

The Preface and the Purpose

Bible Study Lessons on Leviticus and Hebrews

Marchant A. King, D.D.

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Marchant A. King, D.D.

Biographical Notes by his daughter, Ruth King Dix, M.D.

Marchant Askren King was born of English descent, February 7, 1903, on a farm in Minnesota. After several moves because of his mother's health, the family settled in York Valley in Southern California.

Because life was difficult financially, Dad raised a large garden to help out. He enrolled in ROTC during high school; and, while taking an unbelievable course load at Occidental College from which he graduated Phi Beta Kappa with several majors, he taught at a private school his father established. Yet he found time to climb the face of Eagle Rock in his bare feet!

Plans to be a medical doctor and missionary were laid aside for want of finances; but, learning of the need for Bible translators in Africa, he secured passage on a boat and sailed through the Panama Canal to enroll at Princeton Seminary and University in New Jersey.

Dad's ability in languages was awesome. He majored in languages, learning Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic and Amharic. He already knew Latin, French, German and Spanish. He never mixed up any of them and stated that one did not really know a language until he could dream in it. He spent many extra hours with professors on special projects and earned Masters and Theology degrees simultaneously.

His spiritual journey began early at home and involved memorization of scripture passages. At age nine he recited John 10, 13 and 14 to his father and then prayed his decision to trust Christ as Savior. He was baptized the next Sunday.

At age 80, two years before his death, he recorded all the details of his decision and discussed the special Sunday School teacher of his early years, the influence of preachers and small church groups and Mr. Paul Walker of the Fisherman's club. Dad was well mentored and responsive to these men. He then carried out this same process, mentoring many others.

Romance came later for Dad than most of his friends and was limited to his courtship of Grace May Hamilton, a school teacher in New York City whom he

married September 1, 1929, after graduating from Princeton. The wedding took place in the bride's family apartment with only close friends. But a three-week honeymoon on a lake in the Adirondack Mountains started the couple on the right path. To quote Dad: "We had a very suitable time with a little Greek thrown in."

At the end of one year as an associate pastor in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, Dad accepted a call to an independent church in Newburgh, New York, where he served for 14 years. My brother Paul and I were born during this time.

Two difficult and disappointing times in Dad's life are noteworthy. The first was at the end of Seminary/Graduate School when he was rejected for missionary service in Africa and lost a fellowship because of his conservative theology.

The second came during his pastorate when controversies arose in the Presbyterian denomination that centered on the supremacy of Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and practice and on the importance of the Lord's Supper. Although ordained by the Presbyterian Church, Dad resigned, defended his position before the Synod, and was granted independent status. In both cases, Dad accepted the change as God's sovereign design for his life and never voiced any regret.

My recollection of these years growing up as a preacher's kid centers around our home and the fascinating missionaries who spent time with us. Perhaps this link with missions helped Dad further accept his having to remain at home.

About 1936, Dad noted an increasing weakness in his legs. Doctors diagnosed it as Muscular Dystrophy and gave him two years to be active or even live. Realizing there is no treatment for this disease and that it would simply progress, the family moved to Southern California in 1944. Both Dad and Mom taught at the college and graduate levels and led Sunday School and Bible classes. Dad preached in many churches.

As his daughter, I never heard a word of self-pity from him. He moved in and out of his wheelchair by himself from 1955 on and would stand at the kitchen sink washing dishes because he could keep his balance

by leaning on the counter. When he could no longer stand, he taught and preached sitting down and never made a show of this. He married my husband Richard and me from his wheelchair.

When pushed to comment on his condition, his response was: "This is the best thing God could give me." Two hymns which Dad would sing as solos express his acceptance of God's plan: "It is Well With My Soul" and "Under His Wings."

His teaching positions included Westmont College (1945-49) and Los Angeles Baptist College and Seminary which became Northwest Baptist Seminary in Tacoma, Washington. Dad received an honorary D.D. from the Seminary in recognition of his teaching ministry.

Two attempts to retire were unsuccessful, and he returned each time to teach another year.

Finally, in 1982, he and Mom moved to Tucson, Arizona, to be near Paul and family and later to Gainesville, Florida, before needing nursing home care. In July 1985, a place opened up in Pennsylvania at the Quarryville Presbyterian Home. Just two months later, Dad had a cerebral hemorrhage and died quietly on September 5, 1985. His memorial service, taken by three former students, was a most fitting tribute to his life and ministry.

Anyone who knew "Dr. King," my father, became aware of his constant study of Scripture in its original languages. He could communicate gems of knowledge,

and he loved to share his insights about the person of Christ to any listener. In many ways, he "lived in the heavenlies."

Early in his life, he emphasized the grace of God as needing to be operative in a believer's life.

In his own weakness, he drew on God's strength. God's grace was sufficient for him. His own intimacy with Jesus Christ was not something he talked about; but, being with him, one sensed the truth of his oneness with Christ and the depth of relationship he enjoyed with his Lord. None of us can forget the booming voice and closing phrase of all his prayers, "in the peerless name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

He transferred to two generations of faithful men the absolute authority of Scripture in a person's life and the reality, the fulfillment of life in Christ. And those faithful men today are making disciples among all nations, reached and unreached. If Dad had had the physical strength, he could have toured the world in the company of his students and seen what God was doing in each place. From that standpoint, his ministry continues on today.

It would be Dad's prayer that these studies in Leviticus and Hebrews would be a catalyst in your life and mine to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ more completely.

--Ruth King Dix

Editor's Note

To those in Marchant King's immediate circle—as guests in his home, students in his classes, listeners when he preached—he seemed the living portrait of the verse, “strength made perfect in weakness.”

Struck by muscular dystrophy in the mid-stride of young manhood, he spent the rest of his long life coping with the grip of that disease as it strangled his body and ultimately led to the cerebral hemorrhage that took his life.

Raised in California, he attended Occidental College and then chose Princeton Seminary in New Jersey for graduate study under Professors Robert Dick Wilson and Gresham Machen, giants in theology.

While holding his first pastorate in Newburg, NY, his body succumbed to the disease. Anticipating an uncertain future, his wife Grace earned a doctor of philosophy degree in English at New York University. The family, now including daughter Ruth and son Paul along with Grace's father George Hamilton, moved to California, attracted by the milder climate and teaching positions offered them.

Marchant taught at Culter Academy in Los Angeles and his wife taught English and psychology at nearby Westmont College. Later, when the school moved to Santa Barbara, Marchant joined the Westmont faculty teaching Bible.

The family moved to Glendale, CA, when Grace became head of the English department at Glendale College and Marchant joined the faculty of the Los Angeles Baptist Seminary. They moved to Federal Way, WA, when the seminary changed its name and moved to Tacoma.

In retirement they moved to Tucson, AZ, to be near their son, then to Keystone Heights, FL and ultimately to Hershey, PA and a nursing home.

Believed the longest survivor of muscular dystrophy, Marchant, enduring the crablike gait that made walking so difficult, resisted a wheel chair for many years.

When I was a young teen in his classes, I held him in such high esteem that had someone said the King James version was a collaboration I would have believed it.

The day he performed the marriage ceremony for my bride and me, he fell and smashed his eyeglasses. He refused the offer of Novocain to deaden the pain as his physician sewed the cuts on his face. He didn't want his deadened expression to take attention away from the bride.

When I became editor of “Moody Monthly” magazine, I asked him to write these studies in Leviticus and Hebrews. They were subsequently published. He poured his heart and strength into these lessons. They show his mastery of the Scriptures and deep appreciation of the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a great man of God he was—what patience under pressure in the extremes his body brought him, what an alert mind balanced by a sensitive heart, what concern that his students mature in their knowledge of Christ and their understanding of His deep things. He stood for truth and personal righteousness with grace. He exalted the Lord Christ.

Truly, in him we found one whose seeming weakness disguised immense strength.

--Prof. Dick Bohrer

Introduction

The complex, rapidly-moving events of our times can easily confuse and overwhelm us, driving us to anxiety and despondency.

But they need not. The Christian has been provided an antidote in the sovereignty of Christ.

His sovereignty shines forth like a beacon light to help us see beyond the confusion around us to the higher, long-range horizon of God's revelation.

Our examination of the details in Leviticus will point us forward to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as seen in the gospels and explained in the book of Hebrews. May this sweep of Scripture open our eyes and heart to the magnificence of God's plan for the ages as He reveals Himself to us as Savior and Sovereign.

How is He sovereign?

First, He is sovereign in God the Son. This and nothing less is the Jesus of the New Testament, the Savior whom we trust. Before the foundation of the world He was one with the Father, equal with Him in power and glory. He shared in the sovereignty of the Godhead just as He did in the other attributes.

He refers to this relationship in His high priestly prayer in John 17, where He speaks of "the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was" (v.5).

The Scriptures explicitly declare that in Him, the second Person of the Trinity, the sovereignty of God was exercised in creation. John 1:3 pro-

claims that "all things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Colossians 1:16 repeats the same truth.

His fiat brought forth this earth we stand on, the sun that provides energy we live by, the starry worlds beyond the range of our unaided vision. To this Paul adds, "By Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17KJV). By Him all things hold together in their places, from electrons within an atom to a planet in its orbit.

By His word came life—this thing so inexplicable, so amazing in its delicate adjustments, so quickly destroyed by man's cruelty, so impossible of human origination.

His is the sovereignty by which it all came to be and by which it persists. Yet He is also the very One who loved us even to the depths of Golgotha where He was made sin—a curse—for us. He is the One who loves us today.

Second, Christ is sovereign as the incarnate God-man. Because of His love for men condemned in sin, this same Person of the eternal Trinity, God the Son, became incarnate and took our humanity apart from its sin.

Born as a babe in Bethlehem, growing up in subjection to His parents in Nazareth, walking the roads

of Palestine veiled in flesh, He was, nevertheless, the Sovereign of all.

This is precisely the testimony of those who saw Him day after day. The synoptic Gospels cite repeated examples showing Him sovereign over disease, demons, and a storm at sea until his companions cried out, "What manner of man is this!"

The apostle Paul, who met Christ on the Damascus road, says He is "the first-born from the dead," "the first-born of all creation" (Colossians 1:15-18). The word translated "first-born" means primacy in time plus supremacy and sovereignty—as the first-born of the family inherits the sovereign rights belonging to the family.

Paul is saying that Christ is declared by His resurrection to be sovereign over death and life, sovereign of all creation.

The apostle John, who knew Christ most intimately, declares this sovereignty most fully. He arranged his Gospel account around seven selected proofs of Christ's sovereignty in every sphere—a structure whose perfection is seen in the ascending order of the examples.

First comes sovereignty over the processes of nature—in the water made wine. Nature uses sunshine and air in the course of a season to turn water into wine. But the Sovereign-of-nature's-processes accomplishes it instantly.

Next He is shown as sovereign over diseases—one of short standing in the healing of the nobleman's son, and one of long standing in the restoration of the man by the pool of Bethesda.

Then He multiplies five rolls and two fishes to feed a multitude. After

that, in making a blind man see, He provides a faculty lacking since birth.

Coming to the climax, the Sovereign calls Lazarus from the grave. Then He raises Himself from death, never again to come under its power.

Taking a still different view, we see Him as sovereign of sin and Satan. Sin had no power over Him; Satan had no claim and no hold upon Him. This is the Sovereign who enters and abides in the heart of every one who truly receives Him as Savior and Lord.

Third, Christ is sovereign in His death. Christ's sovereignty shines out most brilliantly in the cross. It is not just that He set His face deliberately to go to Jerusalem where He knew death awaited Him. He is sovereign in the very act of dying.

He could say, "No man has taken it (My life) from Me ... I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again (John 10:18). His cry, "It is finished," was not a cry of final, exhausted relief but the shout of a Victor who had accomplished His goal. This cry was followed by the sovereign act (obscured by our poor translation) of dismissing His spirit. He was sovereign in the very action of death as well as resurrection.

Someone might ask, "Was He not yielding to something in dying?" The answer goes to the very core of Christianity.

He was not yielding to anything outside Himself. The necessity of the cross lay within the confines of His own being and nature as God. God is both righteous and loving; He must both punish sin and provide salvation for the objects of

His love. Christ did exactly this in His death on the cross, so there was a mighty gain for His sovereignty.

Paul discloses this in Philippians 2: “God highly exalted Him” (v. 9) because “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (v. 8).

In Revelation we see that the only One worthy to take the scroll—that title-deed to the universe—is the “Lamb ... slain” (Revelation 5:6). He is proclaimed sovereign not only because He sacrificed Himself but even more because His sovereignty by this sacrifice was released from the restraining demands of His justice, a justice that insisted on the punishment of sin.

With sin’s punishment executed on the cross, Christ’s sovereignty is full and unrestricted, free to act in absolute grace to any and all.

Fourth, we need to consider the status of Christ’s sovereignty in the world. Today it is not as manifest as it will be the day of His coming, when He will be sovereign without a shadow of question. When men cry to the rocks to fall on them and hide them, they will not doubt His sovereignty nor have any thought of resistance.

Revelation 19 says He will have many crowns on His head when He comes to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Anti-Christ will be destroyed by the very “brightness of his coming” (2 Thessalonians 2:8KJV). His mere word will crush the armies of the nations, for His “Depart from Me” will send men to everlasting fire.

He will be sovereign over nature, since by His power the earth will be cleared of the curse due to

sin. He will be sovereign over men, ruling with “a rod of iron” and causing righteousness and equity to reign in the earth.

But the highest of all indications of sovereignty will be His right to bestow on others the sovereignty which is His own. The Word of God declares that Christ will not only reign over the earth but that He will cause His saved ones to reign with Him. And so the believer will share the sovereignty of Christ by virtue of the will of the Sovereign.

All of this will take place in the future. But the sovereignty of Christ is just as real today as it will be then. It simply is not manifest today because it is not exercised immediately. Instead, Christ is acting in the world “mediately,” that is, almost entirely through second causes.

This is the only way He could exercise His sovereignty and at the same time fulfill His present purpose. How else could He test men to see who really believes and loves Him?

He wants today to gather for himself a people (His bride) who will really trust and love Him, not a mass forced into submission by His display of omnipotent power. Billions of stars follow His will perfectly but not by their own voluntary choice.

However hidden it may be, Christ’s sovereignty among men is nevertheless real today. We can see it as we take the long-range view through the books of Leviticus and Hebrews.

We will see a sovereign Hand at the helm in the exact, minute fulfillment of prophecies given hundreds of years before the events.

The Hebrew people sojourned in Egypt for a previously specified num-

ber of years. Then, as prophesied, they went into the Promised Land and later into the predicted seventy years of Babylonian captivity.

We've witnessed the prophesied coming of Messiah, Jerusalem's siege and destruction in 70 A.D., the Jews' world-wide dispersion but amazing preservation and now their return to Palestine and national revival. These demonstrate a sovereignty that defies contradiction.

The same may be said of prophecies regarding the course of the church and the world's political and social life.

Surely we see the sovereignty of Christ in the miracle of transformed lives—when men and women turn from cynical doubt or cold self-righteousness to simple, loving trust in the Lord Jesus as their Savior. That turn from hard selfishness and lives of sin to joyous self-sacrifice and lives of real purity is the standing miracle of our time.

He would exercise this same sovereignty in the lives of Christians constantly to make "all things work together for good," that they might be conformed to the image of the Son of God. He would have His own recognize His purpose in all that concerns them.

This has always been the intent of God as He has dealt with man from creation onward. As we trace His plan through the shadows of Leviticus and into the substance of Hebrews, we will see how beautifully the glory of the LORD has shone for us in levitical detail and gospel story. May our hearts respond in wonder and in worship.

But how often, though, we fail—like Israel—to discern His hand and cause Him to work indirectly in order to fulfill His purpose. We don't listen until laid low by illness. We won't wait for Him until we have met some disastrous defeat.

Perhaps our highest privilege as Christians is to let His sovereignty in our lives be immediate, to allow him to rule directly in every particular, to look to Him in every circumstance.

Then we shall see His sovereignty exercised in putting down sin in our lives and in subduing evil before us.

This is the only way to count for Christ, to gain satisfaction and joy in our lives, to bring joy to the heart of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

May He whose right it is to reign wield the scepter in our hearts and lives.

Let's Prepare to Dine with Him on Leviticus

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

God has spread a lavish panoply of pictures through the Old Testament as a preface to prepare the world for His coming to earth to redeem fallen man at Calvary.

From early chapters in Genesis where He told Adam that the soul that sins would surely die, we learn that God has carried through on His warning. The sinner dies.

But God, in grace, has revealed His remedy that the death of a substitute can atone for sin. In the Books of Moses He defines which substitutes were suitable and why.

Out of the shadows of that Old Testament sacrificial system has come the substance of His arrival on earth as the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

The ultimate plan? He Himself would become the sacrifice. He would be the One "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

To grasp the significance, the magnificence of the plan of redemption, we begin our study in Exodus because Leviticus so closely connects to Exodus that Leviticus 1:1 literally begins with the word "and" in the King James Version. We must become familiar with the former book if we are to understand and appreciate the latter.

Exodus presents three supremely important acts of God: Israel's deliverance from the death of its firstborn and from Egyptian bondage, the nation's becoming God's covenant people at Mount Sinai and the plan and building of the tabernacle.

The first act stands as the basis of Old Testament redemption in which Israel is sheltered from judgment by the sprinkled blood of the Passover lamb. God delivers the nation from Egyptian slavery as proof of His might and loving concern. We will deal with this in more detail in Leviticus 23.

The second act signifies God's bringing the nation into covenant relationship with Himself. The people have reached Mount Sinai, and God manifests His presence by awesome signs. Moses ascends the mountain to receive the Lord's promise for Israel. The One who delivered them from bondage in Egypt will claim these people as His special treasure, a kingdom of priests.

But this promise is conditional: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant ..." (Exo-

dus 19:5). God has established His law, centered in the Ten Commandments, looking to man for righteous performance.

The Israelites, however, show no hesitancy. They confidently assert, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Exodus 19:8). God then calls for complete cleansing; and any man or beast that touches the mountain, except Moses and Aaron, will die.

