day of atonement was to take the blood of sacrificed animals into the Holy of Holies (Ex 30:10). On this day of atonement for the people, the priest offered the blood of the sacrificed animals for himself and the people (Hb 5:3). As the writer revealed this physical function of the priests of the Sinai law, we wonder why the Jewish Christians would turn from Jesus who performed this function on their behalf in order to return to a law wherein it had to be performed every year by the high priest. We wonder why the urge was so strong to forsake the onetime sacrifice of Jesus in order to return to the killing of animals for the sacrifices of the Sinai law.

The importance of the ceremonial performances of the priest, especially the high priest, was not in the ceremonies themselves. Those who would copy such physical ceremonies in religious performances today are missing the point that the Holy Spirit wanted to illustrate. The tabernacle,

and the surrounding ceremonies, were symbolic of that which was to come in the history of Israel. *“The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place [Holy of Holies], was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.”* The tabernacle ceremonies were a prophecy of that which would come in Christ.

The writer has now clued us in on why he brought up the subject of the tabernacle and the *“ordinances of divine service”* that surrounded the services of the tabernacle. *“It was a symbol for the present time.”* The Holy Spirit’s main point was that the gifts and sacrifices that were ceremonially offered under the first covenant *“cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience.”* Such things were only physical in substance and legally performed according to law. But their performance could not sanctify the performers, nor those for whom the priests performed the ceremonies. All these priests and their ceremonies were to terminate when the spiritual arrived through Jesus. Those religious groups today that focus on religious ceremonies are going back under law. They are establishing ceremonial laws for themselves that are similar to the Levitical ceremonial system.

Legal performances of ceremo-

nies cannot cleanse one of sin. Nevertheless, all the *“foods and drinks and various washings and carnal ordinances”* illustrated metaphorically the spiritual that would eventually replace both the tabernacle sacrifices and its surrounding ceremonies. That which was earthly and ceremonial set the stage for the spiritual and heavenly that was coming. And since there was no sanctification for sin in the ceremonies and sacrifices, the people were naturally driven to something that had to be greater and spiritual. Those today who seek to build temples and institute religious ceremonies need to remember this point.

C. Prepared for Christ (9:11-15):

Through the tabernacle and the services of the high priest, God prepared the minds of the Jews for what Jesus would do through His incarnational crucifixion, ascension, and coronation as King and Priest. He assumed that their dissatisfaction with the physical would drive them to the spiritual.

“Christ appeared” in a manger in Bethlehem in preparation to be *“a high priest of good things to come”* at the conclusion of His earthly ministry. His incarnation and ministry, with His coronation, would lead to *“a greater and more perfect tabernacle.”* When Jesus said during His ministry,

“Upon this rock I will build **My church**,” He was speaking of His spiritual tabernacle that was “*not made with hands*” (Mt 16:18; see 1 Tm 3:15).

His house was spiritual, not carnal as the physical tabernacle and ceremonies. We would caution ourselves, therefore, that whenever we seek to make the church physical through ceremonies and buildings, we are reverting back to the inferiority of the physical tabernacle and ceremonies of the Sinai law. Therefore, the lesson is simple. The more we make physical the church that Jesus built, the less spiritual we become, for our focus is often more on physical things than spiritual things.

In contrast to the blood of animals, Jesus took His own blood offering with Him into the Holy of Holies in heaven (See Ep 1:7). His was a “*once for all*” offering that needed never to be repeated again as those offerings on the annual day of atonement at the tabernacle. Through His blood offering, He “*obtained eternal redemption*” for all those who would come into contact with His life-giving blood. Though His offering occurred two thousand years ago, everyone today has the privilege and opportunity to come into contact with His blood through their obedience to the gospel.

Through His offering, He ob-

tained “*eternal redemption*” for us. Again we must honor the definition of quality in reference to the Greek word *ionios* (“eternal”). The secondary definition of time without end must not lead us to ignore the primary meaning in this text in reference to redemption. And the primary meaning is the quality of that which was produced by His onetime blood offering.

He accomplished redemption at the cross at one time for all time. In other words, the offering of the blood does not have to be continually offered. It was a onetime blood offering for our redemption, the effects of which will continue without end. When He made the offering, He entered into the Holy of Holies of heaven. There will never again be a sacrificial blood offering for our sins.

The ceremonial offering of the “*blood of goats and bulls*” at the tabernacle may have set apart the “*fleshly*” priests to have obediently obeyed the law, but the onetime “*blood of Christ*” cleanses forever the conscience in reference to sin (1 Jn 1:7). The legal works of the priests of the Sinai law were “*dead works*” in reference to justifying them before God through the legal performance of making the offerings. But the “*eternal redemption*” of the offering of the blood of the Son of God cleanses all those who come to Him through faith.

By faith, the priests were cleansed by the blood of Jesus in prospect. God now absolves our sins through the offering of Christ because of our obedience to the gospel (See Rm 6:3-6).

Through His offering, therefore, the incarnate and ascended Son of God was qualified to be the “*mediator of the new covenant*” (See 1 Tm 2:5). We sometimes marginalize this function of Jesus through His blood. We often forget “*that by means of death*” He gave His blood “*for the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*” This would include the sins of Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, the faithful priests, and all others who walked by faith before the cross. Even the Gentiles who walked by faith were cleansed in prospect of the cross (See Rm 2:12-16).

Those who were righteous through faith before the cross were made saints at the cross, for at the cross there was the total cleansing of all their sins. It was Christ 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).

D. Blood-ratified covenants (9:16-22):

Covenants are ratified by sacrificial death. The Sinai covenant was ratified by the death of animals (Ex 24:5,6). As in the case of all covenants of man, once the covenant is ratified by blood, then the conditions of the covenant cannot be changed (See Gl 3:15). The Jewish Christians to whom these concepts were directed were familiar with all the information herein written in reference to the tabernacle and the ceremonies that surrounded it. But the writer was bringing his readers to the statement, “*This is the blood of the covenant that God has commanded you.*”

There were Jewish disciples in the presence of Jesus when He stood up during the Last Supper and said, “*For this is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission of sins*” (Mt 26:28). At the time Jesus made this statement, those immediate disciples who were seated in His presence did not fully understand the application of what He said because the statement was made before the gospel of the crucifixion and resurrection. However, the Jewish Christians to whom the Hebrew writer inscribed these words knew exactly what Jesus meant when He spoke in reference to offered blood and Old Testament covenants.

After His offering, Jesus’ blood was this “blood of the covenant” that the apostates were willing to forsake

in order to return to the blood of animals that were continually offered at the altar. They were making the blood of the offered Son of God “*a common thing*” as the blood of bulls and goats (Hb 10:29). If they forsook the blood of the incarnate Son of God, then it would be impossible to renew them again unto a state of salvation (Hb 6:4). They would be forsaking the best for the inferior, and thus, the best would no longer appeal to them.

The premise upon which Jesus offered His blood (death) was in the fact that “*without shedding of blood there is no remission*” (See Lv 17:11). The blood that was shed under the Sinai covenant did not result in the remission of sins, “*for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*” (Hb 10:4). But it was possible for the blood of the Son of God to cleanse the sins of those who come unto Him through obedience to the gospel (See At 2:38; 22:16). There was no gospel news in the blood of bulls and goats. Only in the blood of Jesus is there gospel cleansing. Nevertheless, the blood of Christ flowed back to the cleansing of those under the Sinai law in order to cleanse those who walked by faith.

E. The final offering (9:23-28):

The physical tabernacle, and those who came unto it, were “puri-

fied” (cleansed) by the blood of bulls and goats only in the sense that they were obedient to the law that required them to make the sacrifices. **Their cleansing was in view of the cleansing blood of Jesus that would come centuries later.** The faith of the people was indicated by their obedience to the law to make the sacrifices. However, the cleansing power of the animals could not reach into the sanctuary of heaven until Jesus took His own blood with Him into the Holy of Holies in heaven.

In order to cleanse spiritual things, there was the need that the heavenly had to come into the flesh of man in order to be offered as an acceptable sacrifice for those who would draw near unto God. For this reason, the “*heavenly things*” demanded “*better sacrifices than*” the sacrifices of the Sinai covenant. No sacrifices that originated from the earth (animal sacrifices) could ever be accepted by God in heaven.

The offered Son of God could not enter into the earthly Holy of Holies of the tabernacle in order to atone for the sins of the people. Since sin was against the One who was in heaven, then it was into heaven that the offered Lamb had to go in order to mediate with His blood on behalf of those on earth. Therefore, He entered “*into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*” No priest

on earth could have done this.

His was an “eternal” (*ionios*) offering in that it was complete and certain, with the results thereof continuing without end. Therefore, it was not “*that He should offer Himself often.*” If He would have needed to offer Himself continually, then it would have been reasonable to start the offering of Himself when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. The fact that the offering was at a point of time in the history of the world teaches the conclusion that the offering was once and for all time for all those who will live on the earth until He comes again.

“*But now once at the end of the ages He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*” The appointed time was the end of national Israel. It was the time in history in which God planned to end Israel by ending the earthly tabernacle and animal sacrifices. “*When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son ... to redeem those who were under law*” (Gl 4:4,5). Once the Son revealed the gospel of His eternal redemption, then those under the Sinai law were delivered unto God through the blood of Jesus Christ (See Gl 3:25).

When the Hebrew writer used the phrase “*end of the ages,*” we now understand that all the earthly tabernacle priests and ceremonies, with the Sinai covenant, were to be summed

up and terminated in Christ. The conclusion to the Hebrew writer’s arguments in reference to Israel, with the Sinai covenant and law, was that all these things that were associated with the Sinai law ceremonies, as well as the covenant with Israel, were to come to an end in Christ. God never intended that Israel should continue as a nation beyond the offered and ascended Son of God. As the covenant was finalized with the establishment of the new covenant, and the Sinai law nailed to the cross, so was the copy of the true terminated in Christ (See Gl 3:26-29). Israel, with all the tabernacle services and priests found their fulfillment in the Christ who was offered once and for all time.

It was appointed for Christ to die once, but there would be no more need of offerings for the sins of men after His sacrifice. This is the gospel of the crucifixion (1 Co 15:2,3). Having ascended into the heavens, He is now functioning as our mediator before God. This is the gospel of His coronation as King of kings. This is the gospel of His priesthood.

But there is yet a final chapter of the gospel to occur. This final chapter will never be written, for it will be experienced eternally by all those who have faithfully submitted to the first official announcement of the gospel on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30.

“*He will appear a second time,*

not to bear sin, but for salvation.” He is coming again in order to collect all those who have faithfully walked in the light of His first revelation (1 Th 4:13-18). He is coming for those who

have been cleansed by His blood that He offered once and for all eternity (1 Jn 1:7). This is a gospel forecast of better things to come.