On the third day, with fearful signs of thunder, lightning and smoke, the "Ten Words" are given. And for a moment, Israel actually "feared the Lord." But the people were afraid to hear God's voice and even begged Moses to speak rather than God. Law had not brought them nearer to God.

Now there follows a wide range of laws regulating Israel's life, worship and responsibility toward others (Exodus 20:22-26; 22:21-23). When Moses presented these to the people, they responded as confidently as before: "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Exodus 24:3). So Moses wrote down what God had given him for Israel. This became known as the Book of the Covenant.

The next morning, Moses built an altar at the base of the mountain. He erected pillars for each of the 12 tribes to share in honoring God. Both burnt and peace offerings were sacrificed, and the blood was collected. Half was sprinkled on the altar to acknowledge God's sovereignty over life. When Moses read the Book of the Covenant again, the people responded once more, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." This time they added, "And we will be obedient" (Exodus 24:7).

Next we reach a high point.

Moses takes the remaining blood and sprinkles it over the people. "Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words," he says (Exodus 24:8). Israel has now entered a covenant relationship with Jehovah.

But God's blessings are conditional, based on man's obedience. This sacrificial blood is only of token value, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). How grandly different is the new covenant into which Christ has brought us, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20).

The second act concludes with Moses, Aaron, his older sons and 70 elders catching a glimpse of God in His brilliant glory. They ate and drank in a privileged though distant fellowship. Moses went to the top of the mountain, and on the seventh day he entered the very presence of God in the middle of the cloud. He completed 40 days on the mount, receiving the tablets of law and plans for the tabernacle.

The third great act of God concerned the plan and building of the tabernacle. As was fitting for God's covenant people, they constructed the tabernacle in the center of the camp. Day or night, the Israelites could see the pillar of cloud or fire above it, recognize God's presence and obey His command to break camp the moment the cloud lifted.

God gave specific instructions for the tabernacle's construction. Each detail held significance. Approaching the tabernacle, an Israelite would

first encounter white linen hangings on movable pillars around a court, 75 feet across by 150 feet.

Throughout Scripture, fine linen symbolizes righteousness. Here, the wall protecting God's dwelling emphasized His standard of perfect righteousness. Suitably, the linen wall stood seven-and-a-half feet high. Before God's standard of righteousness, all come short; anyone who wanted to know God must first find a door.

The entrance was 30 feet wide.

Its hanging screen could be readily identified by its colored embroidery: blue, purple and red. The blue suggested heavenly origin and the purple, royalty. "Adam," the Hebrew word for "red," also meant "man" and was closely related to the word for "blood." This door, therefore, combined heavenly origin, humanity associated with shedding of blood as well as ultimate rule and authority.

Within the court, the most prominent item was the brazen altar, a seven-and-a-half foot square standing four-and-a-half feet high. Made of acacia wood overlaid with brass or bronze, it was open at the bottom and top. Halfway down was a network of bronze grating for firewood and the sacrifice.

The metal used here implied judgment, as did the brass pillars supporting the linen hangings. (Judgment upholds the standard of righteousness.) This is in accord with Christ's reference to the brazen serpent as a type of His own death on the cross (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14). He was to be lifted up in judgment for sin. The altar's central position shows the primacy of atoning sacrifice.

Another court furnishing was the brazen laver, a huge bowl placed between the altar and the entrance of the holy place (Exodus 30:18-21). It held water so the priests could wash their hands and feet before going into the holy place or ministering at the altar. This washing was not optional but "on pain of death." God's ministers had to be clean.

Again, the brass points to judgment—in this case, self-judgment or self-evaluation. Appropriately, women donated their brass mirrors to be melted for this purpose.

The tabernacle proper was a tent, 15 feet by 45 feet, set toward the rear of the court. Its side and back walls began with acacia boards standing on end. Each had two projections, or "tenons," on the bottom. These fit into silver sockets that held the boards in place and formed a portable foundation.

Gold rings attached to each board allowed five bars to slide through and provide additional support. The two back corners had special boards with large rings to hold them together.

Everything was covered with gold. This presents a grand picture of Christ, who tabernacled among us (John 1:14). He was the true temple of God during His years on earth. His spotless humanity is portrayed by the acacia, or "incorruptible wood," as the Septuagint puts it. The gold characterized His deity.

It is significant, too, that both wood and gold continue unmingled and unchanged, true wood and true gold, yet one unit. The table, altar of incense and ark of the covenant repeat this message. Each item foreshadows Christ.

The tent itself had four complete coverings. The first was of fine linen embroidered with cherubim in blue, purple and scarlet. It spanned the tabernacle, covering the outside walls down to 18 inches above the ground. These cherub figures revealed the holiness of God's dwelling; the blue, purple and scarlet pointed to the One from heaven, the true King, incarnate and sacrificed. Christ, who maintained God's righteousness, became the just and the justifier of all who have faith in Him (Romans 3:26).

The second covering, larger than the first, reached to the ground. Woven from goat hair, it provided insulation against desert heat and occasional winter cold. Spiritually, this sturdy material denoted separation from the world, essential for God's people in any age.

Above this was a covering of ram's skin dyed red, giving the strength of leather. A ram was prominent in consecration (Leviticus 8:18-36); the reddening process accentuated the need for a sacrifice. Such consecration would add strength to God's temple today.

The outer covering, also of skins, was probably derived from the sea cow whose thick hide was used for shoes (Exodus 26:14; Ezekiel 16:10 NIV). Such skins provided shelter from rain and sandstorms, but not much beauty. The beauty of the tabernacle was on the inside. The prophet Isaiah mentioned such external plainness in the One who had "no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him" (Isaiah 53:2).

At the east end of the tabernacle hung a screen similar to the one at the court entrance. Again this represented Christ, the door into God's presence and favor. This screen was supported by five acacia wood pillars overlaid with gold; its sockets were of brass, picturing both sin's judgment in the cross and self-judgment as foundational to worship and acceptable service.

The holy place, where any ceremonially clean priest with a service to perform could come, was the larger of the two sacred rooms. Inside on the right stood the table of showbread bearing the "bread of the Presence," and on the left, a golden lampstand. Close to the great veil dividing the tabernacle, barring the way into the holy of holies, was the altar of incense.

The table of showbread, made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, was 36 inches long, 18 inches wide and 27 inches high. A gold border or "crown" surrounded its edge to hold the bread in place. A rim with its own gold border also encompassed the table.

But the center of attention was the showbread—the "bread of the Presence," which was held continuously before God. Here one sees similarities to Christ Jesus, the Bread of Life (John 6:32-58), who was bruised and put through the fire as the Father willed.

The lampstand, made of pure gold, weighed about 75 pounds. Its central shaft had three branches on each side, supporting lamps with an almond-shaped design that burned pure olive oil. The spiritual significance is strong. Seven lamps provided perfect light for the outer sanc-

tuary. Throughout Scripture, oil symbolized the Holy Spirit; it is His power that enables God's light to shine. Gold, again, represented the full deity of Him who declared Himself "the light of the world." As full deity, Christ could provide a revelation or light that was trustworthy. And the almond decorations pointed to the ultimate proof for Christ's claims—the resurrection. The Hebrew word for "almond" means "awakener," that is, the one showing new life early in spring.

The last furnishing in the holy place was the altar of incense with its portable alternative—the gold censor. This acacia altar overlaid with gold was 18 inches square and 36 inches high. God commanded the Israelites to place it near the great veil, opposite the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies. He wanted it as close to the ark (and His revealed presence) as possible but still available to common priests.

Gold united with acacia wood again pictures the God-Man lifting believers' prayers and worship to the Father. Our utterances are united with the perfect fragrance of Christ's own character (Revelation 8:3, 4).

The great veil separating the holy place from the holy of holies was another fine linen hanging embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet cherubim, held up by four acacia wood and gold pillars.

In the synoptic Gospels, we read of the literal tearing of this veil when Christ died (Matthew 27:51). John, who consistently described our Lord's body as the true temple of God on earth, focused on His side, rent by the Roman spear. The writer of He-

brews also equated the tabernacle veil with Christ's flesh (10:20).

During Jesus' earthly life, His body concealed the glorious presence of God. Likewise, His spotless character and teaching reflected God's righteous standard, as the cherubim in the veil signified the holiness of God's dwelling place. When Christ, our infinite sacrifice, died, the veil split from the top down. Now the way into the true holy of holies is open, and we can come boldly before God's throne (Hebrews 4:16).

The sole furnishing in the tabernacle's Holy of Holies was the ark of the covenant, a modest-sized chest made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. A gold molding or crown, put around the upper edge, held the magnificent cover in place.

Here we find a climactic type of Christ—the gold of deity and wood of humanity, both unchanged but forming one ark, one Person.

Inside the ark, Moses placed the tablets of the law which Israel had already flagrantly broken. This was the safest, most sacred place for them. And in Jesus Christ alone, God's law was kept. Psalm 40:8 foreshadows Messiah's declaration, "Thy law is within my heart." He alone qualified as the spotless lamb.

The ark's cover, commonly called the "mercy seat" or "atonement cover" (NIV) was solid gold, reserved wholly for God as a seat of supreme honor. Two cherub figures—one on each end—faced inward with wings spread high, arching over the mercy seat.

Here was potentially the most awful judgment seat imaginable. Emblems of God's holiness and executioners of His absolute righteous-

ness stared down at an ark that contained the written law, the pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded—memorials of man's failure, discontent, rebellion and witnesses of man's death-deserving sin.

But it was not a judgment seat.

It was a mercy seat, a throne of grace. Atoning blood had been sprinkled there, satisfying God's righteous

demands. God had promised, "There I will meet with thee and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat" (Exodus 25:22 KJV). Jesus Christ, our final Atonement, has enabled us also to enter the presence of the Almighty.

The gospel of Christ was indelibly portrayed in Exodus. Here we find significant background for Leviticus.

Questions for Leviticus 1

1. The Hebrew word translated "offering" in verse 2 is "qorban," meaning "a gift dedicated to God." It is also used by Christ in Mark 7:11. From this definition, what should have been the motivation for bringing such an offering?
2. What difference did it make that the offering had to be male (in contrast, for example, to the peace offering mentioned in 3:1)?
3. An offering must be "without defect" (1:3). Where do you find an earlier reference to a prominent "unblemished" offering? How does this relate to Christ?
4. Why was an offerer instructed to lay his hands on the head of his sacrifice?
5. If the offering cited in verse 4 was not for any particular sin, why the phrase: "to make atonement on his behalf"?
6. Why did God demand that the blood be drained from the sacrifice and sprinkled around the brazen altar?
7. What was done with the hide of the bullock (see chapter 7)? Suggest reasons for skinning it.
8. Note Leviticus 3:16; what did the fat or "suet" signify?
9. What in the text assures the poor that offering a pigeon is acceptable to God?
10. Why was the burnt offering a sweet aroma to God?

The Burnt Offering: A Sweet Aroma to God

Leviticus 1

Without the death of Christ, the levitical offerings lose definition and significance. Old Testament sacrifices introduce the coming Messiah and His redemptive work.

Because Hebrew practice designated a manuscript by its initial word, the third book of Moses was originally known by the Hebrew word meaning “and He called.” “Leviticus,” the name given by the translators of the Greek Septuagint, is suitable because the book outlines religious order for Israel as God’s covenant people. That order was largely directed by the levitical priests.

Leviticus gave regulations for every aspect of Israel’s life, food, hygiene and relationships. All of life was to be lived “before Jehovah.” At the same time, prophetic sections portrayed God’s righteousness and grace, later fulfilled through Christ’s redemptive work. These prophetic pictures can have a tremendous spiritual impact on a Christian.

The first seven chapters cover five regular offerings and their corresponding laws. It is significant that these offerings immediately precede the inauguration of the priests who would offer them because sinful man cannot reach God apart from an atoning sacrifice.

Although the five offerings emphasized a token acceptance by God, their real, eternal value was in the

death of Christ. These sacrifices depended on the cross for ultimate meaning and foreshadowed the chief aspects of Christ’s atonement.

The presentation doesn’t begin with atonement for man’s specific sins and failures, but with an offering wholly for God’s honor, rising to Him as a sweet savor or pleasing aroma. The burnt offering pictured Christ, who gave Himself wholly to God in obedience “to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8).

While the King James translation—“of his own voluntary will” (Leviticus 1:3)—is not literal (God had commanded it), that may well be implied. The Hebrew does suggest it was a voluntary offering. The word “offering” itself connotes a gift, given out of devotion to God in worship, possibly celebrating restoration or some other special blessing.

Though unattainable in an animal sacrifice, perfect voluntariness was demonstrated in Christ. “No one has taken [my life] away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative,” Jesus said. “I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father” (John 10:18).

Christ, of course, was both offerer and sacrifice.

From Noah's day, cattle, sheep and goats were recognized as ceremonially clean (Genesis 7:2). Turtle-doves and young pigeons were added when God condescended to assure Abram of His promise (Genesis 15:9).

Larger animals had to be male, but not because that was more valuable or more acceptable to God. In the peace offering, for example, male or female were equally acceptable (Leviticus 3:1, 6).

The male represented active strength in accord with the voluntary nature of the offering. Sin did not force that sacrifice to suffer. Rather, the giver would be actively and totally devoting himself to God. This parallels Christ's almost aggressive determination to go to Jerusalem, which ultimately meant the cross (Luke 9:51; 12:50).

It was probably understood from early times that these offerings needed to be without defect. God made this requirement explicit when He detailed the Passover instructions. At least part of the reason for keeping the Passover lamb from the 10th to the 14th day was to ensure it was spotless.

The relation to Christ is obvious: To bear man's sin, He Himself must be without sin. And if He was to bring to God on our behalf the glory and honor of infinite obedience, He needed to be without defect.

An Israelite would bring his sacrifice to a point in front of the tabernacle doorway, as near the manifest presence of God as he could properly come (Leviticus 1:3, 4). For this reason, some have called it the "approach offering."

The next step in the ritual shows how God's acceptance was secured. Despite its spiritual importance, we often overlook this. The offender was to lay his hand on the sacrifice's head, symbolizing an identification with his offering. They became one before God; what the sacrifice would do was credited to the offerer. If bearing sin was prominent, then specific sin might be confessed at that time. Such identification made it proper to transfer a man's sin onto his sacrifice.

In the same way, saving faith unites us to Christ. What He has done we also have accomplished in and with Him (Romans 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:11-13; 3:1-4).

The latter part of verse four, "that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf," explains that the sacrifice would be accepted for the offerer's benefit. Though specific sin was not the reason for this offering, the offerer was still a sinner and the slain sacrifice did "make atonement on his behalf." Expiation preceded devotion.

Everything was now ready for slaying the young bullock. The offerer had acknowledged the Lord's awesome majesty and holiness. Life itself, God's great gift, belonged initially to Him. Here, the offerer would give it back to God in voluntary sacrifice.

The priests carefully collected the blood and lifted it up in its basin toward God's manifest presence in the holy of holies. Blood symbolized life; and, because life belonged to God, so did the blood. The priests would then sprinkle it around the altar or "against the altar on all sides" as the

New International Version puts it. The atoning blood made the altar ceremonially clean, fit to receive the sacrifice.

Next, the priests skinned the bullock, perhaps to preserve the “pleasing aroma” from mixing with that of burning hair and hide. But more important, the perfect body would now be fully exposed to the altar’s flame.

The four parts mentioned are significant. While other portions of certain offerings may have been eaten by the priests or by the offerer and his family, the inward fat, like the blood, was reserved for God. Just as the blood carried life, so the fat suggested inward energy because it flamed up quickly in the fire. Representing inward spiritual energy, it rose swiftly to God. Such devotion can only be fully seen in Christ and fully appreciated by the Father.

The head signified intellect; the inward organs, the seat of emotions for ancient Hebrews; and legs, their spiritual walk. In Christ, who was our whole burnt offering, these areas were infinitely perfect and offered to God on our behalf.

After washing the entrails and legs (to maintain the picture of purity), the priest would arrange them with the other parts to show that the whole sacrifice was on the altar. It would then be offered up in smoke as “a soothing aroma to the Lord.” The King James Version translates it “sweet savor” (verse 9), while the New International calls it “an aroma pleasing to the LORD.”

The altar fire lifted a voluntary offering to God in atonement, but its significance went deeper. The total offering, from head to innermost en-

ergy and emotion, was lifted as a sweet savor of complete devotion and honor. When God accepted the sacrifice, He would restore the offerer to a relationship of favor with Himself.

Christians throughout the centuries have treasured the truth that Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed the cross. Isaiah said, “Thou shalt make His (Messiah’s) soul an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10 KJV). The New Testament is full of similar references—from John the Baptist’s “Behold the Lamb of God” to Revelation’s “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” Although we have noted some parallels, there are also significant differences.

In the levitical sacrifice, death came first, followed by the flaying, the laying out of each part and the fire. In Christ’s sacrifice, however, the fire of infinite suffering precipitated the sacrificial death.

We can see anticipatory fire in Gethsemane and the trials before both Caiaphas and Pilate. But the mockery, scourging and crown of thorns introduced the actual fire. Ironically, the shameful exposure of Christ’s total nakedness before a jeering crowd only revealed His perfection. Peter later commented, “While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats” (1 Peter 2:23).

The unspeakable physical suffering of crucifixion emphasized Christ’s unfailing grace. “Father, forgive,” He said after the nails were driven in, “for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

By far the most intense flame was Christ’s spiritual suffering. The Lord Most Holy was made sin for us. The Son, who was ever one with the

Father and Spirit, suddenly was forsaken. Yet in absolute loyalty and obedience, Christ gave Himself to that fire, offering up His whole being in devotion. When an Old Testament offerer would identify with his sacrifice by laying his hands on it, he was accepted before God. So we today, united by faith with our Sacrifice, are “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6 KJV) or “taken in gracious favor.” Even more than having our sins forgiven, we stand in Christ’s righteousness before God, in all the aroma of the infinite Burnt Offering. This is what Jeremiah meant when he called Messiah “the Lord our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6).