Chapter 10 THE SUMMATION

The writer now comes to the finality of his arguments against the theology of those who were considering a return to the religion of Judaism. In this final summation, it is not that the possible apostates were “leaving the church.” Throughout the book of Hebrews the focus is not on one leaving the church, but leaving the cause for the church. They were leaving Christ. They were forsaking the blood offering of the Son of God in order to trust in the blood of bulls and goats. They were exchanging the incarnationally offered blood of the Son of God for the blood of animals. Peter was right when he said of such people, “*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 2:22).

A. Inadequate blood (10:1-4):

The Sinai law was the shadow of the gospel to come. It was not the

substance of gospel things, for there is no comparison between animal blood and the blood of an incarnate God. For this reason, the sacrifices of animal blood “*can never with the same sacrifices they offered year by year continually make perfect those who draw near.*” There was no cleansing power in any animal sacrifice. If there were, then sacrifices of animals would “*have ceased to be offered.*”

The people who came to the altar of animal sacrifices knew that something was wrong with their sacrifices. They reasoned that no sacrifice of an animal could cleanse sins against God. Therefore, the worshipers continually felt the guilt of their sins regardless of the sacrifices. They had no satisfaction in the animal sacrifices themselves, though they continued to make the sacrifices because of their faith in God who commanded them to do so. Nevertheless, their sacrifices were “*a reminder of sins*” for which they could receive no atonement.

Since it is “*not possible that the blood of bulls and goats*” could take away sin, the people concluded that there had to be a better sacrifice to come. Though this better sacrifice was not completely revealed to those who lived before the cross, God had given them enough information through prophecy that something greater was coming (Is 53; Ps 22; see Hb 1:1,2).

B. Adequate incarnational blood (10:5-10):

“*Sacrifice and offering*” of that which was of this world could never be a sufficient sacrifice for that which is not of this world. Therefore, the Son said to the Father, “*A body you have prepared for Me.*” This is the gospel of the incarnation. Since the Holy Spirit referred to what He had previously inspired to be written in Psalm 40:6-8, He added in this text what He meant in the prophecy. A body was to be prepared for the One who came to do the will of the Father, thus making Psalm 40 a prophecy of the incarnation of the Son of God. The angel said to shepherds of a woman who had been carried unto birth by the Spirit-conceived babe that had been prepared for His birth into the world, “*I bring you good tidings [news] of great joy that will be to all the people. For to you a Savior is*

born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:10,11). This babe would be the desired sacrifice of the Father who sent His only begotten Son to be an offering for the world.

Since God had “*no pleasure*” in the offering of animal blood, He sought for pleasure in the offering of His own Son. Consequently, “*He gave His only begotten Son*” (Jn 3:16). It was written in prophecy that this was the will of the Father (See Is 53; Ps 22).

Jesus’ sacrificial offering was not some accident whereupon some supposed earthly kingdom reign of King Jesus was postponed until He came again. From the very beginning of time, it was intended that the offering of the incarnate Son should take place for the sins of the people. This was in the meaning of what the Spirit said through Peter: “*He [Jesus Christ] indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you*” (1 Pt 1:20). The sacrificial blood offering of the Son of God was not an accident. It was foreordained and predestined by God, regardless of the Jews’ acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah (See Jn 1:11).

Though the offerings of the Levitical priesthood were “*offered according to law,*” God still did not desire them. Though He was the author

of the law, obedience to the law of offering animal sacrifices still resulted in no remission of sins. And because the Father had no pleasure in the animal sacrifices of the law, His Son showed up on earth with a satisfactory sacrifice that would please the Father. Remission took place, therefore, when the Father had pleasure in the sufficient sacrifice of His Son.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus said, “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work*” (Jn 4:34). “*For I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me*” (Jn 6:38; see Jn 17:4). In His coming, therefore, “*He takes away the first [covenant, and its sacrifices] so that He may establish the second*” covenant, with its “once-for-all” sacrifice. In contrast to the blood of bulls and goats that were offered before the cross, “*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*”

C. The perfect sacrifice (10:11-14):

Why would one seek to return to the priest who “*stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices that can never take away sins*” (See Nm 28:3)? This is what perplexed both the writer and ourselves. We must not underestimate the tremendous admiration that some

have for religious ceremonialism. Idolized religious buildings are decorated with curtains and drapes. Pulpits are polished. Performing presenters stand in neatly tailored suits and exhort their audiences with eloquent smooth and fair speech. All this modern-day religious ceremonialism is performed for a God-Savior who gave up being in spirit in a heavenly environment to become the flesh of carnal man. He was introduced to the world by a camel-hair clothed prophet who ate grasshoppers dipped in honey (Mt 3:4). The incarnate offering was propagated to the world through men who counted all their former religious ceremonialism and pomp as rubbish (See Mk 10:28; Ph 3:7-9). In contrast to the incarnational Savior and first messengers, religion has a tremendous appeal to the carnal aspirations of religious people to seek to be someone important.

The vanity of self-sanctifying offerings for sin under the Sinai law was revealed in the sufficient offering of “*one sacrifice for sins forever.*” And after the offering at the cross, it was time for the offered One to sit down at the right hand of God (See Ps 110:1; Cl 3:1). All those animal offerings became meaningless in view of the eternal offering of the incarnate Son of God. All of our self-sanctifying efforts to do likewise are meaningless when offered to subsidize the

incarnate blood of God.

We must now envision the gospel reign of Jesus at the right hand of God. We must see Him there “*waiting until His enemies are made His footstool.*” We conclude rightly, therefore, that He will be reigning continuously until the last enemy, which is death, is destroyed (1 Co 15:26). But the word “until” assumes an end of His present heavenly reign. And this is exactly what the Holy Spirit revealed in another context:

When all things are subjected to Him, then will the Son also Himself be subject to Him who put all things under Him, so that God may be all and in all (1 Co 15:28).

The gospel reign that now exists will terminate with the final chapter of the gospel. After the final resurrection of all from the dead at the time of His final coming, King Jesus will be Jesus among His brethren in order “*that God may be all and in all.*” At that time He will “*deliver [from death] those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*” (Hb 2:15). It will be after He has brought “*many sons to glory*” through the resurrection that He will continue in His incarnate body in which He was “*made like His brethren*” (Hb 2:10). “*It has not yet been revealed what we will be [when*

He comes again]. *But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is*” (1 Jn 3:2; see 1 Th 4:13-18).

But until that time, He continues to sanctify us with His offered blood in order to perfect “*forever those who are being sanctified*” (1 Jn 1:7).

D. The perfect remission (10:15-18).

The Holy Spirit gave His witness through inspired words. He confirmed with words the testimony of what God would do through the sufficient sacrifice of His Son. God said, “*I will put My laws on their hearts, and on their minds I will write them.*”

Unlike the old covenant where the children had to be taught the law of God after having been born into a national covenant relationship with God, under the new covenant those who would respond to the gospel would already know the law of God. Their knowledge of the gospel was what motivated them to obey the gospel. It is still the testimony of the written word of the Holy Spirit that we have a witness to the events of the gospel (See 1 Co 15:1-4).

Once an individual obeyed the gospel in his baptism for remission of sins (At 2:38), the Hebrew writer reassured his readers with the promise of God that “*their sins and iniq-*

uities I will remember no more.”

Since remission is accomplished when one washes away his sins in the waters of baptism (At 22:16), then there is no more the need to continue offerings in order to sanctify one’s self of sin. This is the victory of the gospel over the self-sanctifying efforts of ceremonial religion. The religionist believes that his or her sins are continually remitted through self-sanctifying works of atonement. But the one who lives by the gospel that he has obeyed finds assurance in the remission of sins through the blood of Jesus that was once and for all time offered at the cross. In living the gospel, *“there is no longer an offering for sin,”* for Jesus accomplished a sufficient offering for all sin for all time at the cross. It is His blood that comes from His offering that continues to cleanse us daily of all sin (1 Jn 1:7).

E. Boldness in the blood (10:19-25):

The conclusion to the sufficiency of the offered blood of Jesus should inspire the following: We can have *“boldness to enter into the holy place [the Holy of Holies in heaven] by the blood of Jesus”* (See Hb 9:8). The Jewish brethren to whom the writer addressed these words had to realize that animal blood could never take one to where the blood of Jesus can. Animal blood will never take one into

the inner sanctuary of God’s dwelling.

Only through the blood of Jesus can Christians have a *“new and living way”* into the “Holy of holies” of God. Through the sacrifice of the incarnate flesh that was offered from the birth of Jesus to His ascension, Jesus has shown us the way into the presence of God. During His ministry He proclaimed to the multitudes, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me”* (Jn 14:6).

Since we have a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, then we have access to the one mediator between God and man (1 Tm 2:5). *“For through Him [Jesus] we both have access by one Spirit to the Father”* (Ep 2:18).

The readers had already tasted of the heavenly gift and the good word of God (Hb 6:4,5). Such were the blessings of their obedience to the gospel that brought them into the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19,20). But there seems to have been some questions on their part concerning their access and acceptance by God in His realm of grace in which they were spiritually residing. And because of this lack of assurance in His grace, they seem to be harboring a longing to return to the self-sanctifying satisfaction of religion, particularly the ceremonial sac-

rifices of Judaism. But now the writer seeks to spur them on to faith in the offering to which they had originally responded many years before. He thus encouraged them to “*draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith*” in the grace of God.

Their “*evil conscience*” had formerly been cleansed through repentance. They had been “*washed with pure water*” in the waters of baptism (At 22:16). The writer uses the word “pure” to emphasize that as the clean waters for the ceremonial cleansings in Judaism, their baptismal water washed away every sin. There was total remission in the cleansing blood of Jesus. Dirty water would have left some residue. But the symbolism of “pure water” meant that there was absolutely no residue of sin left when they came out of the waters of baptism for the remission of their sins. God had washed every sin away in the “pure waters” of baptism (At 22:16). They could continue to walk in the newness of life because they were completely cleansed when they were raised into Christ (See Rm 6:3-6).

Our faithfulness is contingent on the faithfulness of Jesus. And since Jesus has been a faithful servant for our sin and separation from God, then we must continue faithful as He did by not turning back from the cross. His faith took Him to the cross, and our faith must continue to connect us

to Him at the cross in order that we end up where He now is.

When one is involved in religion, he believes that this faithfulness is contingent on the legal performances of his religious rites and rituals. But when one lives the gospel, his motivation to continue faithful is in his realization that he must never question the faithfulness of Jesus. Therefore, the closer we move to King Jesus in His present function as our High Priest, the more faithful we become. The further we move away from the gospel kingship and priesthood of Jesus, the further we move into religion and doubt. It was in this situation that many of the readers found themselves. The exhortation of the Hebrew scribe, therefore, is to “*hold fast to the confession of our faith without wavering.*” “*For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind*” (Js 1:6).