Some insist that God considers us righteous because Christ kept the law for us. But the apostle Paul writes, “As through *one transgression* [the Fall] there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through *one act of righteousness* [the cross] there resulted justification of life to all men” (Romans 5:18).

Equally conclusive is his statement in Romans 3:21, “Now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested.” Our righteous standing is not through the law, but the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The Lord Jesus delivered pure grace to us and absolute obedience to the Father. As our whole burnt offering, He brought infinite honor to God on our behalf.

You will notice three distinct grades of burnt offering in Leviticus 1. We have already examined the highest, the young bullock. The second was a male sheep or goat, sacrificed in the same manner as the bullock. (Leviticus 7:8 implies the sheep or goat was similarly skinned.) The

third was a bird, either a turtledove or pigeon. All were considered ceremonially clean. The only distinction, from a natural viewpoint, was economic. A bullock was costly, while even the poorest Israelite could obtain a turtledove.

Some scholars have suggested the spiritual significance of these sacrifices. The bullock is said to represent patient strength; the lamb, gentle self-surrender; the goat, bearing others’ sins; the birds, mourning and association with the poor. All these qualities are found in our perfect burnt offering, Jesus Christ.

A striking challenge confronts us as we picture three grades of appreciation for Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. With a bullock-size appreciation, we should echo Paul’s conviction: “May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14).

There is also a mid-size appreciation, good but still challenged by the best. Significantly, two classes in Israel had to bring at least a sheep or goat: priests and princes. God’s standard of devotion for leaders in the church should hardly be lower.

The spiritually poor or babes with only pigeon-size appreciation are still accepted by God. For the Christian in this condition, there is not only encouragement but also abundant provision for bullock-quality growth.

While the order for offering sheep or goats was virtually identical with that of the bullock, the ritual for a bird was different. Leviticus does not mention laying hands on bird, sheep or goat sacrifices. This may simply be implied or it could suggest that entering into oneness with the sacrifice

demands a bullock-size appreciation. As Christians, we must recognize and embrace the Lord's "obedience unto death."

For a bird offering, the priest did all the preparation and actual sacrificing. The offerer's inability to enter actively into the service may result from a small appreciation of the sacrifice.

Leviticus emphasizes cleanliness of the pigeon or turtledove. No other bird offering required removing the crop as well as the feathers. The head was wrung off and its blood drained on the side of the altar. Next the priest would tear, not sever, the wings so the fire could reach the entire body. Though small, the bird would become a sweet savor to God; and the offerer would be accepted before the Lord.

Leviticus chapter 6 distinguishes these burnt sacrifices as continual offerings, symbolizing Israel's constant devotion to Jehovah. The priest would put on a special linen garment for this service. Each day, according to levitical law, he would offer a new sacrifice and discard yesterday's ashes. These offerings were not to be removed from the altar nor was the fire ever allowed to go out.

Christ's acceptability as our whole burnt offering guarantees our security as believers. The most important response to God's mercy is the "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." Because we have been redeemed by Christ's blood, this is our "spiritual service of worship" (Romans 12:1).

Questions for Leviticus 2

1. What names were given to the offering in chapter 2 in NASB and KJV? Why does the KJV call it a "meat offering" (see John 4:32)?
2. Why is fine flour considered a symbol of Christ's character, revealed in His earthly life and ministry?
3. What does oil symbolize in Scripture?
4. Why was a handful from the offering called the "memorial portion?"
5. Why was all the frankincense burned with this portion?
6. Can you name the three times God, in a voice from heaven, acknowledged that Christ had fulfilled this offering?
7. Why was the remainder of the offering, eaten by the priests, considered "most holy?"
8. Why were leaven and honey excluded from regular levitical offerings?
9. What was the significance of a "covenant of salt" (verse 13)?
10. Why isn't atonement mentioned in this chapter? What does this imply about preaching only about Christ's example without stressing the cross?

The Grain and First Fruits

Leviticus 2

When Leviticus 17:11 (KJV) declares, “It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul,” why should a bloodless sacrifice have so prominent a place?

The second regular levitical offering is quite different from the others. Rather than a slain animal, here is fine flour, olive oil, salt and frankincense. The King James Version calls it the “meat” offering. In old-English, this meant “food” (see John 4:32). More recent versions use “meal” or “grain.”

The offering was never intended to accomplish atonement; the words “alone” and “atonement” are not found in the chapter. Numbers 15:2-10 shows the meal offering usually accompanied a slain sacrifice with its atoning work. The whole burnt offering, as the highest sacrifice, is wholly for God; it is the primary sweet savor. Also identified as a sweet savor, the meal offering appropriately follows.

Manna is not mentioned. A temporary provision, manna had its own message: God provided “bread from heaven” as needed in the wilderness. Although unbelief kept the Israelites wandering 40 years, the Lord provided the necessary manna.

When they reached Kadesh-Barnea, the place of decision, God commanded the people to go into the land. Leviticus details standard procedure for life there. The land’s “milk

and honey” would include plentiful grain harvests for food and offerings.

In this offering, fine flour was the primary ingredient. Beyond raising or buying the grain, it had to be pounded or ground between millstones until it was completely even. Such fineness represented a life of perfectly even-textured obedience and honor to God.

When offered with a sincere heart according to the Lord’s instructions, this sacrifice was accepted as a sweet savor, honoring God and encouraging the offerer. But it also foreshadowed an important aspect of Christ’s work. His was a perfectly even-textured life of obedience and honor to God the Father. Christ demonstrated the excellence of His character in His life and ministry, which depicted the true Meal Offering.

Fine flour typifies the perfect fineness of the God-Man who could say, “I always do the things that are pleasing to Him (the Father)” (John 8:29). The true aroma, the infinite sweet savor, arose to God through the fire of Christ’s suffering during His earthly life which climaxed at the cross.

Some olive oil was always added to the fine flour. It enabled cakes or wafers to be formed, and it contributed richness and flavor.

One of the Bible's best-recognized symbols, oil pictured the person and work of the Holy Spirit. There could be no acceptable meal offering, no sweet savor rising to God, without the presence of God's Holy Spirit.

From the virgin birth to Christ's death and resurrection, the eternal Spirit accomplished His work (Hebrews 9:14). We, as well, must bring our "spiritual meal offerings" of worship and thanksgiving in full dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The other required ingredient was salt, an almost universal seasoning (see Job 6:6). In early times, it was also used as a preservative. Both qualities were significant in the offering, just as they were for Christ's disciples, whom He declared "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13).

If believers maintain a right spiritual condition, their presence and witness will retard moral and spiritual decay. By gracious but pungent contributions, our seasoning can lift conversation from the empty and tasteless. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt," Paul directed (Colossians 4:6). The true Meal Offering never lacked salt.

Leviticus 2:13 added a new and striking aspect to the salt in this offering, calling it "the salt of the covenant of your God." Such a covenant did not change. In Numbers 18:19, certain offerings allotted to Aaron and his sons were declared "perpetual ... an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord." Again in 2 Chroni-

cles 13:5, "the Lord God of Israel gave the rule over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt."

Partaking together of salt established an unbreakable bond of friendship and protection. This Near Eastern tradition has persisted into recent years.

An intriguing aspect of the salt covenant concerns a phrase in Acts 1:4, translated "gathering them together," or literally "taking salt with them." It implies the risen Christ was establishing a "covenant of salt" with His own. The meal offering not only pictures Christ's life of obedience and honor to God, but also portrays God's accepting the aroma of the sacrifice. He is partaking of the "salt of the covenant" with His people.

Along with the offering, there was to be a designated amount of frankincense. The most prominent kind of incense, it formed part of a special incense that burned on the golden altar morning and evening as a continual sweet savor to God.

Like the incense of Exodus 30 and Revelation 8:3, frankincense signified the fragrance of Christ's innermost character rising to God through suffering and death. This was indeed a sweet savor to the Father.

Two things were excluded from the meal offering—leaven and honey. As an Old Testament symbol, leaven always represented evil. God warned Israel not to allow spiritual "leaven" in their lives. He instructed them to set aside the week following Passover for a Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In the New Testament, Christ used "leaven" to refer to evil in the Pharisees' and Sadducees' teaching (Matthew 16:6-12). The apostle Paul

admonished the Corinthians to avoid all “leaven” or moral evil. In a wider reference, he mentioned “the old leaven” and “the leaven of malice and wickedness” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). In Galatians 5:9, Paul likened Galatian legalism to yeast that could “leaven the whole lump of dough.”

Yeast’s function makes it a suitable symbol. It causes the dough to swell and become lighter and more palatable when baked. So it is with departure from God’s truth and standards.

Disobedience can give someone a feeling of lightness and freedom to change, a “swelling” of the ego. Sin can be attractive and exhilarating at first; but it ends without Christ, without God, without light or life. There was no leaven in Christ, the true Meal offering.

Because honey symbolized productivity in the Promised Land, it seems strange that it was excluded. Some claim it fermented easily like leaven, but beekeepers deny this. Spiritual symbolism seems the reason for its exclusion.

Natural, external “sweetness” is just sentimental, wholly apart from God’s grace. At first it can look attractive, but before long the superficiality becomes apparent. It smothers honesty; and the more the “honey” approach succeeds, the less a person feels his need for God. Its real motivation is self-promotion which is not honoring to God. There was none of this “honey” in Christ, and there must be none in our lives as living sacrifices to God.

The prepared meal offering was brought to the brazen altar. There the priest took a handful of the meal and all the frankincense and burned

them as a sacrifice. The handful, called the “memorial,” represented the whole offering. The major part being given to the priests as food did not detract from its holiness (Leviticus 2:3). When we priests (1 Peter 2:9) feed on the even-textured obedience of Christ’s earthly life, we glorify God as well as gain spiritual nourishment.

The writer of Leviticus mentions three methods of preparing the grain offering (2:4-7). These differed according to the utensils used and the amount of work involved. Listed in descending order, they’re like the sacrifices in chapter 1—from bullock to pigeon. In each case, the grain offering underwent heat, picturing the trials and suffering of Christ’s earthly life and ministry.

The first type was enclosed in an oven. This pointed to Christ’s deep, unseen suffering such as referred to in Hebrews 2:18. The holy Son of God had to be tempted; the spotless One was made sin. Considerable effort was involved in this offering. The ingredients were mixed and formed into thick unleavened cakes or thin wafers, spread with oil and carefully baked. The diligence shown here portrayed a concern for worship.

The second type was to be prepared on an open griddle which pictured Christ’s open, obvious sufferings. Because this sacrifice involved less concern about forming and timing, it showed less appreciation for its contribution to the sweet savor.

The third type used a common pan into which ingredients could be easily poured and quickly cooked. It represented minimum preparation. Although acceptable, this grain offering was far from what it could have

been.

Verse 12 explains the offering of the first fruits, where a sheaf of first-ripened grain was waved before the Lord on the first day of the week following Passover—the morning Christ arose. God directed the Israelites not to burn it as a sweet savor. Possibly it was too fresh to burn properly, but it also had spiritual significance. The first fruits pictured Christ arisen (1 Corinthians 15:20); they could never go on the same altar that portrayed the cross.

After the priest waved the sheaf of grain, he could then offer other grain which was to be beaten out of full heads that had been roasted. Oil, salt and frankincense were added to this crushed grain and presented to the priest. Again, he would take a memorial handful with all the frankincense and burn it on the altar as an “aroma pleasing to the Lord.”

The law concerning this offering emphasized the reverence with which a priest must offer it (Leviticus 6:14-18). The priests were to eat the remainder in the tabernacle court to

teach them that they drew strength from this offering. Because it was holy, anyone who touched it was consecrated to God. To touch Jesus Christ is also a life-changing experience.

An added note in the passage gave special instruction for the meal offering during a priest’s consecration (6:19-23). After this offering was stirred and baked on a griddle, half was burned in the morning and half in the evening. Because nothing was to detract from the complete consecration of the priest’s life to God, none of it could be eaten.

The meal offering gives us spiritual insight into Christ’s earthly life of absolute obedience and loyalty. His life honored God infinitely, gave us a perfect example and qualified Him to be our spotless sacrifice.

But the meal offering was not to stand alone; it did not meet the need for atonement for sin. Preaching the example of Christ’s life apart from His atoning sacrifice leaves the seeking soul facing an unrent veil, still outside God’s presence.

Questions for Leviticus 3 and 7:11-36

1. Check available Bible versions for the phrase “peace offering” in Leviticus 3:1. For example, the New International renders it “fellowship offering.” How does this affect your understanding of the offering?
2. What does the acceptability of either a male or female offering suggest?
3. Review carefully why an offerer laid his hand on the head of his sacrifice.
4. What two parts of the sacrifice were reserved for God alone and why?
5. What does the inner fat of the sacrifice symbolize? (Note that “whole rump” in the KJV is translated “fat tail” in later versions.)
6. Why couldn’t a poor man bring a pigeon for a peace offering?

7. The passage implies inviting friends and neighbors to help finish eating an offering the day it was sacrificed (7:15). What did God require of these people?
8. Why was it suitable, when a peace offering represented thanksgiving, to add a grain offering?
9. What startling addition was made to the standard meal or grain offering in this case? Can you suggest why this was done?
10. Besides hygienic reasons, why couldn't someone eat a sacrifice two days after it was offered? Was there a spiritual reason?
11. Note four things given to the priest from the peace offering. Name a spiritual significance for at least three.

God Provides Divine Friendship

Leviticus 3:1-17 and 7:11-36

From a human perspective, the peace offering of Leviticus 3:1-17 may be the most attractive. It was the Israelite's opportunity to praise God for who He is and what He has done.

With this third regular offering, which follows the description of the grain offering, we return to the standard slain sacrifices. The peace offering completes the group referred to as the "sweet savor offerings" because of their pleasing aroma to God. Like the previous offerings, the peace offering is voluntary. A responsive heart would celebrate God's goodness or give thanks for His special blessing.

Although the translation "peace offering" has been used for centuries, interesting alternatives have evolved. The Septuagint called it the "sacrifice of salvation." The Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria evidently thought it celebrated God's saving work.

More than 2,000 years later, the New International Version used "fellowship offering," because the original Hebrew definition encompassed "friendship." In the ritual for this offering, God, the priest, the offerer and his family all shared the sacrificial feast.

The peace offering recalls characteristics of the first two offerings. The burnt offering had every part consumed on the altar, rising to God alone. The meal offering had a repre-

sentative portion with all the frankincense burned as a sweet savor to God; the rest became the priests' sacred food.

In the peace offering, however, the blood and fat were God's, and the breast and the right shoulder or "thigh" were given to the priest. The rest constituted a feast for the offerer, his family and friends. This is a climactic picture of full communion, impossible without the two previous offerings.

The peace offering portrays the fellowship we have in Christ, our infinite sacrifice. The New Testament specifies: He "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20 NASB). He gives His peace to His own (John 14:27); "He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14); and "God ... reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Each detail relating to the peace offering had a message. The animal was to be taken from a man's own herd or flock. A small offering wasn't appropriate because it was to be used for a feast. And spiritually, to enjoy the peace and fellowship Christ would establish on the cross required

more than a small appreciation of His sacrifice.

The animal could be either male or female, in contrast to the whole burnt offering which had to be male. That offering emphasized the strongly active aspect of Jesus' obedience unto death, whereby He honored God. When Christ made peace through His blood, however, the passive element of His suffering became apparent. Equally part of His work to bring reconciliation and fellowship, this aspect can be symbolized in a female.

Every standard offering of the Old Testament had to be spotless. The One to whom the peace offering pointed was also without defect. The New Testament testifies of "One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Some will say Jesus could not sympathize with us if He had not experienced sin. This argument is false. Only one who has stood against the storm really knows its power, not one who lets it carry him along.

As the offerer brought his sacrifice to the door of the tabernacle, he made a significant gesture. By laying his hand on the head of the sacrifice, he identified himself before God with that sacrifice—both what it would undergo and what it would accomplish. On this basis, he could obtain peace and fellowship with God.

The apostle John applied this principle to believers today. "We may have confidence in the day of judgment," he wrote, "because as [Christ] is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). Our identification with Christ in His infinite work on Calvary is our source of peace and fellowship.

Now that the offerer was consciously before the Lord, he would take a knife and slay his sacrifice. There could be no peace apart from satisfying the righteous demands of God's character. The levitical sacrifice had its token value, looking to the infinite satisfaction on the cross. By this, our own peace was made; and our hearts were drawn into loving fellowship with God.

The blood, representing life, belonged to God. It was caught by the priest and offered to Him by sprinkling it on the altar. The blood of the original Passover lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts of Israelite houses in Egypt. This sprinkled blood proclaimed to God the death of the sacrificial substitute. And to those for whom it died, peace would come, followed by the fellowship meal.

The inward fat of the sacrifice was also completely reserved for God. Representing the animal's stored up energy, it would quickly ignite when placed on the fire as an offering to God, carrying the aroma heavenward. The fat symbolized the strong inner energy of Christ. In the fire of His suffering burned an inward zeal and deep devotion to the Father, His house and His redemptive purpose.

The repeated details about the location of the fat show its importance. Even the concentration of fat at the base of the sheep's tail was not forgotten. The statement in 3:17 underscores this further: "It is a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall not eat any fat or any blood." The fat of the sacrifices portrayed the zeal and devotion that carried Christ to the cross; the blood atoned for the sin.

Considerable instruction is given in the law of the peace offering, making it the longest of these laws (7:11-36). The inspired writer changed it from its regular third position to the last position in the law of the offerings. Perhaps he felt the longest and most complex law should be placed last. But more likely, he noted the peace offering's close relationship to the priests' consecration, described in chapter 8.

The point of this law was that there had to be a part of the offering reserved for God, a part for the priest and something for the offerer, his family and friends. Real communion became possible because of the peace made through that sacrifice. Similarities to the Lord's Supper are obvious. We were reconciled to God, and with Him we share the blessed results of the Sacrifice.

As priests, we have an inalienable right to the breast of our Sacrifice, symbolizing the love of Him who "loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). The shoulder or thigh was also allotted to the priests who actively offered the blood and the fat. The shoulder pictured the strength of the sacrifice; any spiritually active Christian finds himself strengthened in spirit as he remembers his Peace Offering.

The offerer and his family, friends and neighbors feasted on the remainder of the sacrifice which included the choice portions. In the fellowship offering, the poor had their fill without having to pay for even a pigeon.

God desired that every family feast in Israel have the nature of a peace offering. Could His ideal be lower for believers today?

There are several more important details about the peace offering. When it was given specifically for thanksgiving, two things were to be added. First was the meal offering with its unleavened cakes of fine flour and oil. Thanks should arise not just because Christ died but for His perfect obedience to the Father and dependence on the Holy Spirit during His lifetime.

The second addition was startling—leavened bread. Wasn't leaven a symbol of evil forbidden in any sacrifice to the Lord? Yes, the offering that made peace and reconciled man to God represented Christ so there was no leaven in it.

But there was also man's thankful response. All too often the leaven of self-interest will enter into our praise. Even the smallest amount of leaven would spoil an offering for the altar, yet God still values His people's thanksgiving. For this reason, the leavened bread was given to the officiating priest but not put on the altar. Throughout Scripture, we're exhorted to bring our honest praises to Him regardless of how meager.

The restrictions on the time for eating the offering (7:15-18) are related to hygiene, symbolism, personal significance and a guard against selfishness. God was concerned for His people's health. In a hot climate without refrigeration, keeping meat beyond the second day could be dangerous. Symbolically, decay must never be allowed to occur in the representation of the true Peace Offering. What remained after the second day had to be burned.

Further, a time lapse between offering and eating the sacrifice could make the feast lose its significance.

Likewise, if our thanksgiving fellowship during the Lord's Supper separates us in mind and heart from its only source—the suffering and death of Christ—communion will decay into dead formality or merely a social gathering.

When a peace offering was to express thankfulness, all the meat had to be eaten the day of the sacrifice. Because the offerer could not save any of it for later, he was encouraged to invite his poor but “clean” neighbors to help him.

But if the feast was designed to be smaller and more personal, arising from an intense devotion to the Lord and leading to greater care of the offering, eating could continue the day after the sacrifice. These people were presumed spiritually strong enough not to eat the leftovers thoughtlessly.

Any sacrifice that remained until the third day or became contaminated by unclean contact was to be burned. And if it was eaten the third day, the offerer lost his benefit before the Lord; the one who ate became guilty and needed spiritual renewal. It was more serious if an unclean person ate the peace offering. He was to be cut off from all contact with his people because he had knowingly disregarded the holiness of God (verses 19-21).

The next six verses reinforce the command that fat was acceptable for sacrifice, but not to be eaten; it belonged to God. If an animal died or was killed by another animal, however, its fat could be used for other purposes. And blood, which bore life and so belonged to God, was also never to be eaten. Offenders were to be excluded from fellowship in Israel.

In conclusion, turn to the Gospel accounts of Christ's sacrifice. Matthew and Mark both emphasize the agony of bearing the world's sin and guilt. They cite one cry from the cross found in Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” This reflects the sin and trespass offerings.

The Gospel of John highlights the voluntariness of Christ's sacrifice and its completeness (10:18), reflecting the whole burnt offering. The Lord Jesus discharged His highest human responsibility by giving John care of His mother. As the completion of the suffering approached, Jesus cried out, “I thirst,” as prophesied. Finally, He shouted in a loud voice, “It is finished” (19:30).

In contrast, Luke emphasizes the reconciliation of the peace offering, selecting three of Christ's statements from the cross:

- He prayed for God's graciousness toward those who drove in the nails. “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do” (23:34).

- Just before the darkness came, Christ told the criminal at His side, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (23:43). Here we see not just full forgiveness, but personal fellowship with the Lord of Glory. It began that very day on the basis of simple faith, not ordinances or works. This is the responsibility of the true Peace Offering.

- His last cry confirmed His triumph. The One who minutes before had cried out in agony, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” now calmly laid down His life with the realization of restored fellowship. “Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit”

(23:46). In perfect confidence, peace had been made.

Questions for Leviticus 4 and 5

1. There's a question whether 5:1-13 belongs to the sin offering or to the trespass offering. To which would you think it belongs?
2. Why does God restrict the offering to unintentional sins?
3. When a priest sinned, why did he have to bring as large and costly a sacrifice as when the whole congregation sinned?
4. How would someone handle the blood of the sin offering differently from the burnt or peace offering? Why?
5. What symbolism do you see in taking the whole bull outside the camp and burning it there?
6. What do you find noteworthy about the "sweet savor" or "pleasing aroma" in 4:31?
7. What does 5:1 refer to (see NIV)? How might this be related to Acts 1:8?
8. What fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23) would best counteract the sin in 5:4?
9. What new element does 5:5, 6 bring into God's dealing with sin?
10. What are the differences between the substitute sin offering for the poor (5:11, 12) and the regular meal or grain offering (chapter 2)?

There's Power in the Blood

Leviticus 4 and 5

The final Levitical offerings lack a buoyant, joyful spirit. Sin offends God and condemns the sinner to death. Graciously, God provides a substitute.

The last two regular offerings (Leviticus 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30) are distinct from the first three which honored God through a “sweet savor” and brought reconciliation and fellowship with God. Instead, these offerings emphasize the guilt and penalty of sin and the need for an atoning sacrifice.

The sin offering dealt with sin in its essence and showed how far God would go to rid man of this malady. It specifically pictured Christ being made “sin on our behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The writer of Hebrews declares, “For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (13:11, 12).

Some teachers believe this section in Leviticus should end at the close of chapter 4, but we shall consider the presentation of the sin offering to extend through 5:13. Although the terms “trespass offering” or “guilt offering” occur twice in chapter five, verses 6 and 7 clearly emphasize “as a sin offering” and “for a sin offering” along with five other direct references.

A poor offender could bring as little as a bowl of flour for an accept-

able offering. Including 5:1-13 with the sin offering allows us to trace this provision. There's also no mention in this passage of “restitution,” a recognized characteristic of the trespass offering. The passage, however, could be transitional; there is a close relationship between the sin and guilt offerings.

Note that this offering is for unintentional “sins of ignorance,” in contrast to sins committed in deliberate rebellion against God's standards and defiance of His authority. God would not tolerate such conduct in His people; if it did happen, the penalty was death or excommunication.

When David under Nathan's denunciation awoke to the enormity of his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah, he did not offer a sacrifice (Psalm 51). Instead, he threw himself on God's mercy, pleading with “a broken spirit ... and contrite heart” that God in His grace would not despise him. After restoration, David would bring many bullocks as burnt offerings.

In general, a sinner's prominence in the Jewish culture determined the grade of his sin offering. “The anointed priests,” including all priests but primarily the high priest, were mentioned first. Note 4:3, “If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people” (NIV). The priest repre-

sented the people to such an extent that if he sinned, the people were considered guilty.

The sin offering for a priest equaled the offering for the entire nation. This showed the negative side of priestly representation. But the positive side is glorious. Christ, our priestly representative, so glorified God in His obedient suffering and death that we were made “the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The priest had to bring a young bullock. Such an expensive sacrifice corresponded to his high position. “In ignorance” is not mentioned here; the priest was expected to know the facts about sin and to be spiritually sensitive. Because the bullock would bear the penalty of sin before a holy God and pictured Christ in His infinite perfection, it had to be without defect.

The priest would present his offering “before the Lord” near the tabernacle entrance, lay his hand on the animal’s head in the gesture of identification and slay the bullock. Death, the penalty or “wages” of sin, was met in the substitute, a token of Christ’s propitiation on the cross.

Next the priest would take some blood (the evidence of sacrificial death) inside the holy place, dip his finger into it and sprinkle it seven times before the veil, beyond which the Shekinah glory rested over the mercy seat. The blood was then before God in perfect atoning power.

Worship and ministry at the altar of incense, however, had been cut off by the high priest’s sin. So the blood had to be applied to the horns on the altar. This freed the priest to minister again, lifting to God the fragrant in-

cense of worship mingled with Israel’s prayers. The rest of the blood was poured out beside the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard.

The inward fat was also reserved exclusively for God, because it held the inner, stored-up energy of the sacrifice. When laid on the altar fire, it would quickly ignite, carrying with it any other offerings present.

As in the peace offering, the fat represented Christ’s inner zeal and devotion for God. In the sin offering, it emphasized the accomplishment of the Father’s purpose in Jesus, who would “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Luke 12:50 highlights this zeal for putting away sin: “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!” Christ’s zeal to fulfill God’s purpose held Him to that “baptism,” by which He would conquer sin and death and establish a new creation in resurrection life.

After the blood of the bull had been sprinkled and its fat burned on the altar, all the rest—hide, head and entrails as well as the body proper—was taken outside the camp to a clean place where the ashes were poured out and burned completely.

This action was distinctive to the sin offering in its highest form. The writer of Hebrews explains that this Old Testament ritual pictured in detail the suffering and death of Christ. For our atonement He suffered, died and was buried outside the gate of Jerusalem.

But why “outside the camp” or “outside the gate”? Several answers have been proposed. Some say the offering was too sinful or “saturated with sin” to remain in camp. But God had accepted its blood before the

tabernacle veil and its fat upon the altar. (And although Christ died outside the city, Jerusalem was hardly too holy for Christ to suffer within its walls.) If, on the other hand, these portions were too holy to be burned within the camp, how could the whole burnt offering—certainly of equal, if not greater holiness—be offered there?

Two other suggestions are worth considering. 1) God dealt with sin apart from the law. This understanding agrees with both Hebrews 13:11-13 and Galatians. Or 2) this sacrifice portrayed God's full work of salvation, taking away into death all sin. Christ's suffering and death accomplished this in reality for all believers (Romans 6). The Christian, by union with Jesus in His death and resurrection, has ended his career as a sinner and has become a new creation.

The following section (4:13-21) concerns the sin of the whole congregation. Although God expected a priest to recognize his infraction immediately, He acknowledged that a sin might "escape the notice" of the general congregation. He allowed the people time to recognize their sin. Repentance was essential for cleansing, just as it is for salvation today through Jesus Christ.

Another difference in the ritual for the general congregation is that the tribal elders were responsible to lay their hands on the head of the sacrifice. Through these representatives, the people were identified with their sacrifice in its death for their sin.

The rest of the chapter discusses the sin of individuals, whether a secular leader or a common person. Through the sacrifice of the entire ani-

mal in the previous offerings, the Lord demonstrated that his full, deep dealing with sin involves taking it away completely through death. But in this ritual, the meat of the sacrifice was given to the priest for food (5:13). Though thoroughly sacred, it was also economically useful.

When a secular leader became conscious of his sin, he had to offer a male goat without blemish. Because he bore greater responsibility, his sacrifice was to be larger than the female required for the common people. He laid his hand on the goat's head in the traditional gesture of identification and killed it "before the Lord" near the tabernacle entrance.

The blood, however, was not taken into the holy place. Unlike the sin of a priest or the entire congregation, this man's sin had not hindered the worship there. Part of the blood was sprinkled by the priest onto the horns of the altar of burnt offering, signifying the atoning and cleansing power of the blood. Burning the inward fat pictured again the inward zeal of Christ rising to God in His death on the cross.

Every priest was to eat of the sacrifice and only in the court of the tabernacle. Whatever touched the meat became consecrated to God (see 6:27). How could a mere man minister before God without consciously and deeply feeding on a sacrifice for sin?

The common Israelite offered a female goat or lamb. (The goat was probably preferable because of its role as sinbearer on the Day of Atonement.) The ritual was the same as for the secular leader. Atonement would be made and forgiveness established; salvation could come only

through the death of a spotless substitute.

The first three levitical offerings were bright, voluntary expressions of honor and devotion, rising to God as a pleasing aroma or “sweet savor.” But these last two were required sin offerings, designed to satisfy the righteous judgment of God. Because of their solemn character, some scholars have designated these offerings as “non-sweet savor.”

But there was one break in this atmosphere of judgment. In the common Israelite's offering, the inward fat was to be burned “for a soothing aroma to the Lord” (4:31). When God watched a humble and contrite person claim atonement by faith through his sacrifice, He responded in what Christ called “joy in the presence of the angels” (Luke 15:10).

The beginning of chapter 5 deviates from the actual sin offering. Instead, it points to various areas of sin that otherwise might go unnoticed. The first was failure to serve as a witness. When a trial was to take place, anyone who had seen or known anything relevant to the case was to report to court regardless of whether it was inconvenient or potentially embarrassing.

The second area concerned failure to separate from pagans. God's laws against defilement arose primarily from His concern for Israel's physical, moral and spiritual health. Direct contact with people who had minor infections or serious diseases could cause sickness or death.

But “to touch” their false religion was worse. Whether it's an Israelite toying with an idol or a professed Christian studying one of the new pantheistic philosophies, such com-

promise can lead to spiritual death.

The third area was lack of self-control. Loose, thoughtless talk was sinful. Careless oaths to do evil—“I'll get him for this”—could increase the pressure to harm that person. And a positive promise without action had the potential of becoming a lie, destroying confidence in the speaker or wrecking a friendship.

These sins required a full offering for the common people. But if someone was poor, he could bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. Having two birds did not compensate for their small size; the text states one was “for a sin offering, the other for a burnt offering” (5:7). Perhaps God was challenging the poor to enter into the highest of the offerings. Though small, the sacrifices were lifted to God; and the offerer was accepted in all that sweet savor.

The priest would take the two birds and nip off the first one's head without severing it from the body. He would then sprinkle some of the blood for atonement against the wall of the altar and drain the rest at its base. The body would be burned to assure the aromatic fat rose to God.

When the priest prepared the second bird, he did it “according to the ordinance” (verse 10)—wringing off its head, pouring its blood beside the altar and plucking its crop and feathers—which qualified it as a perfect sweet savor. The body was torn, but not severed, by the wings to make it lie flat on the coals. The sacrifice became a whole burnt offering of complete honor and devotion to God. It pointed ultimately to Christ, the infinite burnt offering of the lowly as well as of the great.

Because sin offerings were re-

quired, God provided for even the very poor to bring one. Flour or grain, perhaps gleaned as from Boaz's fields, had to be threshed and ground or beaten into a fine texture to represent the true Bread of Life. As a substitute for a lamb or bird, this grain doubly emphasized the principle of substitution—for the poor and for the sinner.

No oil was to be added to a sin offering. The Holy Spirit, who convicts men of sin, would comfort an offerer only after his sacrifice had been accepted. And frankincense was reserved for a full "sweet savor" offering.

The priest would then take a "memorial handful" from the flour as in the meal offering and put it on the altar "with the offerings of the Lord by fire" (verse 12). Although Hebrews 9:22 states "without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," this principle is not invalidated here; the flour would be united with other blood offerings on the altar, furnishing atonement and forgiveness. The rest of the flour belonged to the priest, just as the meat did in the common person's regular sin offering.

We've referred to the "law of sin offering" (6:24-30) several times. It highlighted the priest's role, especially concerning holiness. The priests were to slay the sin offering, as they did the whole burnt offering, "before the Lord" at the tabernacle entrance. After sprinkling the blood and burning the fat, they were commanded explicitly to eat the flesh, considered a most holy thing.

In essence, the priest made the sacrifice for sin part of himself, the source of his strength for service. Anything that touched this offering was consecrated to the Lord. Therefore, any earthen pot used to wash its blood stain from a garment had to be broken and one of bronze scoured and rinsed. All this was to impress upon the priests sin's seriousness.

The final word of the passage warns that under no circumstance was the sacrificial blood to be eaten by the priests. Nothing could be allowed to obscure the picture of God's radical dealing with sin, accomplished through the blood of His Son sacrificed "outside the gate."

Questions for Leviticus 5, 6 and 7

1. Comparing the KJV with the NASB, consider the names used for Israel's final regular offering. Decide on the more fitting translation. 2. What elements in 5:14-6:7 were not mentioned in previous offerings?
3. What might be included in "the Lord's holy things"? How could one sin "unintentionally" in this area?
4. Why did God require both a ram and an offering of silver?
5. Verse 16 of chapter 5 speaks of sinning "against the holy thing" and adding one-fifth to the penalty. Find a similar regulation in 6:1-7. What is the connection?
6. In this latter section, what is the general nature of the offense?
7. Briefly define any offense in 6:2-5 that is not readily obvious.

8. What part should restitution have in salvation today?
9. Why did Isaiah use the word "guilt" for this offering (53:10)?
10. How would the five offerings, representing Christ, most fully meet our needs today?

The Trespass Offering

Leviticus 5, 6 and 7

Moses deals with this offering last in Leviticus 5:14-6:7 and 7:1-7. But this doesn't mean that the trespass or guilt offering was least important to God.

Isaiah 53 is the first great exposition of Messiah's suffering and death. The prophet began by detailing the early obscurity of the Lord's Servant, then highlighting His rejection by the nation's leaders. One of the strongest descriptions of vicarious suffering follows.

Verse 7 introduces Christ's death "like a lamb that is led to slaughter"; verse 10 (KJV) reaches a climax: "Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin (*asham*, 'guilt offering')."

Why did Isaiah emphasize the last of the regular offerings? The whole burnt offering was higher and grander with every part rising to God as a sweet savor. The peace offering was most attractive, picturing the believer reconciled to God and enjoying full fellowship. But Isaiah's choice was not arbitrary.

The King James translators recognized that the central idea of the Hebrew word describing the offering was "guilt," but they rendered the term in Leviticus as "trespass" to distinguish it from the preceding sin or guilt offering. Although the New American Standard Bible translates it "guilt offering" in the text, the section is titled "trespass offering." The New International Version uses "guilt" in both places.

We need a clear grasp of the relation between the sin offerings (Leviticus 4:1-5-5:13; 6:24-30) and the trespass offerings. Both deal with sin in its essential character—choosing self above God.