The writer did not leave us without a fundamental answer as to how we can hold on to our confession that Jesus continue to be the Lord of our lives. The means to maintain our confession to follow Jesus is that we first “*consider one another.*” Narcissistic disciples have a difficult time remaining faithful to Jesus through their commitment to others. Narcissistic religionists seek to create a religion after their own desires. They seek to worship God according to their own

religious rites and rituals. They forget that God seeks for those worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).

Narcissistic worshipers see themselves as the center of reference in their faith, and thus, they take their eyes off others and Jesus in order to focus on themselves. This is the resounding problem with religionists. The narcissistic religionist assumes that he can self-sanctify himself through the religious performances that he has bound on himself, or the experience of a self-centered worship. If through the performance of his religion he can find assurance to approach God, then he will move past the gospel of God's grace in order to focus on his experiential religiosity.

Contrary to this vain worship by which we might merit God's approval, those who live by faith in the gospel of Jesus realize that the only means by which to maintain a relationship with Jesus is to maintain a relationship with others who are unselfishly living by faith. When we consider one another, we are thus looking to others in the mutual assurance of one another's faith.

Those who seriously consider others will seek to "*stir up love and good works.*" This is the mutual responsibility of those who have obedience to the gospel in common with one another. This mutual responsi-

bility is not an option in living the gospel. It is not a unique ministry. It is not a relational responsibility that can be assigned to another and paid for with a paycheck.

Stirring up love and good works is the function of the Christian community. It is the identity of being a disciple of Christ. It is by this mutual spiritual benevolence that Jesus said, "*By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*" (Jn 13:35). Many years after Jesus made this statement, and possibly only a few years after the Hebrew writer exhorted his readers, the apostle John wrote, "*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*" (1 Jn 3:16).

The preceding objective can be accomplished only if we not forsake "*the assembling of ourselves together.*" No cellphone or computer can replace eye to eye contact. There is no virtual assembly in Christianity, and never will be. The electronic world may enhance the contact that Christians have with one another, but "digital connectivity" can never be a substitute for true "facebook" contact with one another in a personal assembly with one another. It is truly hypocritical for one to say that he or she seeks a great relationship with Jesus when there is little personal relation-

ship with one's brothers and sisters in Christ. There is no such thing as a willful hermit Christian.

When disciples come together to organize and encourage good works, the natural habit of some is to stay away. This is especially true of those who do not walk in gratitude of the gospel. When there are those who seek to encourage a meeting at the temple courtyard in order to preach the gospel of Jesus as the Christ, there will always be those who will shun the assembly for such (See At 5:42).

It is perfectly logical that the exhortation of Hebrews 10:24,25 is placed in the context of reaffirming again all that the incarnate Son of God did for us in reference to our burden of sin. Those who have little appreciation for their salvation, will have little motivation to assemble and rejoice with others who have responded with gratitude to the gospel of His death for our sins and resurrection for our hope. If one is not living in gratitude of what Jesus did through the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, then there is little impetus to assemble together with others. There is little motivation to assemble with others in order to be encouraged to love those who seek to worship God in thanksgiving of what God did by loving us through His Son.

All the encouragement the Hebrew writer was offering was in view

of what Jesus said of “*that day*” in reference to His presence (“coming”) in the consummation of national Israel, Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. It was a day that Jesus did not know during His earthly ministry (Mt 24:36). However, the calamity that was coming upon national Israel was so great and traumatic for the Jews, that Jesus prepared His Jewish disciples with some signs that would indicate the coming time for the consummation of national Israel (Mt 24:19,22,29,37).

It would be in those days that the evil Jewish persecutors of Christians would be taken away as the wicked generation during Noah's time was taken from the earth and Noah was spared (See Mt 24:37). Jesus prophesied of the time: “*They [the wicked] did not understand until the flood came and took them all away. So also will be the coming [presence] of the Son of man*” in the consummation of national Israel (Mt 24:39). In the flood, it was the wicked who were taken, and the righteous who were left. However, when Jesus comes in His final coming, the righteous will be taken and the wicked will be left to be consumed in the lake of fire (1 Th 4:13-18; Rv 19:20; 20:10,14,15)

In our present generation of theologically confused prognosticators, they too do not understand these things. It would be the wicked who

were taken away in the destruction of national Israel, and the righteous left. False prophets today also do not understand that both Jesus and the Hebrew scribe were speaking of a calamity that would happen in the generation of the first century Christians (See Mk 9:1). As these Christians witnessed the signs of the times that Jesus had given in the prophecy of Matthew 24 (Lk 21), they knew that His prophecy was near unto being fulfilled. For this reason, the writer of Hebrews inscribed words of warning. All the Christians of that generation could “*see the day approaching*” for the consummation of national Israel.

They believed the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 (Lk 21). Those who did not, would be caught up in the destruction. The Jewish historian Josephus, who wrote during those times, calculated that hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed in the final calamity of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. We wonder if some of those to whom the Hebrew writer directed his words, but refused to be warned, were not also among the dead because they returned to Judaism. If they turned back to loyalty to national Israel and the temple sacrifices, then they too would be consumed in the destruction.

F. Stomping on the blood of the incarnate God (10:26-31):

Since this chapter is the final argument of the writer in defense of the gospel priesthood of the offered High Priest Jesus, then this section of statements is the Holy Spirit’s final warning to everyone who would consider any substitutions for the gospel. The Holy Spirit’s statements here are stern and straightforward. If one has any understanding of the incarnational offering of God in the flesh of man in order to give Himself for our eternal dwelling, then certainly the words of this context are appropriate. They are directed to anyone who would consider turning away from the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are speaking of those who “*sin willfully after*” they “*have received the knowledge of the truth*” of the gospel. This is not the truth of an outline of doctrine that must be legally obeyed in order to earn one’s self into the grace of God. The statements of this context are about the “*truth of the gospel*,” not the violation of some “*church doctrine*” (See Gl 2:5,14; Cl 1:5). In fact, there is no mention of the disciples as “*the church*” throughout the book of Hebrews. There is no mention about “*falling from the church*,” or “*leaving the church*.” This exhortation and admonition is about the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who is now King and Priest. If a Christian willfully turns from this King and Priest, then “*there no longer*

remains a sacrifice for sins.” He has forsaken the very foundation upon which the church is based.

What is in store for the ungrateful apostate is “*a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries.*” We assume, therefore, that those who turn away are now “adversaries” of the truth of the gospel. Their apostasy brings shame on the name of Jesus, and thus an embarrassment to faithful Christians.

Whether reference here is to the fiery destruction of Jerusalem, or the fiery destruction at the end of time, the result is the same (See 2 Pt 3:10). In the gospel of His final coming, “*the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire*” (2 Th 1:7).

Those who “*set aside Moses’ law*” did not escape punishment when their apostasy was confirmed with “*the testimony of two or three witnesses*” (See Dt 17:2-6; 19:15). But that was the law of a covenant that God had established only with the nation of Israel. It was ratified with the blood of animals. But if one were to “set aside,” ignore, and walk away from the new covenant that was established through the blood offering of the incarnate Son of God, then it would only be logical that more severe punishment was deserving. The writer had previously warned, “*How*

will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation” (Hb 2:3)? The fact is that one will not escape the severe punishment that is awaiting those who walk away from the blood of Jesus.

We must keep in mind that the more one becomes entrenched in his religion, the further he moves away from trusting totally in the sanctifying blood of Jesus. This is true because religion is a system of self-justification that is based on an attempt to sanctify one’s self through meritorious works or religious performances. Therefore, this context of warning should be a wake-up call for those religionists who suppose that they can self-sanctify themselves through religious rites and rituals that they have bound on themselves in order to atone for their own sins.

When one creates works of righteousness by which he would supposedly justify himself before God, then he is walking away from the sufficient blood offering of the incarnate Son of God. In the zeal of his now self-sanctifying righteousness, he has trodden under foot the righteousness of God that we have through the sanctification of the cross. He “*has counted as a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace.*” This was the result of the apostasy of those to whom the Hebrew writer was addressing this stern warning.

Some were considering a return to the self-justifying religion of Judaism (See Gl 1:13). We would correctly assume, however, that an apostasy to any self-sanctifying religion would reap the same judgment that is revealed in this text.

The writer affirms that apostates deserve the vengeance of God. And so, “*Vengeance is Mine. I will repay, says the Lord.*” “*The Lord will judge His people*” who have “*trodden under foot the Son of God.*” The Hebrew writer could not have given a more stern warning. “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*”

If one would dare stomp on the blood of the Son of God by exchanging gospel for religion, then he has fallen into the hands of a vengeful God. He should thus expect “severe punishment” when Jesus comes again. There will be no mercy for those who have turned from the gospel of God’s grace in an attempt to justify themselves by the performance of their own religiosity. We must keep in mind that the more we perform our religion to justify ourselves, the less we consider Jesus to have performed sufficiently on the cross for us. The more we try to self-sanctify ourselves, the less we consider His sanctification sufficient for us by the shedding of His blood. The more we seek to justify ourselves through meritorious

works of law, the less we consider His justification sufficient at the cross.

G. Remember (10:32-39):

Sometimes a doubtful Christian must remember the sacrifice that he or she formerly paid in order to become a Christian, and to remain faithful those first few years of his or her gospel walk. In this case, the readers needed to “*remember the former days, after you were enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings.*” They “*were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations.*” The readers had formerly fellowshiped with those who were likewise persecuted for righteousness sake. Therefore, they should be asked the same question that Paul asked the Galatians: “*Have you suffered so many things in vain*” (Gl 3:4)?

In the early days of their discipleship, they took “*joyfully the seizure*” of their possessions. Their persecutors confiscated what they owned. In such a situation, they “*became companions with those who were so treated.*” They even had compassion on the writer while he was in prison for the gospel (See Ph 1:7; 2 Tm 1:16). They had truly lived the encouragement of Jesus when He said, “*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who*

were before you” (Mt 5:12). And in like manner, and with the following words, James encouraged those who also endured hard times: “*Count it all joy when you fall into various trials*” (Js 1:2). But some of the Hebrew readers now seem to have forgotten the excitement of the beginning of their discipleship many years before.

If their confidence remains in the blood of Jesus and the gospel reign of His kingship and priesthood, then they should not easily cast away this assurance that comes through gospel living. Most of their fellow Jews did not obey the gospel. The intimidation of disobedient nationalistic Jews should not discourage them. The destruction of Jerusalem will come and go. But it will be after the destruction that “*the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Mt 13:43).