The sin offering emphasized God's condemnation of rebellion against His authority, which offended His holiness. It portrayed God's taking the whole old thing—brought by the Fall—away into death through the cross. (Paul wrote, "Our old self was crucified with Him.")

The trespass offering, on the other hand, stressed individual sin, particularly the injury inflicted on others. Because all sin involved guilt before God, He required a sacrifice. But when injury to another was involved, compensation (plus 20 per cent) was added.

The trespass offering is presented in two divisions. The first related to God—sin "against the Lord's holy things" (5:14-19). The second, considered equally sinful, concerned offenses against other men (6:1-7). The offender sacrificed a ram, which was a large, valuable animal. United with the restitution money, it became an expensive thing.

The first set of offenses is described generally as acting unfaith-

fully, in violation of the Sinai covenant but not necessarily in deliberate defiance of God (5:15). As in previous offerings, the sin was considered “unintentional.”

Among “the Lord’s holy things,” the one perhaps uppermost in the writer’s mind was the tithe, a primary support for the tabernacle. Faithfulness in this was a barometer of the nation’s spiritual level. Malachi spoke strongly, “Will a man rob God?” (3:7-10). The nation had done just that by withholding the tithe, and it called for a trespass offering.

Although believers today are not under law, the standards of life and devotion under grace are not lower than in the Sinai covenant. Giving must be voluntary, cheerful and in proportion to one’s income (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Unexpected income, like Old Testament firstfruits, could be an occasion for higher percentage giving. According to 2 Corinthians 8, 9, all Christians should feel responsible for meeting needs. And let us never belittle honesty regarding the proportion of our giving. Two believers in Acts 5 forfeited their lives for such failure.

Other “holy things” are just as precious to the Lord. The blood and inward fat of clean animals were sacredly His. The blood represented a spotless life poured out in atoning sacrifice, and the fat represented the inner energy of that sacrifice rising to God in obedience and devotion. To use these in cooking or to eat them at a neighbor’s feast, satisfying a self-indulgent appetite, offended God.

In our day, when we treat Christ’s infinite atonement and perfect obedience unto death as grounds for spiritual lethargy, it is equally an

offense to God and an injury to His cause.

The penalty for the trespass was twofold: a ram for a sacrifice and restitution in silver for an injury. As in any regular offering, the ram was without blemish to picture Christ’s perfection. The offerer put his hands on the head of the sacrifice to identify with it, and the ram was slain near the tabernacle entrance before the Lord.

The priest sprinkled part of the blood at the side of the brazen altar and poured the rest onto the base. The inward fat was offered to God on the altar fire, making complete atonement as the aroma arose to God. The priests would later eat the flesh in a holy place to signify the sacredness of God’s holy things and draw strength from feeding on the sacrifice.

Offenders paid restitution to the priests to compensate for any harm done to God’s cause. It was given “in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary,” which was as much before the Lord as slaying the ram. Moses determined the “valuation” of harm done and added one-fifth.

Christ has atoned for all guilt and made infinite restitution for man’s failure to bring God glory. But some people who have converted to Christ later in life have recognized the need to make restitution to those they had defrauded, and many have thus accomplished valiant service for the Lord. If Moses could estimate in his day, surely Christ can be trusted to direct His conscientious servants today.

Verses 17-19 cover a broad range of offenses, described as doing “any of the things which the Lord has

commanded not to be done.” Again a ram was required, and Moses’ “valuation” was consulted. Disobedience always causes considerable harm. When we act contrary to God’s will, we injure His honor and government.

The second division dealt with an Israelite’s relation to his neighbor (6:1-7). The sins in this passage are manifestations of “action unfaithfully against the Lord,” but not major crimes. Murder, rape, adultery, theft and false witness are considered elsewhere.

These sins may require time for the offender to fully realize his guilt (verse 4). Verse 3 may refer to sins people try to defend by saying, “Everybody does that.” But these are still sins that bring guilt before God. He wants his people free from them.

Specifically, these sins entail wrongly getting or keeping, by robbery or extortion, what belongs to someone else. Or perhaps a person finds lost property and lies to retain it. Swearing falsely, in any connection, is included with these sins.

Cheating and lying, so prominent today, demonstrate the essential nature of sin: self-gain regardless of God’s will and standards. The Christian should have died to that type of life in his death with Christ.

When a believer does sin against his neighbor, which must be the exception, Christ our Advocate intercedes for us on the basis of the propitiation He has made already at Calvary (1 John 2:1). That settles the question of guilt before God.

When we have sinned, let’s confess it quickly and humbly ask God’s pardon. If we have caused material loss or physical harm, we should make every effort to set it right by ac-

counting for entrusted funds, returning loans or clearing up old grievances and misunderstandings.

We can derive another application from this truth. Those of us who have received solid Bible instruction have been entrusted with a precious deposit. It reaches from the finished work of the cross and the assurance of salvation through our union with Christ, to the personal presence of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual nature of the church—and on to the truth of Christ’s second coming. This treasure belongs to those whose hearts are open to the Lord. If we withhold this message from them, we are guilty. (The added one-fifth might well be an enthusiastic appreciation of the truth.)

We have already discussed the details of the offering ritual, which emphasized its holiness (7:1-7). Although the offering dealt with seemingly minor offenses—such as neglected tithes and firstfruit offerings or a purse found but not returned—it does not mean it was unimportant to God or less sacred than the whole burnt offering.

The male lamb clearly pictured Christ. Its blood had to be sprinkled on the sides of the altar, and its flesh must be called “most holy” and be eaten by the priests in a holy place. The skin of the sacrifice was given to the sacrificing priest, who needed a constant reminder of God’s object lesson for Adam after the Fall.

In Exodus, plans for the tabernacle began with God’s throne, the mercy seat in the holy of holies. It worked its way step by step through the holy place to the outside of the tabernacle and eventually to the court gate. So it was with the presen-

tation of the offerings.

Moses began with the highest, the whole burnt offering, which was reserved absolutely for God—the blood, head, fat, entrails and legs. Rising as a sweet savor, the sacrifice typified Christ giving Himself completely to God in infinite obedience. The offerer was fully accepted by God. In the same way, believers today are welcomed at God’s throne.

Next came the meal or grain offering, which could not atone by itself but pictured Christ’s life of even-textured obedience and honor to God. On the altar, the fine flour offering united with the slain sacrifices to complete the messianic picture.

True fellowship was completed in the third and perhaps most attractive offering, symbolizing Christ who “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). Even in the Old Testament representation, God’s righteousness was satisfied and his honor advanced.

The priest identified with the

peace offering by partaking of the right shoulder and the breast, representing service and love. Both are essential to a priest in any era. The offerer had the responsibility and privilege to share in a feast with his family, friends and neighbors. Everyone involved ultimately shared with God.

The last two sacrifices were essentially sin offerings. The first, the sin offering proper, concerned general sin. It traced God’s full work of putting away the old thing into death. The trespass or guilt offering brought into account specific offenses against God’s honor and government. Harm to His cause or injury to one’s neighbor would bring guilt, demanding a ram and restitution plus one-fifth in silver.

God’s salvation through the all-embracing sacrifice of Jesus Christ is pictured perfectly in Leviticus, written by Moses at God’s direction more than 1,400 years before Christ was born.

Questions for Leviticus 8

1. Why did God have the whole congregation present at this service?
2. What spiritual works do the washing and clothing picture?
3. What special part of the ephod is described in Exodus 28 but taken for granted in Leviticus 8? How does its function compare to the breastplate?
4. From a study of Exodus 28:30, Numbers 27:21 and Ezra 2:63, what was the purpose of the Urim and the Thummim?
5. What was inscribed on Aaron’s gold headplate (Exodus 28:36)? Where does Zechariah say it will be seen again in the millennium? (Zechariah 14:20).
6. The New Testament explains that the high priest pictured Christ in His work on earth and that believers are also priests. What is the difference between the high priest’s anointing in verse 12 and the regular priest’s in verse 30?

7. What offerings were brought for the priests? What does this say about qualification for priestly service?
8. Why was the blood put on three specific places on the priest? See Exodus 29:20.
9. Read verses 8:25-27, keeping in mind that the Hebrew word for "consecration" or "ordination" means "filling the hands." What does consecration therefore emphasize?
10. What was God's purpose in extending the consecration service for seven days?

God Consecrates His Priests

Leviticus 8

More than just our atoning Sacrifice, Christ is also our priest. Leviticus 8 begins a section presenting the inauguration and ministry of the priesthood.

Though secondary to the sacrifices, the inauguration of Aaron and his sons into the priesthood was important to God. Through Moses He commanded the whole congregation to assemble in front of the tabernacle as witnesses. With a representative from each family group in Israel, perhaps as many as 3,000 men stood closely packed to fill the front half of the court.

The ceremony answered any lingering question Israel might have had about God's forgiving Aaron's failure with the golden calf. The large gathering also impressed Aaron and his sons with the honor and responsibility they were to have laid on them.

But God's most important concern was that His people understand priesthood. At Sinai He promised that Israel would be to Him "a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). Similarly, believers today are declared to be a "holy priesthood" and "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Because Christ has made us "priests to His God and Father" (Revelation 1:6), we still need to understand the priesthood.

Moses was conscious of God's directing this ceremony. Three times in the first five verses he referred to God's commanding each step.

The potential priests were men

who had sinned. They needed cleansing, a righteous standing before God and divine enablement. Therefore the first movement of the ceremony pictured salvation.

Before the congregation, Moses cited God's command and washed Aaron and his sons. This symbol of moral and spiritual cleansing occurs throughout Scripture.

In his psalm of repentance, David pleads, "Cleanse me from my sin... Purify me with hyssop" (Psalm 51:2, 7). In "the gospel of Ezekiel" the prophet points to God's use of water to cleanse before He gives a new heart and puts His own Spirit within (36:25-27).

In Titus 3:5 Paul speaks of "the washing of regeneration," and in 1 Corinthians 6:11 he refers to the readers' salvation: "You were washed." And at the last supper, Christ contrasted for Peter the once-for-all bath to the need for repeated washing of one's feet (John 13:6-10).

For Aaron and his sons, this cleansing was also once-for-all. Thereafter they were only to wash their hands and feet before entering the tabernacle.

The second step was clothing the priests in proper garments. This portrayed the granting of a righteous

standing before God.

Their basic garment was a fine linen tunic with a sash. They also wore a linen undergarment and a linen headband or turban. The fine linen symbolized righteousness (Revelation 19:8).

The garment symbolically confirmed a righteous standing and full acceptance before God. Isaiah speaks of being “covered ... with a robe of righteousness” (61:10). And Paul says, “Put on [as a garment] the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14).

The high priest wore distinctive garments “for glory and for beauty” that proclaimed the honor of his office (Exodus 28:2). Because the high priest was a type of Christ, these special garments also typified the glory and beauty of Christ.

The first special garment was the full-length, blue robe. Simulated pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn alternated with golden bells that musically announced the high priest’s presence in the sanctuary. The blue proclaimed the heavenly quality and direction of Aaron’s ministry and pointed to Christ’s origin, character and priestly ministry.

The robe provided a background for the ephod’s striking display. This short, sleeveless, vest-like garment was richly embroidered with gold and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn. Attached to each shoulder was an onyx stone, set in gold and engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel, six on each stone. In this way the high priest bore the tribes equally, in a place of strength, before the Lord for His blessing.

The breastplate was beautiful—with 12 precious stones, each engraved with the name of a tribe and

set in gold filigree in four rows. About nine inches square, it was held in place by a pouch of the same material as the ephod. It was secured to Aaron’s chest by gold chains fastened to the shoulders and sides of the ephod. This allowed the high priest to hold on his heart, before God’s presence, each of the tribes with its unique character.

In the back fold of the pouch Moses placed the Urim and the Thummim (literally “lights” and “perfections”). These objects (perhaps precious stones) were used to determine God’s decisions. “Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord” (Exodus 28:30 NIV).

Scripture does not show the precise nature of the Urim and Thummim or the way they functioned. This may have been to discourage anyone from attempting to make copies and pretending to get answers from God. Some have suggested the Urim and Thummim functioned by a physical manifestation, such as lights showing in the stones. Or perhaps by putting on the ephod with the breastplate and Urim and Thummim, the high priest attained such a sense of access to God that he understood God’s message—as did the prophets to whom “the word of the Lord came.”

Finally, the linen turban had as a crown a plate of pure gold held at the front by a blue cord. It was engraved with the theme of true priesthood, “Holy to the Lord.”

These garments befitted Israel’s high priest. They also pictured the glory of the true High Priest with the pure gold of deity interwoven with the

blue of His heavenly origin, the purple of His kingly character and the scarlet of manhood entering into the sacrifice of the cross.

The third step was the anointing. The pouring of a small amount of special oil qualified a person or object for the Lord's service. For a person, it also symbolized the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Two anointings took place. At this point, Aaron and the tabernacle, altar and laver were anointed. Its purpose is expressed in the Hebrew verb meaning "to make holy" (Leviticus 8:10-12). The KJV translates this "sanctify," while the NASB and NIV use "consecrate."

The typology of anointing was fulfilled when Christ, the true High Priest, was baptized and the Holy Spirit came upon Him. Christ was also the true Tabernacle of God and His cross the true altar and cleansing laver.

Aaron's sons were then also clothed in the fine linen tunic, sash and turban that speak of righteousness. Their anointing, however, awaited the completion of the sacrifice. Similarly, at Pentecost the anointing of the body of believers followed the cross, resurrection and ascension.

The next stage of the priests' consecration was the sacrifice, which was also presented in three steps.

First is atonement by the sin offering. Rather than individual sins, it presented God's dealing with sin in its entirety. Moses killed the bullock, sprinkled some of the blood on the altar and poured the rest at its base to render it holy. He then burned the fat on the altar and had the carcass burned outside the camp. Atonement

had been accomplished. The priests' washing signified their individual application of that atonement.

The second offering was a ram, the first of two unblemished male sheep offered. This whole burnt offering was the basis for the priests' clothing because it secured righteousness before God. As the entire ram on the altar fire rose as a pleasing aroma to God, it pictured Christ's obedient devotion, even to His death on the cross.

Someone might ask, "But where is the faith in this?" Faith was displayed in the one and only thing the priests did in this step of their consecration—they laid their hands on the head of the sacrifice in the gesture of identification. They were one with their offering; its standing before God was theirs. This was salvation "to the one who does not work, but believes" (Romans 4:5).

The second ram was the consecration or ordination itself (Leviticus 8:22). This sacrifice belonged with the sweet savor offerings. Because it included a grain offering, it was similar to the peace offering. But it also had a significant distinction. After the priests identified themselves with their sacrifice, Moses slew the ram and put some of the blood on the right ear lobe, right thumb and right big toe of Aaron and his sons. He who would serve God must be marked by the blood of the sacrifice, "being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10). All that enters his thoughts, work and conduct must come into conformity with Christ's death.

At the climax of the ceremony, Moses took the fat of the ram, its right shoulder or thigh and samples

of three kinds of unleavened bread. He then arranged them on the open, empty hands of Aaron and his sons. The word for this ceremony literally means “filling their hands.”

Although the blood placed on Aaron and his sons is a witness and guard against sin, God pictured consecration positively. We have our hands filled with Christ, the Sacrifice. He, in all the glory of a perfect work, is the One we present as a wave offering to honor our God. As pictured here, consecration also means that our attention is centered on Christ, the slain Sacrifice who is now our living Savior and Lord.

To complete the sacrifice, Moses took the selected parts from the priests’ hands and offered them on the altar fire, along with the whole burnt offering as a pleasing aroma to the Lord. God had given Moses the breast of the ram, so he waved it before the Lord as his personal offering.

As high priest, Aaron was anointed before the sacrifices were made, just as our true High Priest was anointed with the Spirit before His infinite sacrifice. Later at Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on believers. Now that sacrifices were completed, Moses took the anointing oil, added blood from the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his sons as well as on their garments. This purified them by the atoning blood and qualified them for service. By this common anointing of Aaron and the priests, they formed one priestly body—with Aaron as head and the Holy Spirit’s power available for ministry.

In a far deeper way at Pentecost,

all believer-priests were empowered for ministry and “baptized into one body” with Christ as our head by the anointing of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

After the ceremony, the consecration was not over. The priests were to take their nourishment from the meat of the sacrifice and the unleavened bread of the offering. What they did not eat they had to burn.

Afterward, they were to stay at the tabernacle entrance continuously for a week. This was a time for the priests to contemplate what their consecration meant. The seven days also pictured that the priests must live the rest of their lives as “before the Lord”—nourished by the meat of the sacrifice and in full realization of their consecration to Him.

In the ceremony, two pictures stand out strikingly. The first is the priest, in preparation for consecration, being marked by blood on his ear, thumb and big toe. Henceforth the blood of the sacrifice was to be the guardian and inspiration of his thoughts, work and conduct.

The second picture is the priest standing before Moses with hands extended, empty and open, about to be filled with the sacrifice. They had to be empty if they were to be filled. Moments before when they laid their hands on the head of the sacrifice, they had to be empty to receive the perfect righteousness of the Sacrifice who was portrayed.

Now they had to be empty of self-will and self-promotion if they would be able to hold Him as the wave offering to God and the accepted Sacrifice freely offered to others.

Questions for Leviticus 9 and 10

1. In Leviticus 9:1, what does the eighth day mean to Aaron and his sons? What does it usually signify spiritually?
2. Why must Aaron bring sin and burnt offerings for himself before making an offering for all Israel? What does Hebrews 7:27 show in contrast?
3. In 9:21, what is the symbolism of the breast and the shoulder (thigh) and, in 9:24, the meaning of the fire from the Lord consuming the offering?
4. How would you describe the attitude of Nadab and Abihu and define the "strange fire" (Leviticus 10:1, 2)?
5. Why shouldn't Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar uncover their heads or tear their garments in response?
6. How did Aaron defend his sons' not eating the meat of the people's sin offering?

A Glorious Beginning and Strange Fire

Leviticus 9 and 10

God also speaks through His actions. Leviticus 9 and 10 show His approval of the priests' first service and His judgment of their first failure.

After a week of consecration with repeated daily sacrifices, Aaron and his sons were ready to begin their service. It was the "eighth day," an expression in Scripture not only for a new week, but also for the beginning of a new period.

This "eighth day" began the service of the levitical priesthood. It was to continue until A. D. 79 with the two notable breaks: the Babylonian captivity and the defiling of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C.

As he did for the priests' consecration a week earlier, Moses directed the elders and congregation to be present for this initial service. He first called for a sin offering of a calf and a burnt offering of a ram for Aaron and his sons. A clean and acceptable priesthood was necessary.

Then Moses directed the people to bring offerings for the whole nation: a male goat for the sin offering, a year-old calf and lamb without defect for a burnt offering and an ox and a ram for peace offerings with an accompanying grain offering. The incentive for these offerings was not a fellowship feast; the thousands present made that impractical. The in-

centive was the ultimate in worshipful fellowship: The Lord would appear to them that day.

With the congregation present, Moses restated God's command for Aaron to proceed with the sacrifices so that His glory may appear to them.

This principle became permanently manifest in the Resurrection following the finished sacrifice of the cross. God's infinite excellence of character shines out in the righteousness satisfied and the love expressed at Calvary.

Aaron killed the calf in accord with the established order, yet a new symbolic move was introduced—Aaron's sons presented the blood to him (Leviticus 9:9). More than just giving them a recognized part in the service, it showed their appreciation of the sacrifice and its application. This is also our privilege today as we take the cup at the Lord's Table.

Dipping his finger in the blood, Aaron sprinkled the horns of the altar, the emblems of its power. Ceremonially this brought it into proper relation to God for His service. He poured the rest of the blood at the altar's base. Aaron then offered the inner fat on the altar.

He took the rest of the carcass outside the camp and burned it. This pictures God dealing fully on the cross with the old thing we were as sinners.

The burnt offering of the ram came next. The regular priests handed Aaron not only the blood to be sprinkled on the altar sides, but also the pieces of the ram to be laid on the altar fire and rise as a pleasing aroma to God. Thus the two requirements were met. Sin was atoned for by the sin offering, and acceptance was obtained through the whole burnt offering.

All was now ready for the offerings on behalf of the people. Aaron first took the goat for the sin offering. Atonement is necessary first. It was a goat—the offering for an individual who had sinned—rather than the bullock of Leviticus 4:14. In that verse it was for a sin committed by the people corporately; here it is a matter of each individual's having sinned. So Aaron slew the goat, and with his sons he sprinkled its blood and offered its fat on the altar. Israel's sin was "covered."

Next came the burnt offering of a spotless year-old calf and lamb to establish the people in acceptance as righteous before God. Moses had just performed this ritual for the priests themselves.

Aaron offered the yearling calf with its fine potential and the lamb with its unresisting meekness as a double whole burnt offering, a sweet savor to Jehovah. The grain offering was also observed because no aspect of Messiah's work was to be missing. The "memorial" handful was placed on the altar with the burnt offerings, and the rest was held for the priests'

use.

The peace offerings completed the sacrifices. The ox and the ram were the largest sacrificial animals. They challenged Israel to a high appreciation of the peace and fellowship they symbolized. Aaron slew the two animals, took their blood from his sons, and sprinkled it on the sides of the altar. In an act reminiscent of "filling the hands" in consecration, he placed the inward fat of both animals and the ram's fat tail on the breasts of the ox and ram. Then he placed the portions of fat on the altar as God's. But the breasts and right shoulders became the priests' portion after they waved them before God in worship.

With the offerings complete, Aaron lifted his hands toward the people to bless them, perhaps in the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26, and he stepped down from the altar.

One can almost hear the hush as Moses and Aaron solemnly entered the tabernacle for Moses to speak directly with God. The two soon came out to bless the people again and prepare them for God's appearing. God kept His promise through Moses. The Shekinah appeared in full splendor from above the mercy seat and was seen by all the people. And fire from God's presence consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar.

No one could question God's acceptance of those sacrifices. Only the Resurrection was a better proof. The people's first reaction was a shout of joyous wonder. But they immediately fell to the ground in reverent awe and fear.

Another part of Israel's worship was also inaugurated at this time, the continual burnt offering, author-

ized in Exodus 29:38-43. A yearling lamb was to be offered in the morning and at twilight each day, along with a meal and a drink offering. It was to symbolize Israel's continuous worship and devotion to God with every part of the offerings being wholly for God and rising to Him as a pleasing aroma.

The offering looked forward to the cross. But Christ's infinite sacrifice was a completed, once-for-all work. His sacrifice is like the continuous one because it is eternally valid. "He always lives to make intercession" for us (Hebrews 7:25).

Today, believers can treasure Christ's finished sacrifice. But we are also to honor His request that we continually remember Him in the Lord's Supper.

In addition to our petitions for the day, our morning and evening personal and family prayers should have something of the worship and devotion of the continual burnt offering. Regular, systematic Scripture reading gives us a time when God can speak to our hearts in a special way.

The levitical historical section continues with the action of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's oldest sons. They took their censers, put fire in them, placed incense on the coals and "offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them" (Leviticus 10:1).

It was Aaron who was commanded to burn incense on the golden altar in the holy place (Exodus 30:7-9). Aaron may have given his sons the censers to assist him in bringing live coals from the brazen altar to the altar of incense. But that in no way authorized what they did

here.

The "strange fire" they offered must certainly have been from a source other than the brazen altar, where fire "out from before the Lord" had so recently consumed the sacrifice (9:24). Leviticus 16:12 explicitly says the coals for burning the incense are to be taken from the altar.

The description of their action is absolute: "which He had not commanded them." They acted in disdain, if not defiance, of God's order. It may have been an attempt to seize Aaron's prerogative. But it certainly was an act of presumptuous self-will and bold self-exaltation.

God's judgment was immediate: "Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them" (10:2). God will maintain His holiness. How soon He acts may differ, but His action is certain.

Moses gave Aaron God's word about this: "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored" (10:3). Aaron understood and was silent. God is concerned about reverence in those who profess to serve Him (see also Leviticus 21:6).

He also has a strong concern over the first break in the purity of a new work of His. In Acts 5:1-11, He dealt severely with the first break in the church's purity by Ananias and Sapphira.

The spiritual counterpart of "strange fire" is no more suitable to ministry now than it was then. There is no place in a ministry for oratory without a biblical message, for sentimental emotionalism, for jokes that only divert attention from the message and for the subtle building up of personal pride and importance.

What is even more alien is the undermining of the Bible and the substitution of rationalism, humanism and modern psychology for proclamation of Scripture. God rejects any professed worship that is not under the authority of His Word and that does not come from the flames on the altar of the cross.

Moses called on two cousins to carry the bodies of Aaron's sons outside the camp, presumably to bury them. But Moses told Aaron and his two remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, not to uncover their heads or tear their priestly garments. The rest of Israel could mourn for them.

The three priests were the remnant who must continue to carry out God's commands. On pain of death, they were not to leave the tabernacle.

The Lord then spoke to Aaron. He forbade him and his sons to drink wine or strong drink before coming to the tabernacle for service. It was a "perpetual statute" with the penalty of death.

The priest must be able to distinguish between the holy and the profane, the clean and the unclean. He is also responsible to teach the people God's revelation. But he cannot do these properly if he is under the influence of alcohol. Because of the timing of this statute, it may have been that Nadab and Abihu had been drunk. If so, it is significant that God still held them responsible for their actions.

For a Christian, drunkenness is also forbidden. It is hard to conceive of a believer drinking before he is to speak in church, teach a class or come to the Lord's Table. A Christian bears a responsibility to the younger

or weaker person about the use of alcohol.

Finally, Moses instructed Aaron and his two surviving sons about eating the remainder of the offerings. They were to eat the remaining grain offering beside the altar as a holy privilege. The breast of the peace offering was theirs to wave before the Lord and eat in a clean place with their families. Likewise they were to lift up the thigh toward God and eat it reverently. As priests today, the love and strength of the Peace Offering of Calvary is also ours to appropriate.

Moses searched for the goat of the people's sin offering and learned it had been burned. In anger he asked Eleazar and Ithamar why they had not eaten it. God had intended that by reverently eating it, they would complete the bearing away of the people's sins by making the offering a part of themselves and ministering in its strength.

Aaron defended his sons. They had properly offered their own sin offering and burnt offering, and God had accepted them. Aaron asked if it would have been acceptable to God if he had tried to eat the sin offering when he could think of nothing but what he had experienced that day. His sons could not properly appropriate Israel's sin offering with their minds stunned and hearts overwhelmed by Nadab's and Abihu's death.

Moses accepted this. A heart bowed low by the results of sin and concerned about the ritual's sincerity is more acceptable to God than an external observance with mind and heart far away.

The fire that came forth from God

underscores the emphasis of each of these two chapters. The first signaled God's joyous acceptance of the sacrifices, lighting a flame to bear aloft the

sweet savor of Israel's devotion. The second fire executed judgment on self-assertive, presumptuous disregard of God's order of worship.

Questions for Leviticus 11 and 12

1. How would you describe the transition in content from chapters 1-10 to 11-15?
2. The animals declared clean for food in 11:2-7 are also acceptable for what other use? Is there a spiritual principle here?
3. What does "chewing the cud" picture or symbolize? What does such an animal eat?
4. What kind of animal has a radically different foot from those that may be eaten?
5. What distinguishing characteristic of seafood is pictured by a fish having fins? What function of scales might seem to have a spiritual application?
6. What types of birds are excluded?
7. Symbolically, why is one group of insects counted clean? Who in the New Testament took advantage of their being clean?
8. Compare verses 44 and 45 with the introduction of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2). Who quoted from verse 44 in the New Testament?
9. In chapter 12, what is the spiritual reason for the long period of cleansing after childbirth?
10. For what reason might the cleansing period after a boy's birth be half as long as for a girl?

Distinguishing the Clean in Common Life

Leviticus 11 and 12

The “law of the common life,” beginning in Leviticus 11, gives both instruction for daily living and one of the Old Testament’s strongest calls for holiness.

Real holiness shows itself most clearly in the common activities of life; it is here that a person’s true character comes out. Leviticus 11-15 presents such matters of practical holiness as what was clean for the Israelite to eat, cleansing after childbirth, treatment of leprosy and basic hygiene.

This material all leads up to the great Day of Atonement for Israel’s sins (Leviticus 16). And from this section, Peter takes his call for Christian holiness: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16).

It is important how we view such a passage of law. We can recognize God’s concern for His people’s physical health in the dietary laws (Leviticus 11) and more strongly in the rules for leprosy (Leviticus 13) and hygiene (Leviticus 15). But we must also recognize the spiritual aspects.

The restrictive dietary laws helped keep God’s people separate from the surrounding nations with their vile, idolatrous practices. And for almost 20 centuries, these laws helped preserve the Jews as a people despite being scattered throughout the world without a homeland, government, religious center and often their own language.

In Christ, our separation is not national or racial, but spiritual—a matter of faith and the new birth.

To many Bible students, the strongest aspect of the dietary regulations is symbolic. Because the first third of Leviticus is filled with types and symbols confirmed by New Testament references, one expects to find symbolism in the passage on clean and unclean food. In the principles that mark food as clean physically, God pictures what characterizes good mental and spiritual food.

Chapter 11 discusses four categories of living things: land animals, fish, birds and insects. Grain is inferred to be clean.

The clean land animals are cattle, sheep and goats—the only large animals acceptable for sacrifices. Leviticus sets the principle that only things acceptable to God as a “sweet savor” are to be received as food for our spiritual lives.

God gives two qualifications for a clean animal. The first is a fully divided hoof, in contrast to a padded paw with claws. The hoof speaks of a careful, surefooted walk that leaves a clean-cut mark.

Today we should ask, “Does what I read, listen to and think about nourish a walk that is careful and

surefooted by faith in Christ and that leaves a clear testimony for those who follow?”

The second requirement is that it chews its cud. The word “ruminates” means both “to chew the cud” and what the action pictures, “to meditate.” Through the symbol, God is saying that clean spiritual food is marked by meditation.

The message that feeds God’s people is usually not the one that is hastily prepared from an idea “that just hit me.” It has more in common with the process of an animal that lies down and diligently rechews its food until it is ready to produce good meat or rich milk.

Verses 4 to 8 re-emphasize that both traits are needed. The camel chews the cud but does not have a split hoof. His foot has a mushy pad that leaves an indistinct mark.

The coney (rock badger) and the rabbit also chew their food diligently, but they lack split hooves; they are unclean. And at times both are carriers of diseases, including bubonic plague.

The pig has a split hoof but does not chew the cud. He enjoys good food but also seems to enjoy garbage. It is often cited as proof of God’s care that He forbade pork, which especially on the wilderness journey might have been undercooked and have spread trichinosis.

In Isaiah’s day, eating “swine’s flesh” had become a sign of rebellion against God (65:4). It also may have been prominent in Canaanite religion. French archaeologist de Vaux found large deposits of pig bones in pre-Israelite levels in Palestine cities.

Animals with neither mark were obviously unclean. The cat family, for

example, does not chew the cud and has padded paws with retractable claws. This gives a soft tread to a destructive purpose—hardly a mark of acceptability to God.

Touching the dead body of any of these animals made the Israelite unclean until evening. Death brought out their uncleanness even more clearly.

The second group of clean animals was fish. The requirements were simple: They must have fins and scales.

Sea creatures without fins, such as eels, resemble a snake too closely to be acceptable. And other aquatic life without fins and scales—shellfish and scavengers—tend to stay on the bottom and are subject to bacterial attack and the effects of the murkiness and stagnation.

God’s ideal is more like the rainbow trout flashing past in a clear mountain stream or the salmon as it comes in from the sea. It pictures food suited to what Christ called “life ... more abundantly” (John 10:10 KJV).

Scales give protection. The Hebrew word is also used to describe what we call a “coat of mail.” This protection is symbolic of the Christian’s relationship with the world. Believers are “partakers of the divine nature” who have “escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

Clean fish must also have fins. These give balance, propulsion and direction that are vital to coming up to God’s ideal. Clean food for our minds and hearts will have the steady balance of Scripture, a forward spiritual drive and the specific guidance to reach the place of God’s perfect will.

The third category of animals is birds. Because they are generally clean, only the exceptions are listed. Birds' ability to soar above the earth seems to enter into their being clean. Unless negated by other traits, the freedom of flight puts the bird symbolically in touch with the realm of the heavenly, where the Christian's blessings are found (Ephesians 1:3) and from which comes the Bread of Life (John 6:51, 58).

The exceptions do not fit into neat categories, but three types cover most of them. Carrion feeders like the vulture, buzzard, raven and sea gull are unclean because of their food. Birds of prey like eagles, kites, falcons and hawks are disqualified because they are wanton killers. And the night birds, chiefly owls, seem to be rejected because they love "darkness rather than the light" (John 3:19).

Two other exceptions are the bat and the ostrich. The bat (Leviticus 11:19) is a night-flier but is actually a disguised mammal. Such confusion is not God's ideal for His people. The ostrich (11:16), which is the largest bird, is swift on its feet but unable to fly. Gorgeous plumage at the expense of useful wings makes it unacceptable as food for God's people.

The fourth group is winged insects. Only those like locusts and grasshoppers are clean. They leap from the earth, symbolically similar to a bird's flight. John the Baptist, last of the Old Testament prophets, found them, with wild honey, able to provide good nourishment.

Verses 23 to 35 deal chiefly with the unclean insects, small rodents and lizards that "swarm" on the ground. Among these is the chame-

leon; he who changes his color to conform to his surroundings is unclean to God.

To touch these creatures' dead bodies renders one "unclean until evening." And to pick one up, risking contact with one's clothing, means the clothes must be washed as well.

If one of these small creatures dies and falls into an earthen vessel, that vessel becomes unclean and must be broken. Such a polluted vessel makes any liquid poured into it unclean. And that liquid, in turn, makes any food onto which it is poured unclean. Even an oven or hearth onto which an unclean carcass has fallen must be broken.

Two things, however, cannot be defiled: a spring (or cistern gathering water) and seed to be used for planting. The spring is undefiled because its supply of fresh water is ever renewed from its deep sources.

Christ shows this to be a picture of life by the Spirit. He said to the Samaritan woman, "The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

Seed for planting cannot be defiled because it pictures salvation. The kernel of wheat must fall into the ground and die before it rises up in a new, productive clean life (see John 12:24).

Verses 41 to 43 re-emphasize the warning against any creature that "swarms [or moves about] on the earth," whether it crawls, walks on all fours or goes on many feet. This condemnation resembles Revelation's judgment of "earth dwellers" (3:10), the unsaved who are too closely tied to the things of this earth.

Chapter 11 concludes with a call

that sums up God's purpose in His laws and in much of His dealing with us in the New Testament: "Be holy; for I am holy" (verses 44, 45). The last verse (47) might be paraphrased, "get started by making a distinction between the clean and the unclean."

Chapter 12 continues the law of the common life with a brief treatment of one subject: cleansing in connection with childbirth.

The procedure is stated simply and clearly. If the child is a boy, the mother is to be in the full degree of uncleanness for a week; whatever she touches becomes unclean. She gets a well-enforced rest.

On the eighth day, the boy is circumcised, and the mother begins 33 days of less severe uncleanness. She is not allowed at the tabernacle or to touch holy things.

If the child is a girl, the mother has two weeks of intense uncleanness, followed by 66 days of more moderate restriction. At the end of the 40 or 80 days, the mother brings a yearling lamb for a burnt offering and a turtledove or pigeon for a sin offering. She presents them to the Lord at the door of the tabernacle to be offered by the priest. The mother is now clean; she and her child are in good standing before the Lord.

If the family was poor, she could bring two clean birds, one for each sacrifice. This is what Mary brought after the birth of the Lord Jesus (Luke 2:22-24). The visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:11) must have been more than 40 days after Christ's birth; one can hardly imagine Mary's not bringing a lamb if she had received the Magi's gift of gold.