Those who would even consider turning back to religion, specifically the religion of Judaism, “*have need of endurance.*” The disciples in Smyrna were exhorted by Jesus, “*Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life*” (Rv 2:10). There will be no crown for those who do not endure the life of living the gospel.

The statement in the context that they lacked “endurance” may be a reminder of what Jesus said in the context of His prophecy concerning the consummation of national Israel in

A.D. 70: “*In your endurance you will gain your souls*” (Lk 21:19). This was true in reference to maintaining one’s gospel living during the consummation of national Israel. It is also true in reference to waiting for the gospel revelation of Jesus from heaven in His final coming. We must keep in mind that we will not receive the final blessings of the promise unless we endure unto the end (See Cl 3:24).

James, Peter, and the Hebrew writer did not mislead their readers with false hopes concerning a supposed imminent final return of Jesus. James, Peter and the Hebrew writer were writing to the same people. They were all writing to Jews, particularly to Jewish Christians. In all three letters, the writers referred to the consummation of national Israel in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 and Luke 21.

All three writers were writing in the middle 60s. Peter alerted his Jewish readers with the words, “*But the end of all things is **at hand***” (1 Pt 4:7). James wrote to the same culture of people, “*The coming of the Lord is **near***” (Js 5:8). And to Jewish readers, the writer inscribed the words, “*For yet **a little while**, and He who will come will come and will not tarry.*” **None of these writers by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit deceived their readers into believing**

that Jesus was coming in His final coming in their lifetime. To twist these statements to refer to the final coming of Jesus would reveal that the interpreter does not understand that Jesus would come in judgment **in time** on national Israel. This coming would occur in the lifetime of the early disciples.

The Jewish readers of Hebrews must not be deceived into believing that the Sinai covenant and law were God’s final covenant and law for mankind. They were only the means to the end, and the end was in Christ. The Sinai covenant and law were not the end within themselves, as many Jews believed, and still believe. Jesus Christ was the end of the law, and thus the change agent from the old law to the new law (Hb 7:12).

Therefore, those who are justified before God *“will live by faith”* in the grace of God that was revealed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, if anyone walks away from Christ, God says, *“My soul will have no pleasure in him.”* The writer thus encouraged his readers to join with him and others who *“are not of those who draw back to destruction.”*

If they turned back, they can look forward only to the “severe punishment” of the destruction of Jerusalem. In reference to the end of time, those who have not obeyed the gospel *“will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power”* (2 Th 1:9). One should be urged, therefore, to join with *“those who believe to the saving of the soul.”*

Chapter 11 HEROES OF FAITH

The introduction to the following commendation of faith in this chapter is Genesis 3:15. In order to conclude his arguments for the present gospel reign and priesthood of Jesus, the Hebrew writer takes his readers on a journey of faith that eventually brought the sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God to the cross. After Adam and Eve had separated themselves from the Creator through their will-

ful sin, the Creator revealed the final solution for sin that had been planned before the creation of the world (1 Pt 1:20). God had planned that all the sins of mankind in the history of the world would find absolution in the incarnate blood of the Son of God. Therefore, after the sin of Adam and Eve, God said to Satan that He had set in motion His plan to bring man back into His fellowship:

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and **her Seed**. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise His heel (Gn 3:15).*

And thus, the “seedline war” began between good and evil. Hebrews 11 is about the preservation of the seedline of woman until the revelation of the Seed in the fullness of time who would crush the head of Satan (Gl 4:4). This was a mortal conflict between God and Satan. Throughout the conflict, Satan sought to destroy the Seed of woman who would bruise his head.

Satan was almost victorious at one time in history when he had brought humanity to the brink of extinction: “*God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that **every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually***” (Gn 6:5).

At this time in the history of the human race, there was only one man and his family who spared the seedline of humanity. Through the faith of Noah, the seedline of woman survived the wickedness of humanity, and thus continued until it was restricted to the posterity of Abraham. From the Garden of Eden to the cross, it was faith that won the day. Faith carried those who had received the promise through all the attacks that

Satan could launch against the seedline of woman.

The writer of Hebrews placed the content of this chapter on faith in the context of those who were losing their faith in the fulfillment of the seedline promise. He sought to shame his readers by reminding them of the great struggles that their forefathers of faith had endured in order to bring the Seed of woman into their lives through their obedience to the gospel of the Seed. He does this by listing several “heroes of faith” who lived throughout the centuries, if not millennia, before the arrival of the incarnate Seed of woman in Bethlehem. If his readers forsook the blood of the Seed of woman, they would be forsaking millennia of faithful servants of God who had given their lives in order that the readers might be blessed.

His readers had received all the blessings that were preached by the first witnesses of the ministry of the Son of God. They had heard His teachings through the apostles, and witnessed the confirmation of His word by the miraculous manifestations of His first disciples. Because of all the testimonies of those who had personally experienced and heard the message of the Seed, they responded to His wondrous atonement at the cross.

They also had the testimony of those who witnessed His ascension

into heaven. But the heroes of faith who remained faithful in their efforts to preserve the seedline of woman until His entrance into the world did not have the knowledge of the revealed Seed that the readers enjoyed. The faithful warriors of the past were being ignored by those who should have by this time become teachers of these things (Hb 5:12). The heroes of faith had not received the wondrous blessings that the readers had received, and thus, their faithfulness in the midst of great struggles shamed the Hebrew readers.

Some of the readers were turning away from those faithful patriarchs of their past who struggled so much to maintain God's promise of the coming Seed who would bruise the head of Satan. The writer would conclude, "*God having provided some better thing for us, so that they apart from us would not be made perfect*" (Hb 11:40). All those who walk by faith in all history depend on the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Seed of woman who was nailed to the cross. If the readers did not remain faithful, then their own posterity would be lost. Their unfaithfulness would lead to the loss of thousands of souls throughout the world. If the cross of Jesus was not the consummation of the faith of those who went before, then none of us are made perfect by the blood of Jesus.

The faithfulness of the patriarchs was a testimony that God had revealed that a Blessing was coming in their future (Hb 1:1,2). The faith of the faithful was established on the word of the patriarchs, whereas the immediate readers of this document lived after the fulfillment of what had been prophesied. The immediate readers, therefore, should be ashamed for even doubting the gospel of the incarnate Seed of God. Their apostasy was inexcusable. This was the message the Hebrew writer wanted to reveal in order to shock his readers into reality. They needed to be reminded that the seedline war that began in a long forgotten garden, was now consummated in the Christ from whom they were willing to walk away for the spilled blood of animal sacrifices.

A. The evidence of faith (11:1-3):

If there is no evidence, then faith is superstition. God does not call on us to have a blind faith. He has always provided evidence lest His people be carried away by the superstitions of religion. Therefore, faith can be "*the substance of things hoped for*" only if there is evidence upon which faith is established. In reference to the message of the gospel that was preached to all the world by the early messengers of the gospel, God bore "*witness with them, both with*

signs and wonders and with various powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Hb 2:4). The evidence of the supernatural behind the message brought alive the hope that was in the message. “*We hope for what we do not see*” in the future because of the empirically substantiated message of the gospel in the past (See Rm 8:24). We have in our hands the written testimony of those whose faith was built on evidence.

Our faith not only encourages us to be hopeful of things in the future, it also turns our minds back to the very beginning when all things were created. Because the faith of the fathers was validated with supernatural evidences from God, then we can with assurance believe “*that the things that are seen were not made of things that are visible.*”

In the creation, God brought into existence those things we perceive in the material world from that which does not appear to the empirical senses of men (See Ps 33:6). Our faith is “*evidence of things not seen*” because God revealed to the empirical senses of the forefathers that which could be perceived. Because God worked miraculously in the lives of the early messengers of Jesus (Mk 16:20), we can trust them when they speak of things that were beyond their own experience. The written word of God, therefore, is our research library

for evidences upon which we can base our faith (See Jn 20:30,31).

B. The heroes of faith (11:4-12):

The writer now reviews the faith of men and women who lived centuries before who did not have all the confirming evidences that the immediate readers had through the miraculous confirmation of the gospel (Hb 2:4). Since the readers were not new in the faith, and the letter of Hebrews was written at least thirty-five years after the cross, we would assume that there were no eyewitnesses of Jesus and His resurrection in their midst. They witnessed only the miracles of the early messengers who had come to them (See Mk 16:20). Since we have the record of the miraculous confirmation of those early messengers, then we too would be without excuse if we turned back from that which God confirmed through them.

In his record of the gospel ministry of Jesus, John recorded only seven of Jesus’ miraculous wonders. However, the Holy Spirit expected that these seven miraculous witnesses of Jesus and His message should be sufficient to produce faith that would result in eternal life (See Jn 20:30,31).

In order that the faith of the patriarchs bear witness to scenes in the background concerning the seedline war between God and Satan, the

writer now focuses on the frontline combatants of this war. These were those faithful men and women who stood against the greatest opposition that Satan had to offer in order to destroy the seedline of woman, from which seedline would come the Seed into the world who would crush Satan. Because of their faith in the God who promised the bruising of the head of Satan, they were victorious over all obstacles that were put in the way of their walk of faith.

1. Abel believed and obeyed:

Abel's blood offering began the animal sacrifices that would millennia later be consummated in the blood sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God who would end forever all blood sacrifices. Abel was obedient in his faith because he *"offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."* His sacrifice was more excellent in that he offered that which was right according to the commandment of God. In offering a blood sacrifice, therefore, *"he was more righteous"* than Cain (Gn 4:3-5).

The foreordained blood sacrifice of the only begotten Son of God was from the very beginning embedded in the animal sacrifices that God commanded man to offer. Abel died millennia ago, but His obedient faith to honor commanded sacrifices still speaks today that faith without obe-

dience to God's instructions is dead (See Js 2:14-26).

2. Enoch believed and obeyed:

Prior to the flood of Noah's day, Enoch *"was taken up so that he would not see death."* He was taken directly by God because *"he pleased God"* through his obedience (See Gn 5:21-24). *"Enoch walked with God. And he was not, for God took him"* (Gn 5:24). God simply took him out of a wicked world for which there was no hope of repentance.

Interlude

The writer places in the middle of his list of heroes of faith the interlude of verse 6 in order to express an absolute: *"Without faith it is impossible to please"* God. Acceptable faith is based on two prerequisites: (1) Those who come *"to God must believe that He is."* (2) Those who come to God must believe that *"He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."* Based upon these two necessities for acceptable faith, we believe that God is true to His word.

One's faith in the existence of God is dead, therefore, if there is no seeking after God. With this absolute, the writer establishes the foundation upon which one must continue to live by faith, regardless of the trials that continually face us in life. Unless one responds to the God who so loved the world through the offering

of His Son, in the eyes of God, he or she is really not a believer unless he or she continues to live the gospel in the midst of great trials.

The entire context of Hebrews 11 is built on giving examples of those who persevered. Faith in God must be expressed in faithful obedience. It was the perseverance of all those who are listed in this chapter that eventually led to the fulfillment of the seedline promise in the birth of the Seed of woman who was God's ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

3. Noah believed and obeyed:

Since the earth before the flood of Noah's day was watered by a mist that came up from the ground (Gn 2:6), Noah still believed God's word of a coming flood that would somehow overthrow the world (See 1 Pt 3:20; 2 Pt 2:5; 3:5,6). Though he did not fully understand what was coming, he believed. The flood would be a flood that was produced by rain that he had never before experienced (See Gn 6:13-22). Nevertheless, he believed in "*things not yet seen.*" He believed and obeyed in that which was beyond his empirical understanding and experiences. By his actions of obedience in preparing the ark, he preached a message of condemnation to those who claimed to believe in God, but did not repent (1 Pt 3:20).

Through his obedient faith, Noah

preserved the posterity of humanity for the coming "righteousness of God." Noah thus "*became heir of the righteousness that is according to faith.*" He saved the seedline through his faith in order that the righteousness of God might be revealed to us. After the revelation of the righteousness of God through the Son of God, Paul wrote,

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God that is by the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe (Rm 3:21,22).

"For He [the Father] has made Him [the Son] who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Co 5:21).

4. Abraham believed and obeyed: God had greater things in mind in His use of Abraham than Abraham and the nation that would come from his seed. God was focused on the Seed, not simply the seed of Abraham. This is profoundly revealed in one statement that Paul made to some Jewish Christians who believed that the seed of Abraham was the finality of God's promises. Paul wrote, "*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not*

say, ‘*And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to your seed, who is Christ*’ (Gl 3:16).

The promise that would come through the seed of Abraham was beyond the seed of Abraham. The Christ would come through the seed of Abraham, but it was Abraham’s faith that preserved his seedline in order that the finality of the promises would be fulfilled in the Blessing that came from his seedline, that is, Christ.

When Abraham was called to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldeas (Gn 11:31), he obediently moved out on the command of God (Gn 12:1-4). His faith moved him into regions where he and Sarah had never been. It was by the motivation of his obedient faith that the couple journeyed to live as expatriates in what would later become the land of promise. It was a promised possession of land for his descendants. It would be in this land that God would preserve his seed until the coming of the Seed. Once the Seed came, then the land promise was fulfilled. The descendants of the Seed would need no land to preserve their heritage, for the descendants of the Seed would go into all the world (Mk 16:15; see Mt 13:36-38).

In Ur, Abraham and Sarah lived in sun-baked brick houses with running water. Nevertheless, the couple journeyed as tent dwellers when they left the comforts of their city living

(Gn 12:8; 13:3,18; 18:1,9). Abraham made the journey, not because he was focused on a promised land of this world, but because God had revealed to him “*a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*”

4. Sarah believed and obeyed:

In her old age of about one hundred years, Sarah’s womb was able, against nature, to produce a seed by which she eventually “*bore a child when she was past age*” (Gn 17:19; 18:11-14; 21:1,2). Her faith was based on the fact that she believed that when God had promised something, he was able also to fulfill His promises (Hb 10:23). Therefore, because both Abraham and Sarah believed the promises of God, from the couple came the great Hebrew nation, whose descendants filled the earth (See Gn 15:5; 22:17; 32:12).

We must not leave the Hebrew writer’s review of Abraham and Sarah without going into some detail of what they left in order to preserve for us the gospel of the Seed. What they left in their lives in Ur epitomizes the greatness of their faith in what God promised (See At 7:1-4). They both possibly grew up in Ur of the Chaldeas. Therefore, both left their homeland in obedience as the first missionaries of the gospel Blessing to go into a foreign country. They left their local home of bricks in order to be wandering expatriates the rest of

their lives as tent-dwellers in foreign countries. They left all their friends, relatives and cultural familiarity and roamed by faith.

Abraham took with him his father, Terah, and moved to Haran. But when his father died in Haran, he and Sarah moved on to the land of the wicked Canaanites. He and Sarah were beaming lights for God in a land of spiritual darkness. They lived by faith throughout this nomadic life, never to return to the friends and relatives of their homeland again. They lived the life that would accomplish God’s gospel mission to the world, for God promised, “*And in you will all families of the earth be blessed*” (Gn 12:3).

Therefore, we are studying through this book of Hebrews because a man and woman of faith left their homeland and families in order to live in tents as missionaries in a foreign land until the day they died. And on top of this, these two heroes of faith “*died in faith, not having received the promises.*” They never realized the Blessing of the seedline that was brought into existence when Sarah gave birth to Isaac. She not only gave birth to Isaac, she also gave birth to a seedline from which would eventually come the Seed who would bless all nations of the world. We need to give pause to these things for a moment.

Interlude **(11:13-16)**

The few statements of this interlude are focused on the nature of acceptable faith that is pleasing to God. The writer exemplifies the true nature of faith. The previous examples of faithfuls “*never received the promises*” (Hb 11:39). They never realized that for which they hoped. They had only “*seen them afar off.*” But because of their faith, they “*were assured of them and embraced them*” (See Jn 8:58). They embraced the promises of God in order to preserve a faith that would eventually end in the birth of the incarnate Son of God.

This is what genuine faith will produce in the hearts of those who truly believe in God’s promise that those who remain faithful will receive the final rest of heaven. But in order to maintain this genuine faith, they “*confessed that they were foreigners and pilgrims on the earth*” (Ps 39:12). The heroes of faith realized that this world was not their final place of dwelling. God had revealed to them that this life was not all that He had in store for those who live by faith in His promises.

Attacks against our faith, therefore, are not because God has not clearly defined the promises. The problem is our attitude of finding security in the comforts of this world. Our prosperity often works against

our faith in things that are beyond this world. Abraham and Sarah were able to leave their homeland, friends and relatives because they knew that there was a land beyond that God had promised to his descendants. When one releases oneself from the entrapment of the possessions of this world, he or she is driven to trust in God. The lives of Abraham and Sarah, therefore, were a clear declaration that their true homeland was the final rest of heaven. And so it should be ours. It is as the song verse reads:

*This world is not my home,
I'm just a passing through.
My treasures are laid up,
somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me,
from heaven's open door.
And I can't feel at home,
in this world anymore*

The strength of the faith of the two missionaries was seated in their obsession with the “homeland” of heaven. “*If they had been thinking of that country from which they came out, they would have*” been tempted to return. But they were not as Lot’s wife who attempted to return to the possessions of her home city (See Gn 19:26). When Abraham and Sarah left Ur of the Chaldeas, it was “good bye” forever to all they owned except a tent. There was no turning back.

So the present tense in the narrative is revealing. “*But now they desire a better country.*” Being in spirit in the arms of God at this time, God is still their God, for God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Mk 12:27). In the care of God, both Abraham and Sarah are waiting for the same “homeland” for which they waited while on earth. We too “*desire a better country*” than any country of this world. Because our desire is for the “heavenly,” “*God is not ashamed to be called*” our God. Because He is proud of us, “*He has prepared a city*” for us in eternal heaven (Rv 21:2). The fact that we long for this “prepared city” identifies us as those about whom God is not ashamed.

B. The result of faith (11:17-31):

In the text, the writer now turns from the definition of obedient faith, to the results of obedient faith. He focuses on the spiritual blessings of those who acted on their faith. Behind the scenes of the heroes’ walk of faith is their conquest over Satan in order to bring humanity to the foot of the cross.

In the first “test” case, Abraham “*was tested.*” We must not consider this a test as to whether he had an obedient faith. He had already revealed such in his walk by faith out

of the city limits of Ur. There was something greater to be revealed in this “test” than the faith of Abraham.

There was prophecy of the gospel in what God requested of Abraham. And because of his faith, Abraham set out to offer up a living sacrifice of his only begotten son (Gn 22; see Js 2:21). In view of God’s promise that “*in Isaac your seed will be called,*” Abraham proceeded to offer up his son in obedience to the command of God.

This son was the seed through whom God had promised to build a nation, and subsequently bring into the world the Blessing that would bless all humanity. Nevertheless, without questioning God, Abraham proceeded to obey the command to offer His son because God had already revealed to the patriarchs the concept of the resurrection, though they had not experienced such. Because of God’s revelation concerning the resurrection from the dead, Abraham “*concluded that God was able to raise*” Isaac from the dead after he had offered him.

But the angel stayed the hand of Abraham from piercing with a sacrificial knife his only begotten son. In all the willingness to obey the offering of his son, the seedline posterity of Abraham needed to remember this graphic ordeal. They needed to tell this story to their children because

there would come a time in the history of Israel when the sacrificial nails would not be stayed from the hands and feet of another “only begotten Son” (Jn 3:16).

From this incident, we assume that God wanted implanted in the memory of every Israelite the fact that their nation was created and preserved to exist for centuries because an only begotten son was spared death. But in the future, a holy nation would be born from humanity when an only begotten Son would not be spared (See 1 Pt 2:5,9).

Because the spared son, Isaac, realized the heritage that would be carried on through the legacy of his sons, he in turn “*blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come*” (Gn 27:26-40). The blessing of his son, Jacob, resulted in the continued building of the promise of a great nation that would come forth from the descendants of Abraham. It would of necessity be a great nation because God did not want the seedline nation to become wicked as in the days before the flood of Noah’s day (See Gn 6:5).

To continue the faithful posterity of the seedline of Abraham, Jacob, “*blessed both the sons of Joseph.*” He did so in order to continue the heritage of the seed of Abraham. Through the faith of Joseph, God was able to preserve the heritage of Abraham through the captivity of the Egyptians.

He also prophesied “*of the departing of the children of Israel*” from Egyptian captivity, which they did after dwelling in Egypt for over four hundred years (At 7:6).

The result of Moses’ faith was that God was able to use his leadership to deliver the people of God from the bondage of Egypt. God foreknew the faith of Moses, and thus through the bravery of Moses’ parents, he was preserved as a babe for his God-ordained destiny to deliver the seedline heritage of Abraham from Egyptian captivity (See Ex 1:16,22; 2:1-3).

When he was grown, Moses knew who he was (Ex 2:11-15). He knew his destiny. When one realizes the destiny that God has gifted him to do, then he is able against all odds to carry on in his life to accomplish great things for God. When Moses realized who he was, “*he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king*” (See Ex 10:28,29). Not only that, but “*he endured,*” believing in God who is spirit and cannot be created after the imagination of men (Jn 4:24).

Out of reverence (fear), he observed the commanded Passover when God passed over Israel’s firstborn in order to take the firstborn of all the Egyptians (Ex 12:21). Again, God established a reminder for His people that in their future a firstborn would be offered for the survival of a spiritual Israel that would be delivered

out of the bondage of sin.