At creation God commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the

earth" (Genesis 1:28). And after the Flood, He gave the same command (Genesis 9:1) to Noah. Throughout the Bible, the birth of a child is the cause of joy and thanksgiving, and childlessness is the occasion for sorrow and even unwarranted shame.

Yet childbirth brings such deep uncleanness upon the mother that for a time everything she touches is made unclean. The reason for such an extended withdrawal from normal life is very grave.

It takes prolonged meditation in a humble and contrite heart to appreciate Christ's word to Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6), and to enter into David's confession in Psalm 51:5: "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."

By natural birth, all are constituted sinners. All whose heredity is marked by the Fall must be born again, "born of the Spirit." One reason for the mother's separation was to provide an "indoctrination session" when she could reflect upon this wisdom about her child's nature.

Few commentators speculate why the cleansing period after a boy's birth is half as long as for a girl. So I suggest this answer with hesitance.

Paul shows that circumcision points to the "removal of the body of the flesh" (Colossians 2:11). This agrees with the spiritual purpose of cleansing after childbirth. The time of uncleanness is cut in half because in circumcision boys share with their mothers the burden of manifesting God's deep dealing with the inheritance of sin.

In Leviticus 11, meditation, which is pictured by chewing the cud, is a primary mark of cleanness.

So in chapter 12, the means used to impress the mother that natural birth brings a sinful heredity is a time of meditation.

That, in turn, prepares her to bring to God a burnt offering and a

sin offering, emblems of the atoning sacrifice of the cross. By this she is clean and her child accepted by the Lord. And by the cross, we are also enabled to respond to God's call: "Be holy, for I am holy."

Questions for Leviticus 13 and 14

1. Why are there two long chapters on the diagnosis and cleansing of leprosy?
2. In 13:3-8, what indicates a skin disease is leprosy?
3. Why might one completely white with leprosy be pronounced clean, but an outbreak of "raw flesh" render him unclean again (13:12-15)?
4. Why, in verse 44, is leprosy in the head considered especially serious? What is its spiritual significance?
5. If no remedy was known for leprosy, why does chapter 14 infer some were healed?
6. Trace what the priest does for the healed leper in 14:3-7. What is pictured spiritually by his actions?
7. Does the release of the blood-marked bird parallel the goat of Leviticus 16 bearing away Israel's sins into the wilderness or does it more closely picture Romans 4:25 with the "justification" here being the declaring of the leper clean?
8. What did it mean to this man to have the blood put on his ear, thumb and big toe and the oil put over the blood and on his head?
9. What spiritually significant items in the cleansing of an infected house parallel those in the cleansing of a leper?

Leprosy Diagnosed and the Leper Cleansed

Leviticus 13 and 14

The lessons of Leviticus 13 and 14 about leprosy also have applications for the ways we must guard our lives against outbreaks of sin.

Continuing its instructions for dealing with uncleanness in people's lives, Leviticus now focuses on leprosy and related diseases covered by the Hebrew word. Although we may overlook this section, God counted it important. It is no longer, for example, than the combined prophecies of Jonah and Malachi. Furthermore, chapter 14's ritual for a leper's cleansing pictures spiritual truths comparable to those behind the offerings of the early chapters.

Chapter 13 presents the diagnosis and quarantine of leprosy. Because no remedy was known, there is nothing about treatment. Yet it is inferred that some, perhaps many, will be healed.

God heals in His sovereign grace—at times in answer to prayer, as He did for Miriam (Numbers 12:10-14), and at other times through a servant, as Naaman was healed through Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-14).

One may wonder, though, whether the priests to whom Christ sent the lepers He healed had ever seen a healed leper before. It's possible some of these priests were among the large number who "became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Christ

said the healed lepers were to show themselves "for a testimony to them" (Luke 5:14).

Most commentators see leprosy as a picture of sin. There are many similarities, from a hidden beginning to progressive, external outbreaks and a miserable end if not healed. The aspect of sin that Leviticus most clearly suggests is the outbreak of the old self which the New Testament calls "the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21).

The first steps presented in Leviticus 13 are for diagnosis. Any sign that might indicate leprosy, such as "a swelling or a scab or a bright spot," demands prompt attention (verse 2). If it is leprosy, it must be recognized as such. It calls for priestly judgment.

Similarly, sin demands honest self-judgment in the conscious presence of a holy God (Isaiah 6:5; Job 42:5-6).

Leprosy was identified by a tendency to spread, to turn hair in the infected area white and to appear to be deeper than the skin. If these marks are present, it is leprosy. The person is unclean and must be segregated.

But if the white spot does not seem deeper than the skin and the

hair has not turned white, the priest is to isolate him for a week and re-examine him. If there is no change, he is isolated a second week. Then if the infection is fading and the scab has not spread, it is declared harmless. The person is to wash his clothes and be clean. But if the scab has spread, it is pronounced leprosy.

Taking a spiritual application, leprosy's identifying mark of "quick raw flesh" (verse 10) pictures an outbreak of "the flesh" in its New Testament sense. Leviticus calls it "chronic (literally, old) leprosy," similar to our "old self" of sin to be laid aside (Ephesians 4:22).

If the whiteness of leprosy has spread over a person's whole body, he is to be pronounced clean (Leviticus 13:12, 13). Some modern writers suggest this may be a different disease described by the same term. But the spiritual significance stands as long as it is a related disease.

When the illness has run its course through the entire body, the leper is no longer a danger to infect others. One who has been completely taken over by sin and who openly acknowledges his condition is also no danger to others and may even serve as a warning.

But if the leper has a fresh outbreak of raw flesh, he is unclean and must be segregated. The same is true for his spiritual counterpart if he allows the "raw flesh" of his sin nature to break out anew.

Next Leviticus warns of points where leprosy can easily make entrance (verses 18-28). A boil as it starts to heal and a burn are danger spots. Spiritually, an area where trouble and pain have centered or a place where one has been "burned" by others' attitudes or actions is the

spot where the flesh most easily attacks.

Leviticus also gives special attention to leprosy of the head (verses 29-44). The diagnostic marks are the same as before, but with the hair of the infected area having a "thin yellowish" condition (verse 30). The priestly examination and the segregation of verified cases also follow the usual order. The emphasis on the seriousness of leprosy on the head is striking, however (verse 44).

One explanation is that leprosy there would be particularly distressing because it is obvious to all. From the spiritual standpoint, an outbreak of the flesh in one's thinking would be the ultimate in uncleanness.

God's Word is emphatic that when leprosy struck, Israel must act, not go on as though nothing has happened. The priest must learn whether the condition is really leprosy. If so, he must segregate the person until he is healed.

In most countries today, the physical disease is no longer a threat; and in the remainder it is being defeated. But the spiritual disease dominates the world today. And as it breaks out in Christians, the result is more often self-defense or self-pity than honest self-judgment before God.

The Israelite leper with his torn garment, disheveled hair, a patch over his mustache and his cry of "unclean" pictures for us the consequences of sin, the result of the outbreak of the flesh (verse 45). But he is also a man for whom Christ died and rose again, as chapter 14 suggests.

The final section of chapter 13 discusses leprous-like mildew or fun-

gus growths on garments or leather goods. Nothing resembling leprosy is to have a place with God's people.

If the spot being observed continues to spread even after washing, the garment must be burned. But if the mark has faded, the article may still be used although the spot must be cut out.

Chapter 14 presents one of the most significant ceremonies of the Old Testament—the cleansing of the leper whom God has healed. It pictures in detail what we appropriate through Christ in coming to God out of the shame and alienation of sin.

The first scene is the edge of the camp, where open fields stretch into the desert. The priest has come following word that a leper has been healed and is ready for examination and cleansing.

Relatives or friends bring the former leper, and the priest carefully examines him. Finding no sign of infection, he calls for two live clean birds and material to make a sprinkling brush: a stick of cedar wood, scarlet yarn and a bunch of hyssop.

The leper's possible poverty is not the reason two birds are specified nor are they for two different offerings. Like the two goats on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), they are for one sin offering. The first goat dies under the penalty of sin, but the second goat is sent away into the wilderness. So in chapter 14 the first bird is slain as a sacrifice for sin, while the second bird pictures a more glorious aspect of the leper's cleansing.

The details are significant: The first bird is to be slain "in an earthenware vessel over running (literally, living) water." The heavenly One also

gave His life in the earthen vessel of our humanity. The water is to help collect the bird's blood and to have enough liquid to perform the cleansing.

But the spiritual picture shows the life-giving water of the Spirit uniting with the blood to cleanse away sin's stain. The priest dips the living bird in the blood of the slain so it is identified with the sacrifice. He also takes the brush, dips it in the blood and water and sprinkles the healed leper seven times. He is now identified with and marked by the renewing sacrifice.

As the priest solemnly pronounces the healed leper clean, he does something unique in levitical ritual. He lets the live bird go to rise and fly free. It is a picture of resurrection—ultimately of Christ's.

Furthermore, this picture of resurrection takes place at exactly the point Paul states in Romans 4:25: "(Jesus) was delivered up because of our transgressions" (seen in the first bird's being slain) "and was raised because of our justification" (seen in the second bird's rising and flying free).

The levitical ritual for the priest's declaring the leper clean and accepted by God points to the believer's assurance of justification with God because Christ was raised from the dead.

Now clean and characterized by the power of a new life by the Spirit, the former leper can begin to act for himself. He is to wash his clothes, but he must also deal strictly with his conduct before others. He must shave off all his hair, representing a rejection of all the products of his former life as a leper (see 2 Corin-

thians 5:17). Then he bathes and “is clean” physically (Leviticus 14:8).

He may now enter the camp but not go into his tent for a week. He needs time for reflection on his experience and the truths God set before him at the edge of camp before he gets involved again in household duties. And he also must prepare his mind and heart for the seventh and eighth days.

At the end of the week, the man again shaves all his hair, even to the eyebrows. Every bit of the products of the old life are put off. And he again washes his clothes and bathes completely. From then on, he is to be in “new creation” cleanness.

The climactic ceremony on the eighth day pictures the nature of the man’s new life and God’s provision for it. The setting is the door of the tabernacle where Israel’s sacrifices are offered. The priest brings the man there with his offerings of two male lambs without blemish, a yearling ewe lamb, a grain offering (about six quarts) with oil mixed in, and a small amount of oil in a separate container.

The ceremony begins with presentation before the Lord of one of the male lambs with the oil as a trespass (guilt) offering. The last and least prominent of the regular levitical offerings is put first.

There are two possible reasons.

In outbreaks of “the flesh,” which leprosy pictures, a believer needs to deal with that particular sin. This is also the emphasis of the trespass offering. Furthermore, leprosy among God’s people was an offense against His honor and an injury to His testimony just as with outbreaks of sin in His people today. The trespass offering looked primarily to these offenses.

The priest then slays the lamb as the trespass offering. Its flesh goes to him for food and as a symbol by which he bears the guilt involved. The collected blood will be used in an anointing no regular Israelite ever had, not even a judge or king. Only a consecrated priest and a healed leper had this anointing.

As the man stands between the altar and the tabernacle door, the priest places blood on his right earlobe, right thumb, and right big toe. Instead of being marked by leprosy, he is marked by the blood of the slain lamb.

No longer is he to be driven ever farther from God and his fellow men by each new outbreak of raw flesh. The blood of the sacrifice stands guard over his life.

Then the priest pours some of the oil into the palm of his left hand, dips his right forefinger in it, and sprinkles it seven times before the Lord. All his actions are under the sovereign will of God and to His glory.

Next he applies the oil on the former leper’s earlobe, thumb and big toe over the blood of the trespass offering. The priest then pours the oil left in his palm on the man’s head to complete the anointing. From this point, he is to be a spiritual man, responding to the Holy Spirit’s leading and encouragement.

The three remaining regular offerings complete the cleansing. The ewe lamb for a sin offering deals with sin in general. The second male lamb is offered as a burnt offering. The offerer has acceptance with God as the whole voluntary sacrifice rises to God on the altar fire as a sweet savor, with an offering of fine flour that symbolizes Christ’s even textured

obedience to God and with oil that symbolizes the Spirit's presence and work.

If the leper cannot afford the full array of offerings, he may substitute two turtledoves or two young pigeons for the sin and burnt offerings and reduce the grain offering by two-thirds. But a male lamb must still be brought for the trespass offering. Leprosy and the sin it pictures dishonor God and injure His testimony. Its importance must not be downplayed.

The final part of the chapter (verses 33-57) looks to the time when Israel occupies Canaan and lives in permanent houses. If a house develops a leprous-like mildew, it calls for priestly diagnosis.

The priest again uses the criteria of whether the growth is spreading and goes below the surface. A week's quarantine determines if it is spreading. If the tests are positive, the affected stones are removed and thrown in a segregated dump. The whole interior is scraped, new stone installed and the house replastered.

If the disease reappears, the

whole house must be torn down. But if the repairs succeed, the priest pronounces the house clean. Again, he calls for two birds along with cedar, hyssop and scarlet yarn for sprinkling and a bowl with spring water.

The priest kills the first bird in the bowl over the spring water, dips the live bird and the sprinkling brush in the blood and sprinkles the house seven times. He then goes to the edge of town and lets the blood-marked bird go free.

Happy is the family whose home is sprinkled by the atoning blood and the living water and that is consciously united to the Living Lord. But more blessed is the individual who recognizes he was a leper, physically and spiritually, and who has been healed by the Sovereign God and brought to Him through the sacrificed and risen Lord.

This healed leper is a new man, clean from all the products of the old life and guarded by the blood of the offering. And he is made a spiritual man by the anointing oil over the blood and on his head. He is a man equipped for life for the Lord.

Questions for Leviticus 16

1. What event provides a background for the yearly service when the Holy of Holies could be entered?
2. Why must Aaron put on unadorned, pure linen garments to enter the Holy of Holies?
3. Why were there goats rather than bullocks as a sin offering for the people?
4. Why was incense burned in the Holy of Holies?
5. What is the significance of Aaron's sprinkling the mercy seat only on the east side (verse 14)?
- 6.. What does Exodus 30:10 indicate about Aaron's action in the "tent of meeting," the large courtyard of the tabernacle (verse 16)?
7. What truth of God's salvation is pictured in verse 17?

8. What is the relation of the live goat to the one sacrificed? How did this picture John the Baptist's introduction of Christ in John 1:29?
9. What unchanging principles of God's character can be seen in this service?

The Day of Atonement

Leviticus 16

The work of Israel's high priest on Yom Kippur looks forward to Christ's atoning sacrifice by which believers can come boldly before God.

Too important to be given just a brief mention in the roll of "the appointed times of the Lord" in Leviticus 23, Yom Kippur has the entire 16th chapter of Leviticus devoted to its detailed instructions.

Yom Kippur is unique among the appointed times. While the others are feasts, this is a fast—a strict "Sabbath" on which no work is done under pain of expulsion from Israel. It is the one day of the year when the high priest enters the holy of holies and makes atonement for the sins of all Israel.

The restrictions for entrance into the most holy place recall the sacrilege and instant judgment of Aaron's two older sons who attempted to make an unauthorized offering of incense with "strange fire" (10:1, 2).

Now the acceptable approach into God's presence is fully described: its day, its sacred details and its glorious result. Israel's sin is taken away so God may continue to dwell among the people.

Falling on the 10th day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement is the high point of the fall convocations, which include the Feast of Trumpets on the first day and Tabernacles from the 15th to the 22nd. It is to the fall's feasts what Passover is to the spring's.

The primary attention is on the high priest. It is Aaron who is to make the offerings and enter the awesome presence of God in the cloud above the mercy seat. He is to bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering for himself and his family (verse 3). Then, in the holy place, he lays aside his ornate priestly garments (verse 4). There can be no show of man's glory before God, even the glory of an office ordained by God.

Aaron now bathes and puts on unornamented, pure linen clothing and turban. Moses adds that "these are holy garments" (verse 4). Symbolically reflecting the character of God, they are suitable for His presence. Aaron then receives the offerings for the people: two male goats for the sin offering and a ram for the burnt offering (verse 5). As the bullock for his own sin offering is being prepared for presentation at the tabernacle door, Aaron turns to the two goats (verses 7-10).

He casts lots to determine which is to be sacrificed and which is to be the scapegoat sent away into the wilderness, symbolically bearing Israel's sins. After he has determined their roles, Aaron presents the two goats before the Lord.

In verse 11, Aaron sacrifices his

bullock. The fuller wording here than in verse 6 may indicate that Aaron was to lay his hand on the head of the sacrifice in the regular symbolic gesture of identification before it was slain. After collecting the bullock's blood, he is ready to enter the holy of holies.

Into the awesome presence of God he is to take not only the blood of the offering but also a golden censer full of live coals from the altar of sacrifice and two handfuls of incense (verse 12). There must be a shield between him and the intense brightness of the glory over the mercy seat. No man can look on that glory unveiled and live (verse 13).

Aaron is alone; no one is with him in the tabernacle, nor can anyone help him. He accurately pictures the ultimate High Priest, who would be completely alone as He did the full work of salvation.

As Aaron stood ready to enter the holy of holies, he may have drawn aside the veil enough to place the censer inside, poured the incense on the coals and paused a moment to let the incense rise before he entered with the atoning blood. As incense fills the small room, he advances to the ark on its near, east side. Dipping his finger in the blood of his offering, Aaron carefully sprinkles the near edge of the mercy seat (verse 14).

There is no presumption, no grand sweep of his hand over "the atonement cover" (NIV), no irreverent attempt to explore what might be felt around the rims or toward the center of the seat. This is dealing with the God of absolute holiness. Finally, Aaron sprinkles the blood on the ground in front of the ark seven times.

The atoning blood is now perfectly before the Lord. It is probably this picture—the mercy seat holding the atoning blood before God—that led the apostle Paul to speak of Christ crucified as a "propitiation" whom God had "displayed publicly" to promote saving faith (Romans 3:25).