And then it was the result of obedient faith that Israel “*passed through the Red Sea as on dry land*” in order to be delivered unto freedom (Ex 14:22-29). It was the result of the faith of Rahab that “*she received the messengers [spies] and sent them out another way*” (Js 2:25). Her faith led to her salvation from death with all her family. Her faith also aided in the conquest of the seedline of Abraham over the wicked Canaanites. Because of her faith, she too would be a hereditary link in the seedline that would eventually lead to the birth of the Seed (See Mt 1:5).

C. Faith in unfulfilled promises (11:32-40):

The list of those who were delivered because of their faith could go on. The writer now turned to those, who through faith, fought to preserve the seedline nation of Israel until the fulfillment of the seedline promise. There was Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the endless number of prophets whose names could be added to the list. These all “conquered,” “worked,” “obtained,” “stopped,” “quenched” and “escaped” in order to perpetuate the seedline nation of Israel that would eventually bring forth the birth of the Savior of the world.

All the preceding verbs are the epitome of those who chose to continue in their faith, regardless of never having received the Blessing that we enjoy today. They were not privileged to see the salvation that was provided by the only begotten Son who was not spared the cross. This list of Old Testament faithfuls, therefore, should shame those readers to whom the Hebrew writer addressed this book. It should shame us for doubting the promise that God yet has in store for the faithful.

In writing these words, the writer was certainly observing the Spirit's instructions: "*And on some who are doubting, have compassion*" (Jd 22). The writer's compassion was revealed in the fact that he wrote the letter before it was too late for some. He wrote before the doubters went back into destruction (Hb 10:38,39).

After his Spirit-guided hand had written many examples of enduring faith, the writer could ask his readers the same question that Jesus asked His disciples who had just experienced His walking on water: "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*" (Mt 14:31). If the disciples could overcome their doubt, then Jesus promised that they could accomplish great things:

Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only

do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you will say to this mountain, "Be removed and cast into the Sea," it will be done (Mt 21:21).

Therefore, after the gospel of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said, "*Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?*" (Lk 24:38). There are those times in our lives when we doubt. But these are times in which we must read the words of Hebrews 11 and witness the result of an enduring faith. And when we do, it is then that we can pray without doubting (1 Tm 2:8). We can pray "*in faith without doubting*" (Js 1:6). The final result of living the gospel without doubt is that we "*might obtain a better resurrection.*"

Though we may endure "mockings," "scourgings," "bonds," "thrown stones," "sawn asunder," "slain by the sword," and wandering about in "sheepskins," "goatskins," being "destitute," "afflicted," and "tormented," we will enjoy the final resurrection that is to come. If the preceding frightens the reader, then he or she should be challenged with the following words of Jesus: "*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*" (Lk 14:27).

Discipleship is not about living a life of comfort. It is about living

the incarnational life of the God who was in spirit ...

*... in the form of God ... made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men ... **humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross** (Ph 2:6-8).*

Before having these words inscribed for posterity, the Holy Spirit challenged the readers thereof, “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus*” (Ph 2:5).

Before one would even consider becoming a disciple of King Jesus who is now our High Priest, he or she should count the cost by comparing his or her life with those about whom the Hebrew writer described in this chapter. And when counting the cost, we must keep in mind that the Old Testament heroes of faith had little information on the incarnation of the Word who “*was in the beginning with God ... and was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:2,14). They lived the incarnational life without the example of the incarnate Son of God who would eventually dwell among men during His earthly ministry.

Nevertheless, as Abraham and Sarah in their abbreviated understanding of what God had revealed to them, they, as the other heroes of faith,

“wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth.” They wandered by faith, knowing that God had “*provided some better thing for us.*”

This is humbling to understand. It is humiliating when we harbor any doubt. All the suffering and hardships that the patriarchs endured was **for us**. Those patriarchs of faith knew that God had made a promise of better things to come **for us**. However, they would all die “*in faith, not having received the promises*” that were made **for us**. But because of their faithfulness, **we have received the promised blessing of the Seed who came through the seedline of woman that was preserved by them for us**.

We are often too shallow-minded in reference to these things, and thus, we cannot connect the dots. So was the problem of the Hebrew readers (Hb 5:12). But this is what the Hebrew writer has just done for us in Hebrews 11. He has given us evidence of things that are beyond our experience. Each dot was a person who suffered in order that we might enjoy the redemption that was promised. Through the seed of woman, the Seed eventually came forth from the seedline of Abraham. All the dots were connected in order that we might understand that God did “*not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one,*

“and to your seed,” **who is Christ** (Gl 3:16).

The faithfulness of those heroes whom the Spirit listed in this chapter endured unbearable suffering in order to preserve the Seed **for us**. Their faith resulted in our enjoyment of knowing the Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnate in the flesh, **for us**. They walked by faith in the future of better things to come **for us**. We walk

by faith in things that came, and thus have a future of greater things to come. The question is, **Who will benefit from our walk of faith?**

The readers who were on the verge of apostasy needed to be ashamed. We too should be ashamed if we even consider turning back from the blood of the Seed of woman for whom they suffered so much in order to usher into the world.

Chapter 12

ENDURING THE RACE

These are the writers’ final exhortations to his readers that they not fail in the Christian race. He has corrected them concerning their comparison of Jesus with angels. He has corrected them to reaffirm that Jesus was greater than Moses as the leader of God’s people. He even embarrassed them for comparing the blood of the incarnate Son of God with the blood of bulls and goats. He refocused their attention on the fact that this Jesus about whom they seemingly failed to understand fully was now King Jesus and High Priest in heaven. It was now time for them to bear down and run the Christian race of faith.

A. Look unto Jesus (12:1,2):

All those faithful heroes who re-

mained faithful in order that the seed-line of woman be preserved until the Holy Spirit impregnated a woman of Nazareth with the Seed of God, had now passed on and were waiting for that city that God had prepared for them. The readers, therefore, were “*surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.*” These witnesses were now watching to see how the living saints would run the race.

The number of witnesses who were looking in on the apparent apostasy of some of the readers, was surely embarrassing to them. When we realize that so many faithful people throughout history endured great suffering in order that we might have the opportunity to obey the gospel, then it is time that we “*lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily en-*

tangles us.” It is time that we “*run with endurance the race that is set before us.*” We must emulate in our lives the endurance of those who remained faithful under great trials in order that we could have the opportunity to obey the gospel.

There is only one way that we can remain faithful. We must be “*looking unto Jesus.*” We must believe that we “*can do all things through Him who strengthens*” us (Ph 4:13). Therefore, we must “*know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being like Him in His death*” (Ph 3:10).

“*Being like Him in His death*” means that we must have His mind (Ph 2:5). He is the reason why we have this hope of a resurrection. Therefore, if we remain faithful, He will be the “*finisher of our faith.*” He will bring to completion our faith with the reward of eternal glory.

It is our hope to “*attain to the resurrection from the dead*” (Ph 3:11). This is the joy we have in our future. “*For the joy that was set before Him,*” Jesus “*endured the cross*” (See Ps 69:7; Ph 2:8). It is the joy of the resurrection that is set before us that will encourage us to endure our cross. With joy, we can “*run with endurance the race that is set before us.*” Paul would encourage us with the words, “*Run that you may obtain the prize*”

(1 Co 9:24), “*rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation*” (Rm 12:12). And James would add, “*Count it all joy when you fall into various trials*” (Js 1:2).

Once the incarnational Son of God had accomplished His destiny of introducing salvation into the world through His sacrificial blood offering, He “*sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*” (See Ps 110:1; Ph 2:9-11). He is now King of kings and our High Priest who is the mediator between God and ourselves (1 Tm 2:5; 6:15). He now enjoys His gospel kingship and priesthood because He endured all things for our sakes. Though we no longer know Him according to the flesh, we now know Him as our King and High Priest (See 2 Co 5:16).

B. Consider His suffering (12:3-6):

In order not “*to grow weary and faint,*” we must consider “*Him who endured such hostility by sinners against Himself.*” Though forsaken by all, Jesus went to the cross alone. At His arrest “*all the disciples forsook Him and fled*” (Mt 26:56).

At least the Hebrew readers had not yet suffered to the point of death. Paul would say to them, “*No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man*” (1 Co 10:13). God had made “*a way so that you may be*

able to endure” (1 Co 10:13). But they had forgotten the exhortation that God had given to them as to children: “*My son, do not despise the disciplining of the Lord.*” They had forgotten that “*whom the Lord loves He disciplines.*”

This discipline reflects on what Paul wrote to Timothy: “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12). Persecution is inherent in gospel living. The misguided religious world hated Jesus because His righteousness revealed the false righteousness of their religion. Before the religious world crucified Him, Jesus warned His immediate disciples, “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you*” (Jn 15:18). “*Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*” (Jn 15:19). Therefore, Jesus encouraged His disciples, “*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for My sake*” (Mt 5:11). Such slanderous speaking against a disciple is an occasion to “*rejoice and be exceedingly glad*” (Mt 5:12).

C. Endure discipline (12:7-13):

But the Hebrew readers seem to have forgotten that people who are

living the gospel must endure the discipline for such living. Unfortunately, the readers had allowed the intimidation of the Jewish religious community in which they lived to discourage their faithfulness to King Jesus. They had forgotten that if God had protected them from all trials, then they would have been spiritually spoiled children, and no one wants to live in a heavenly environment forever with spoiled people.

The readers should have been sensible to these matters. “*For what son is he whom the father does not discipline?*” If they would claim to be the sons of God, then certainly they must expect that their Father in heaven would allow the world to discipline them if they were guilty of wrongdoing. For certainly, “*God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Gl 6:7).

But there are times when one does not do wrong, but still reaps discipline from the world. Sometimes we reap suffering simply because we are Christians. In this context Peter encouraged his readers, “*For this is commendable, if for the sake of conscience toward God, one endures grief, suffering wrongfully*” (1 Pt 2:19). There is no credit for one being “*beaten for your faults*” (1 Pt 2:20). “*But if when you do right and suffer, you take it patiently, this is commendable with God*” (1 Pt 2:20).

In such situations we must follow Christ who suffered for us, *“leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps”* (1 Pt 2:21). The point is that if there is no suffering, *“then you are illegitimate and not sons.”* There is no such thing as living the gospel of Jesus Christ without persecution from Satan-driven people. If there is no persecution, then certainly one should question his or her commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, *“if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name”* (1 Pt 4:16).

As we respected our fathers because they disciplined us, then we respect God. His discipline is the signal of His love for us. Therefore, *“will we not much more be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live”* because He loves us so much that when we go in the wrong direction, He corrects us?

In order not to be spoiled children, He allows us to live in an environment wherein we can be tested with the trials of this world. We endure evil, but this does not mean that God has intentionally inflicted suffering on us. God is not fiendish toward us. He could do away with the world and all suffering. However, if He did, then we would not grow into a spiritual nature that would be fitting for eternal dwelling.

Our earthly fathers disciplined us in matters of this present world. But our heavenly Father has eternal matters in mind. He allows us to be disciplined by the environment in which we live *“so that we might be partakers of His holiness”* in heavenly dwelling. No undisciplined son will enter into the realm of God’s holiness. Therefore, *“no discipline seems to be joyous at the time,”* but when viewed from an eternal perspective, we understand that it is beneficial in training our character for eternal dwelling. Discipline trains us to persevere without being retaliatory. When we endure discipline, it *“yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”* This is the meaning behind what James said in the following words: *“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials”* (Js 1:2).

And for the preceding reason, *“if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness”* (Gl 6:1). The strong have the responsibility of *“strengthening the hands that hang down and the feeble knees.”* They must *“make straight paths”* for those who are discouraged. Those who have become crippled through suffering must be healed through the encouragement of the strong.

D. Do not fall (12:14-17):

Since there are those who will persecute the Christian for simply being a Christian, it should be the Christian who is the peacemaker (Mt 5:9). Persecutors should not be allowed to steal away our holiness. Holiness is developed by focusing on those things that are above. It is a life-time struggle to separate oneself from those things that would control our relationship with the One in whose presence we seek to be forever. The Holy Spirit explained this in another context with vivid words:

*If you then were raised with Christ [from the waters of baptism], seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, **not on things on the earth** (Cl 3:1,2).*

This is the best commentary on what the Hebrew writer had in mind in reference to holiness. Heavenly minded people are heavenly destined.

And can one fall beyond the extent to which the grace of God reaches? Certainly! Christians must look out for one another “*lest any man falls short of the grace of God.*” Some ungodly Christians have turned “*the grace of our God into licentiousness*” (Jd 4). And by doing such, they “*deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*” (Jd 4). We are thus not talking about hypothetical possibili-

ties. Worldly companions will often distract us from focusing on the heavenly. And when we are distracted, we will start focusing on the things that are of this world.

For this reason, the readers must look among themselves to determine if “*any root of bitterness*” was springing up among them that would cause trouble. Bitterness is losing something that one once had. In this case, their prestige as Jews in the religious community of Judaism had formerly been forsaken in order to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some may have been tempted to be bitter about their loss of community with their unbelieving Jewish family and relatives. They needed to consider their attitude toward those things that Paul gave up in order to live the incarnational life of Jesus Christ.

*I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, **for whom I have suffered the loss of all things.** I count them refuse [Gr. dung] so that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him (Ph 3:8,9).*

There were certainly some among the Hebrew Christians who were reconsidering the religious ceremonialism that they had formerly given up to become Christians. Paul would answer that he gave it all up in

order not to have “*my own righteousness that is from law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith*” (Ph 3:9).

Because Paul had written these sentiments to the Philippian disciples may be one argument that the Holy Spirit used in this letter to Jewish Christians to discourage them from considering a return to the self-righteousness of Judaism (See Rm 10:1-3). They knew what Paul had given up in order to become a disciple. He was not writing, therefore, without paying the price of what he was asking them also to pay. He left his Jewish religious heritage, and thus was qualified to call the Hebrew readers to do the same.

If one would seek to leave Christ in order to fulfill the lust of the flesh, then Esau is the choice example of such foolishness. For a pot of food he “*sold his birthright*” (Gn 25:33). And some of the readers, for a moment of fornication, were willing to sell their birthright into eternal glory. After Esau’s deed was done, there was no recourse to enjoy the blessings of the birthright. Even though he poured out many tears, he could not reclaim the birthright (Gn 27:30-40).

Esau sets the background for those who will fall short of the eternal dwelling in the presence of God. Those who fall short of the grace of

God will reap the consequences of what Jesus explained at the end of the parable of the tares. “*He will cast them into a furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth*” (Mt 13:42). Those who will not be permitted to enter into heaven will wail and gnash their teeth because they had “*sold their spiritual birthright*” for a moment of fornication with the religions of the world.

E. Come to the mountain (12:18-24):

When the Sinai law and covenant were established with Israel at Mount Sinai, neither people nor beasts were allowed to touch the mountain when Moses went up to receive the ten commandments (Ex 19:12,13; Dt 4:11; 5:22). The people greatly feared, and “*begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore*” (See Ex 20:18-21). The sight was so terrifying that even Moses said, “*I exceedingly fear and tremble.*”

The preceding was certainly a different scenario than our relationship with God in our coming “*to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God.*” The “*heavenly Jerusalem*” has come down out of heaven through the revelation of the Son of God. This picture is metaphorically written in Revelation 21 as the Spirit guided the apostle John to describe the beginning

of the church on earth.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And there was no more sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rv 21:1,2).

This is John’s description of “*the general assembly and church of the firstborn ones*” who are now written in the book of life (See Rv 20:12). This is the present universal body of Christ that encompasses the entire world, the members of which are enrolled in heaven. Their membership is heavenly, not earthly with any particular sect.

Because their membership is in the book of life in heaven, their allegiance is only to the “*Judge of all.*” God is the judge of all those who lived under the old covenant. Jesus has now been appointed Judge of all (At 17:30,31). Not only are they living in the assembly of the firstborn, but also those who have passed on into the loving care of Jesus. These are the spirits “*of the righteous made perfect*” because they have kept the faith. The Judge will bring the spirits of these with Him when the final chapter of the gospel is revealed in His final coming (See 1 Th 4:13-18).

“*You have come to Mount Zion ... and to God the Judge of all ... and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.*” Here, the writer reflects on the beginning of the blood offerings that were first offered by Abel. But now the readers have come “*to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than the blood Abel.*”

Before His offering, Jesus pronounced in reference to the fruit of the vine at the last Passover, “*This is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many*” (Mk 14:24). It was not the blood of animals about which He spoke, but the incarnate blood of the Word that became flesh that would validate the new covenant (Jn 1:14). Through this blood, the living, as well as “*the spirits of the righteous,*” were all made perfect.

F. Listen to the voice (12:25-29):

The conclusion to the preceding thoughts is obvious. “*Do not refuse Him who speaks*” to you today. Those who touched Mount Sinai, when they were commanded not to touch the mountain, died immediately. If the people “*did not escape*” when One spoke on earth at Mount Sinai, then certainly we will not escape if we “*turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.*” This is again another warning for those who will suffer se-

vere punishment for trampling under foot the precious blood of Jesus (Hb 10:29). They will not escape just punishment (Hb 2:2). Their doom is certain.

In this final warning, the writer seeks again to remind the readers of an impending calamity that is soon to come upon national Israel because of their rejection of the Messiah. At Mount Sinai the voice of God “*shook the earth.*” Israel would in just a few years from the time of writing be shaken from the arrogant self-confidence of her own religiosity. When Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in A.D. 70, it was to the Jews as if heaven came crashing down on them. The writer quoted Haggai 2:6 in reference to “*yet once more*” a shaking will take away those things that can be shaken, that is, physical things, including Jerusalem and the temple. In taking away the old, the unshakable spiritual things will remain. Since the righteous are the church of the firstborn, then “*the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” when the old things are shaken away (Mt 13:43).

“*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken,*” we must live a life of gratitude for the gospel that came to us through Jesus Christ. When we so live the gospel by accepting the king-

dom reign of Jesus, then we “*serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*”

“*Our God is a consuming fire*” who will take away the old in order that the new might shine forth in the kingdom reign of His Son. After A.D. 70, many of the Jews will finally realize that God consummated national Israel with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in order to prove that He was now with the church of the firstborn.

This point should remind some today that a supposed restoration of national Israel, Israel is not our new messiah. The Jews as a race of people have their right to be a nation. However, to have hope in the establishment of the nation of Israel was never God’s intention to signal the coming of the one Messiah Jesus Christ. The Messiah has already come. The Hebrew writer is writing in order to focus the attention of Christians on King Jesus as the Messiah, **not** the survival of the nation of Israel. He seeks to focus Christians’ minds on King Jesus as He now is, not what He will be in the future. His arguments to focus our minds on King Jesus as He now is are still relevant today. Our attention, therefore, should be focused totally on King Jesus. He is coming again, not to reign, but to “*be subject to Him who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all*” (1 Co 15:28).

If the readers in the historical context of the epistle would simply hold on for a few more years, then God’s sign to them that Jesus is our only hope will be clearly manifested with the destruction of the old order. Therefore, the readers must not be of those “*who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul*” (Hb 10:39). They must heed the encouragement of James who wrote at approximately the same time as the Hebrew writer: “*You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near*” (Js

5:8). Jude also wrote contemporarily with James and the Hebrew writer in reference to God’s coming in judgment in time upon unbelieving Israel who rejected and crucified His Son:

Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment on all, and to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds that they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him (Jd 14,15).

Chapter 13

EXHORTATION TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

These are the final exhortations of the writer to Jewish disciples who evidently resided in a region, possibly Judea, where they were in a community of unbelieving Jews. These final exhortations, therefore, were written to believers who were encouraged to portray to their fellow Jews that Jesus is now King and High Priest. They must reveal to the community that they have obeyed the Shepherd who sent His only begotten Son into the world as the final blood offering for the sins of all men. They must live as a forgiven people who no longer need the blood of animal

sacrifices. Therefore, the writer gives some final instructions in reference to living the gospel of the incarnate Son of God.

- **Reflect the love of Christ (13:1):** Since God is love (1 Jn 4:8), then certainly anyone who claims a relationship with Him must love as He loved us. “*Everyone who loves is born from God and knows God*” (1 Jn 4:7). Love of one another is what defines the brotherhood of disciples (See Jn 13:34,35). It is as Peter exhorted, “*Love the brotherhood*” (1 Pt 2:17).

- **Be hospitable to strangers (13:2):** At least one reason for being hospitable to those brethren with whom we are not familiar is that some have unknowingly taken in those who were messengers of the gospel. This is exactly what Gaius did in his partnership with those who went forth to preach the gospel of Jesus (See 3 Jn 5-8). The apostle John commended Gaius for this ministry: “*Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and especially for strangers*” (3 Jn 5). However, the word for “strangers” in 3 John 5 is different than the word used in Hebrews 13:2. In Hebrews 13:2 it is the word for angels, and thus, the writer is possibly referring his readers back to what he previously said in Hebrews 1:14 in reference to angels: “*Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who will inherit salvation?*” Who knows that possibly in taking in a “stranger” one has taken in his “guardian angel” (Mt 18:10). These are things about which we have little revelation, partly because we would possibly do what the Hebrew readers did if we were also obsessed with angels. In the first chapter of this document the writer stated that the readers were obsessed with angels, so much so, that they marginalized their fo-

cus on King Jesus in order to speculate about angels.

- **Pray for those who are prisoners for Christ (13:3):** Those who are in prison for preaching the gospel need the continued prayers of the church. Possibly at the time of the writing of these words, Paul was living the life of a prisoner for Christ in a Roman jail. He also asked for prayers from the Colossians: “*Continue praying for us so that God may open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains*” (Cl 4:3). Such prisoners for Christ are still part of the brotherhood. Since they are, they must not be left alone in a prison while being wrongfully treated. Since they are in prison for preaching the gospel their prison life is an example of commitment to the rest of the brotherhood. But also, in the lives of the readers, dark times were coming. In fact, the words of Jesus to the church in Smyrna are appropriate, “*Do not fear those things that you will suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison so that you may be tested*” (Rv 2:10).
- **Respect the marriage of a man and a woman (13:4):** Whenever fornication becomes a norm of so-

ciety as a whole, the more the society degenerates morally. Fornication within a society destroys the honor of marriage. When marriage between a man and a woman is not respected, then society is in a process of moral decay. We must never forget that the sexually immoral will face the condemnation of God. Those who practice fornication “*will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Co 5:19-21). Therefore, we must remember the words that were directed to the disciples in Achaia, “*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators ... nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites ... will inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Co 6:9,10). The strength of any society is built on the foundation of strong marriages. The weaker marriage is in general within a society, the weaker the society.

- **Be content with what you have (13:5,6):** Covetousness is the love of money, which love redirects our focus as Christians. A covetous person does not have his mind totally set on those things that are above (See Cl 3:1-11). Paul wrote to Timothy that some Christians have been led astray by their love of money: “***For the love of money***

is the root of all evils, by which some coveting after have strayed from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows” (1 Tm 6:10). Since God will never forsake our physical well-being, then we must trust that He cares for us as He does for the birds of heaven (See Mt 6:25-30). If we are content with the things we have, then we can personally proclaim that “*the Lord is my helper and I will not fear*” about being in need of anything.

- **Follow spiritual leadership: (13:7):** Paul had instructed the brethren throughout Achaia, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). Those who lead by teaching the word of God and living the gospel must be followed. The assumption of the imperative in this text is based on the fact that when the word of God is being taught, we must be eager students who “*do not quench the Spirit*” (1 Th 5:19; See At 17:11). Listening eagerly when the word of God is being taught reveals our respect for both the word of God and the one who is teaching. We must follow those who live the word of God, for the result of the leadership behavior of the teacher is eternal life.

• **Respect the authority of the Scriptures (13:8,9):** Since Jesus “*is the same yesterday and today and forever,*” then His word by which we will be judged is unchanging. We will be judged by this unchanging standard (Jn 12:48). Therefore, any new doctrine that may come our way that is different than what was originally delivered unto the apostles, must not be allowed to become the authority of our faith (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). What the writer here affirms is the fact that the written word of God alone will always be the final authority in matters of faith. No new teaching that comes from men should ever be allowed to become the standard upon which we base our faith. Jude said the same in another way: “*Earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jd 3). For this reason, the binding of certain religious rites and rituals in reference to foods, for example, should never be made a test of fellowship. “*Therefore,*” the Holy Spirit wrote, “*let no one judge you in food or in drink*” (Cl 2:16). Paul added, “*I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself*” (Rm 14:14). In these few statements, the Holy Spirit made His case against religion. Since religion is defined as

the self-sanctifying religious rites and rituals of one’s faith, such things should never be bound on the consciences of believers. In reference to such things, the Holy Spirit simply stated, “*Do not touch. Do not taste. Do not handle*” (Cl 2:21). “*All these concern things that perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men*” (Cl 2:22).

• **Maintain one’s right to approach the altar of God with the blood of Jesus (13:10-14):** Those who continued to offer up animal blood at the physical altar of the temple in Jerusalem had no right to come to the heavenly altar of Jesus Christ. Only Christians have “*boldness to enter into the holy place [of heaven] by the blood of Jesus*” (Hb 10:19). Jesus is the “*new and living way that He has consecrated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh*” (Hb 10:20). But those Jewish priests who persisted in offering the blood of bulls and goats at the temple altar had no right to come unto the heavenly altar, for they did not come with the blood of Jesus. They burned their offerings of animals **inside** the camp of Jerusalem. In the beginning of the tabernacle services at Mt. Sinai, however, the offering of sacrifices was truly “*burned outside the*

camp.” As an illustration of the offering of Jesus on the cross, He too was taken outside the city of Jerusalem and offered on a cross. *“Therefore, let us go forth to Him outside the camp [of Jerusalem], bearing His reproach.”* We must always keep in mind that Jerusalem would come to a close in A.D. 70 as the center of reference for Judaism. It was destined for destruction, and thus, its destruction was coming at the time these words were written. But the heavenly Jerusalem will continue forever.

- **Continue in sacrifices for others (Hb 13:15,16):** Since Christians are living the gospel that they obeyed, then they must *“continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”* Christians walk in thanksgiving of all that they have received as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus (See 2 Co 4:15). Since through His incarnation and crucifixion on their behalf, they are inspired to walk in gratitude of what was done for them. This is living the gospel. It is as John wrote, *“We love because He first loved us”* (1 Jn 4:19). Therefore, we *“do not forget doing good and sharing.”* Living the sacrificial life emulates the incarnational ministry of the One who died for

us. It is for this reason that no covetous person understands the mind of Christ (See Ph 2:5-8). And thus, no covetous person is qualified for eternal dwelling with the One who sacrificed all on our behalf. As Jesus died a poor man on the cross with His only garment being given to another, so should we have this same desire by the end of our lives. We too must die having poured out all that we have for others.

- **Submit to spiritual leadership (13:17):** Paul wrote that Christians must be *“submitting to one another in the fear of God”* (Ep 5:21). Christians submit to one another because Jesus submitted to the cross on behalf of our problem of sin. When the writer admonished his readers to *“remember those who are leading you,”* he had in mind those who were leading through the teaching and living of the word of God. Since there is to be no lordship leadership among the disciples, then any leadership we would assume must be through service (See Mk 10:42-44). Those who teach and are living the example of the gospel (1 Pt 5:2,3), are leading in order to keep the sheep away from false teachings. There will be those who *“turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables”* (2 Tm 4:4). But

those faithful leaders among us who love and teach the word of God must be followed. The disciples must submit to their ministry of teaching and their example of living the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not that we submit to them personally, for they cannot be lords who demand that we show up at their Bible class. Our submission to them reveals our submission to the word of God that they teach and our desire to emulate the gospel of Jesus in our lives. If they were teachers that had the authority to demand that we show up at their Bible class, and we did not, then they would be angry at us for not submitting to their supposed authority. But because they teach in order to guard the saints from following after fables, they rejoice when we show up at the Bible class.

- **Pray without ceasing (13:18,19):** While in prison in Rome, Paul asked for prayers from the Ephesians: *“Pray for me so that utterance may be given to me, so that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel”*

(Ep 6:19). The requested prayer in this context was specifically for release from prison *“so that I may be restored to you the sooner.”* It is interesting to note that the writer’s request for prayers in reference to his imprisonment was for the benefit of those to whom he was writing. As in his request for prayers by the Ephesian disciples, his desire was not prayer for himself, but for the sake of others. Selfish prayers rarely reap answers from God. At least Paul tried such prayers three times on behalf of himself in reference to his physical *“thorn in the flesh.”* But God chose not to answer those prayers (See 2 Co 12:7,8). Nevertheless, in another context the Spirit said through James, *“Is anyone sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him”* (Js 5:14). *“The prayer of faith will restore the sick, and the Lord will raise him up”* (Js 5:15). It is interesting to note that even in this context James’ request is that the elders come and pray for someone else, not for themselves.

Epilogue (13:20-25)

It was God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Since He could raise the dead, then He was able also to equip the readers in their ministry (See Ep 1:20). God the Father is the “*great Shepherd of the sheep*” (See Ps 23:1; Is 40:11; 63:11). He raised His Son from the dead in order to establish a new covenant that would continue without end. We must trust that this Shepherd who could raise the dead must also be able to equip us “*in every good work to do His will.*” He does this by working in us “*what is well-pleasing in His sight.*” His work in our lives, therefore, is contingent on our doing His will, not our will. We must walk within the will of God in order to harness this power from God who “*is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us*” (Ep 3:20).

If we create a religion after our own desires, we may be working against the will of God while we think we are working for Him. For this reason, the disciple of Jesus must be a diligent student of the word (will) of God. He must be a Bible student in order to know what the will of the great Shepherd is. Those religionists who are ignorant of the will of God will create religious rites and rituals

that they think are the will of God. But as Christians, we do not have the right to create a religion that conforms to our own desires. If we are so tempted to do such, then it is needful for us to reconsider 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12:

*... and with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie, **that they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.***

The writer could have written more on this subject. Therefore, he asked for the readers to “*bear this word of exhortation*” that we now have in the book of Hebrews. He needed to write no more since the words of this exhortation are sufficient in reference to the gospel kingdom and priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. His words are sufficient to sustain us until His final coming. We know that He now has all things under control (Hb 2:8), though they may seem to be out of control. But He is now reigning over all things with all

authority. He is now functioning as our mediator and High Priest before the Father.

Paul's great companion in the ministry, and close friend, had now been set free from prison. The release of Timothy was surely a great relief to the Hebrew readers. At this time, Paul was expecting also to be set at liberty. We assume that he was set free from his first Roman imprisonment, for in the record of his travels in the book Acts there is no mention of him going to the island of Crete. We assume, therefore, that he and Titus made their way to Crete immediately after his release from his first imprisonment of A.D. 61,62 (See Ti 1:5).

At the time of writing, Paul was possibly in prison in Rome around A.D. 61, 62. If he were in prison and released in A.D. 62, then this would mean that this letter—if he wrote the letter—possibly accompanied the commonly labeled “prison epistles” of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon to their respective recipients. We conclude that Hebrews was written at this time because of the content, and the writer's identification of himself to be in prison, which imprisonment was in Rome of Italy. It is for these reasons that we assume that the apostle Paul wrote the letter, though this assumption is not conclusive.

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Fellowship And Unity Of The Organic Body
The Cross-Centered Faith
Escape From Bondage
Perceptions And Postulations
Our Faith – Our Salvation
His Grace – Our Faith
The Living Sacrifice
Committed To World Evangelism
Organic Function Of The Body Of Christ
The World As It Is
The Godly Giver
Thirsting For Word From God
Following Jesus Into Glory
The Seven Flickering Flames Of Asia
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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**