Israel's sin not only has been an offense against God and His holiness, but also has brought uncleanness on the tabernacle and the altar. The sprinkling of blood has now cleansed the Holy of Holies. As Aaron withdraws from God's presence, he sets about the rest of the cleansing.

In the outer sanctuary, he sprinkles the golden altar of incense. In Exodus, God commanded Aaron to sprinkle the horns of the altar once a year with the blood of the sin offering (30:10). Aaron may also have included the table of showbread and the golden lampstand in this cleansing. Today, we also need to be concerned that our ministry of the Bread of Life and the light of Christ, as well as the incense of our worship, is clean and in alignment with God's character.

The annual cleansing of the tabernacle and its furnishings is complete as Aaron sprinkles the great brazen altar in the courtyard. He applies blood to the altar's horns, which signify its power, and sprinkles it seven times on the altar itself. Its acceptability to God depends on its being cleansed from man's sin and brought into conformity with God's character. It was subject to being detailed particularly in areas of religious ceremony, such as hypocrisy, pride and self-promotion.

Today we have the infinite, once-for-all atoning sacrifice of Calvary. Our ministry of the “altar” is both as a memorial to the Savior and in proclaiming His message of salvation by faith. Such a ministry calls for frequent spiritual cleansing.

According to verse 18, the blood for cleansing the brazen altar combined the blood of the sacrifice for Aaron and the sacrifice for the people. This suggests that today leaders and laity have a unified responsibility for the spiritual condition of the Lord’s ministry.

After Aaron cleanses the brazen altar, he turns to the second goat. Like the two birds of the leper’s cleansing (Leviticus 14:4-7), the two goats form one offering. In both cases, one animal is slain as a sacrifice for sin and its blood sprinkled in cleansing application. As the leper is pronounced clean, the live bird is marked by the atoning blood and is released to soar away, picturing Christ “raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25).

Like the bird, the live goat carries away the result of the first’s sacrifice for sin. This is the complete “taking away” of sin that John the Baptist cites when he introduces Christ to Israel: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The details are important. Aaron first presents the goat before the Lord. Then with the congregation watching and listening, he lays his hands on the goat’s head and confesses over it all of Israel’s iniquities and all its transgressions of every category, laying them on the goat (Leviticus 16:21).

It becomes the “scapegoat” and is led away “to a solitary land” by a man prepared for the task. Bearing Israel’s sin, it is taken to the remotest part of the desert and left there, never to be encountered again.

It perfectly symbolizes the Baptist’s words, as well as the psalmist’s “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). In later years, the scapegoat was taken to a remote cliff above the Dead Sea and pushed over backward.

With the scapegoat on its way to the wilderness, Aaron re-enters the tabernacle. He takes off the linen garments he had put on to enter the Lord’s presence, bathes again and puts on his regular garments of honor (16:23, 24). He leaves the linen clothing in the tabernacle to be cared for as especially holy.

Aaron now goes to the brazen altar to offer both rams as whole burnt offerings, one for himself and his family and one for the people.

Each is slain and its inner fat laid on the altar for a quick flame. Then the flesh is cut into pieces and laid carefully on the altar to receive the flame and rise to God as a sweet savor. Now the inner fat of the two sin offerings, whose blood had been taken into the Holy of Holies, is added to the portrayal of Christ’s inward zeal for God (verse 25).

Through this annual slain sacrifice and its aroma rising to God, Israel has atonement and acceptance as we have it permanently and in perfection through the cross.

The phase of the drama of atonement has its climax as the scapegoat disappears over the ridge toward the depth of the desert. But the last phase gives Christians a

deep assurance and a challenge.

The bodies of both sin offerings are taken outside the camp and burned (verse 27), picturing God's putting away in Christ's death the whole old thing we were by sin—our "old self" (Romans 6:6).

The man who burns the two offerings, which represent sin at its root, becomes defiled. He may not enter the newly cleansed camp until he washes his clothes and bathes (verse 28). Likewise, the man who leads the scapegoat away into the wilderness has touched sin. When he returns, he is ceremonially unclean and must wash his clothes and himself before he re-enters the camp.

For the people of Israel, this is also the most solemn day of the year, a holy convocation. As many as possible observe the action, with at least one from each family being present.

They could see the high priest in his special garments take the blood, the censer of live coals and the incense and take his life in his hands as he enters the tabernacle to make atonement. They would also strain to hear as Aaron confesses their sins to God and lays them on the scapegoat. And they watch the goat and the man leading it until they disappear out of sight.

There is nothing in the ceremony's offerings for the priests to eat; all is burned on the altar or outside the camp. Clearly it is a fast day for the people. Nothing is allowed to break the solemnity of humbling their souls in confession, contrition and repentance in view of the atoning sacrifice (verse 31).

No one, whether native-born or sojourner, is to work at all this day. It pictures Paul's definition of faith: "To

the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5).

Today, Jews observe the day largely out of respect for their traditions or because it is a "permanent statute" of the Torah (Leviticus 16:34). The devout may attend synagogue services and spend time in lengthy meditation, confession and prayer. But this can give little assurance of acceptance with God.

Yom Kippur calls for the blood of the sacrifice to be sprinkled on the mercy seat over the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. But these articles were lost in the Babylonian captivity, and there has been no temple in Jerusalem since it was destroyed in A. D. 70.

But for Christians, this chapter confirms some of the great, unchanging truths of God and challenges us to enter more fully into the privileges that are ours in Christ.

The attribute of God most strongly presented here is His awesome, absolute holiness. On pain of death, only the consecrated high priest—on the appointed day, in holy linen, with incense veiling the glory over the mercy seat and with the atoning blood in his hand—may approach Him. God's character is that of self-affirming purity.

The need for man's reverent obedience to God is also clearly shown. For ministry directly before God, Aaron put on pure, unadorned linen garments. There is no place for man's glory in the presence of God. And at the mercy seat, Aaron reverently sprinkled just the near edge, lest he give any impression of invading the divine presence.

The Day of Atonement also illus-

brates the great abiding principle that man's acceptance with God rests on a substitutionary blood atonement. It is introduced early in Genesis (3:21), fully seen in the Passover (Exodus 12), fully declared in Isaiah (52:13-53:12), and wrought in eternal fact in the cross (Hebrews 9:11-14).

In Leviticus 16, we see it at every turn as the basis on which God forgives and puts away sin and thus dwells among His people.

For a Christian, the most encouraging thing to remember from this chapter is the change that has taken place regarding entering into God's presence.

For Israel under the old cove-

nant, only the high priest could enter, only once a year, and only with the cloud of incense and the blood of the sin offering. It was wonderful, but so restricted.

But when Christ made His infinite offering, the veil was rent from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51). The way into the Holiest is now freely open.

Every believer is urged to come boldly, not because the One there is less holy or less glorious, but because the blood on the mercy seat is that of "the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Questions for Leviticus 15 and 17-22

1. Both men and women have temporary and extended times of uncleanness. How is cleansing made for each (ch. 15)?
2. Why must all slaughtering be done at the tabernacle (ch. 17)? Is there a deeper spiritual purpose?
3. What one verse in chapter 17 is the Old Testament background of the gospel?
4. How wide an area of relationships are outlawed as incest (ch. 18)?
5. What similar types of conduct are condemned in 18:17-23? In verse 21, what constituted giving a child to Molech (see 2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35)?
6. How many of the Ten Commandments are referred to in chapter 19? What verse does Christ say is the second greatest commandment (see Matthew 22:39)?
7. What does 20:14 tell us about the intent of the severity of these laws?
8. What defects in 21:14 have spiritual counterparts in a believer-priest today? Can they be overcome? How?
9. In chapter 22, on what basis might a servant in a priest's household eat of the holy things? Why might a sacrifice with an overgrown or stunted member be accepted for a freewill peace offering, but not for one fulfilling a vow (verse 23)?

Laws for a Clean and Holy People

Leviticus 15 and 17-22

In the midst of instructions for Israel's great feasts and celebrations, God gives additional regulations for living a life separated unto Him.

Although the specific instructions in Leviticus 15 and 17-22 cover a broad range of topics, they share a common goal. In their daily lives, God's people are to live in a way that identifies them as a people set apart by God.

Leviticus 15 again shows God's concern for personal hygiene in His people. The chapter concerns bodily discharges, beginning with the more serious ones in men. These bring uncleanness on the person and what he lies on, sits on, or touches if he has not just washed his hands (verses 2-12).

When the man is healed, he is to allow a week for cleansing and then he must offer two birds: one for a sin offering, the other for a burnt offering (verses 13-15). As always, cleansing comes by the atoning blood. A momentary discharge, such as a seminal emission, calls for the man to bathe and be considered unclean until evening.

A woman's regular menstrual period was counted a minor discharge. Those having contact with her are rendered unclean until evening, and the woman is considered unclean for seven days (verses 19-24). But if the discharge is prolonged or becomes ir-

regular, it is considered a major uncleanness. When cured, she is to take a week for cleansing and offer two birds on the eighth day to complete the restoration (verses 25-30).

These regulations run parallel with Christ's statement, "The things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man" (Mark 7:15). There is within each Christian the old sin nature. Whenever its "discharge" pollutes us and affects others, we can appropriate the finished atonement and cleansing of the cross.

The laws concerning slaughtering in chapter 17 are significant for the theology of the Old Testament. Their immediate purpose is to restrict the slaughter of clean animals to the area in front of the tabernacle—the place where sacrifices are also slain.

God is dwelling among His people. He seeks to prevent any concealed idolatry, and also He wishes to share in His people's joyous feasts. They enjoy the animal's meat, while the blood and inner fat belong to God and must never be eaten. The meal becomes a peace offering, and all participants lift their hearts to the Lord. Today, we should remember that God still desires to share our joy.

The emphasis of the chapter is the sanctity of the blood. The key statement, verse 11, begins with the physical basis: "The life of the flesh is in the blood." By bringing nutrients and oxygen to the cells, the blood enables both our mental and physical activity. And because the blood also removes the cells' waste materials, internal physical cleansing is certainly also "by the blood."

God then declares His principle of redemption: "I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." Death is the required payment for sin. But God, in grace, provided a sacrificial substitute as a picture and token of the Lord Jesus Christ's infinite sacrifice.

So for all Israel and the foreigners among them, there is to be no eating of blood. If a hunter kills a clean animal, he must drain its blood and cover it with earth before cooking and eating the animal (17:13). If someone eats an animal found dead or torn by other beasts, he must wash his clothes and bathe. He is unclean until evening because there may have been blood left in the carcass (verse 15). If he does not wash, he may be expelled from Israel (verse 16).

Chapter 18 presents a sample of God's unquestioned moral standards. The chapter begins with a solemn preamble warning the people of Israel that they cannot follow the immorality of the Egyptians or of the Canaanites into whose land He is about to bring them.

The following 13 verses prohibit incest. Its definition takes in blood relatives, beginning with a

man's mother and extending to his grand-daughter and a son's wife. An aunt by marriage is included in the prohibition because she and her husband are one. Verse 17 prohibits marrying the daughter or other close female relative of one's wife. (By marriage, a man is one with his wife, so these others are now blood relatives.) Verse 18 prohibits marrying the sister of one's wife "as a rival" while his wife is living.

With verse 19, the prohibitions move to a wider scope, calling for consideration of a woman's monthly period, restating the crime of adultery and warning against making children pass through the fire of the pagan god Molech. Such heartless cruelty profanes God's name.

Far from calling homosexuality an "alternative lifestyle," verse 22 forbids it as an abomination. And the final verse of this section forbids sexual perversions with an animal. Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology told of their gods' engaging in such practices. But to Jehovah, this is the most base of perversions.

Verses 24-28 summarize the chapter. Because the Canaanites were guilty of all these practices, they were under the judgment of God. If the land is about to spew out the Canaanites for defiling it, it will do the same if Israel becomes apostate. Christians today must hold absolutely to the standards of morality or their testimony will be gone.

Chapter 19 gives a wide range of laws for daily life. Strongly related to the Ten Commandments, they are enforced 11 times by the expression "I am the Lord" or by an amplified form of it. It begins with a call to honor one's mother and father (a re-

verse order from the commandment of Exodus 20:12) and to observe the Sabbath. Next comes a warning against idolatry, with molten idols in particular (19:4).

Hospitality to poor neighbors is promoted by the prohibition of eating any part of a peace offering after the second day (verses 5-8). Concern for the needy is also expressed by the order to allow the poor and strangers to glean fields and vineyards (verse 10). The call for right treatment of one's neighbors follows, with a reminder that a false oath in God's name profanes His name (verses 11-13).

Next come examples of a righteous attitude toward one's neighbor. These are summed up in verse 18 in the command Christ declared the second greatest: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

In verse 19, mixing breeds, seeds and material for clothing is condemned. When God has given the right breed of cattle, strain of wheat or the perfect linen, don't mix in the Canaanite strains. More important, spiritual food and raiment are not to be mixed with those of Baal, Astarte or Molech (or their heirs today).

The death penalty for immorality is withheld in the case of a slave woman; she does not have freedom of choice. But the man involved must bring a heavy guilt offering (19:20-22).

Fruit trees planted in the land must not be harvested for the first three years, and the fruit of the fourth year is to be presented as an offering to God. After that, the owner may eat of the harvest (verses 23-25).

Again it is emphasized that no blood is to be eaten. Furthermore,

divination, soothsaying and spiritism are not to be touched (verses 26, 31). Because Israel's honor is for the Lord, no special cutting of sideburns or beard in honor of pagan gods, cuttings in the flesh for the dead or tattooing is allowed (verses 27, 28). To make one's daughter a prostitute profanes her and pushes the land into wickedness (verse 29). Instead, Israel is to keep the Lord's Sabbaths and revere His sanctuary.

The final group of laws begins with a call to respect the aged by rising at their approach. Strangers are to be treated as relatives and loved as oneself. Israel was an alien in Egypt and knows how it feels (verses 33, 34). Thus, strangers will learn of the true God.

The final entry in this catalog for a holy life is honesty in business: honest scales, weights and measurements. It was for holiness in every sphere of life that the Lord brought them out from Egypt.

Salvation in Christ has delivered us from even worse bondage. And the moral and spiritual standards of life in Christ are certainly not lower than those of Moses, nor are the incentives for obedience weaker than the law's.

Chapter 20 lays down the punishment for serious sins already condemned. Causing one's child to pass through the fire to Molech—the most atrocious idolatry—merited death by stoning (verse 2). The person had defiled God's sanctuary and profaned His name. If the people disregard the offender, God Himself promises to step in and execute the penalty on the man, his family and others who go along with him (verses 2, 3). God will also cut off from His people any-

one who resorts to a medium or a spiritist (verse 6). And the medium is to be stoned (verse 27).

In view of these punishments, the people are to consecrate themselves to holiness and faithful practice of God's statutes (verses 7, 8). The concluding statement, "I am the Lord who sanctifies you," is an Old Testament parallel of "It is God who is at work in you," which follows the command to "work out your salvation" (Philippians 2:12, 13; see Hebrews 13:21).

The penalty for cursing a parent (from deep hatred, not a passing outburst of temper) is death, as it is for those guilty of adultery (verse 9). Incest between a man and his father's wife or his son's wife also brings the death penalty (verses 11, 12).

Homosexual practice is again declared detestable; the participants are to be put to death (verse 13). And if a man marries a woman and her mother, all three receive the death penalty (verse 14). God also imposes a death sentence for a man or woman who attempts sexual activity with an animal; even the animal is to be killed (verses 15, 16). Sexual immorality involving a sister, half-sister or a woman during her period calls for their being "cut off from among their people" (verses 17, 18). Incest with an uncle's or a brother's wife brings the penalty of childlessness (verses 20, 21).

Chapter 20's final section is again a warning and a call to holiness. If Israel does not keep God's statutes, the land will spew them out as it is about to do with the Canaanites (verse 22). The land is God's gift, "flowing with milk and honey" (verse

24); but the vile Canaanites have done what God has condemned. As a people separated to the Lord, Israel is called to be distinguished from the unclean. They are to make themselves holy because God has "set you apart from the peoples to be Mine" (verse 26).

Although the punishments given in the chapter may seem extreme, for nearly 500 years with righteous leaders in Israel the deterrent was effective. Apparently there was little need to carry out the penalties.

The decline came with acts like Solomon's erecting an idol to Molech for one of his pagan wives (1 Kings 11:7). What Israelite would dare call for his stoning? As Christians with far higher spiritual privileges and provisions, spiritual leaders in the home and the church must also be resolute or decline is almost certain.

Chapters 21 and 22 speak of the priesthood. Because the New Testament shows that every believer is a priest (1 Peter 2:5,9), much from this section has application for us.

The Lord's word through Moses goes to the heart of priestly character and service; a priest is to be holy to the Lord, separated fully to Him and actively living for Him. As holy, the priest must avoid defilement.

Although contact with death defiles, when a death occurs in his family, it bids him to share in the mourning. A common priest may defile himself for the death of his father, mother, son, daughter, brother and virgin sister (21:2, 3). It's implied he may do so for his wife, but he may not for one of her family (verse 4).

Christ did not allow His natural family to deflect Him from His course (Matthew 12:46-50). But during His suf-

fering on the cross, He provided for His mother's future care (John 19:26). And as Christians, the dead thing that causes our most serious defilement is our "old self" (Romans 6:6).

As holy, the priest is separated from what is contrary to God. Marks of loyalty to an idol, such as artificial baldness, shaving off the edges of his beard and cutting his flesh have no place in a man of God (verse 5).

The priest may not marry a former prostitute or a divorcee (verse 7). And if a priest's daughter falls into prostitution, she defiles the Lord's name as well as her father; her punishment is burning (verse 9).

Because the high priest is especially close to God, he not only cannot defile himself by approaching the body after the death of his mother or father. He also cannot leave the sanctuary, take off his turban or tear his garments in grief. The consecration of the anointing oil is to outweigh even the deepest natural emotion (verses 10-12). Furthermore, the high priest is to marry a virgin of unblemished character from his own tribe "that he may not profane his offspring among his people" (verse 15).

A priest must be without physical defect of any kind. If he is blind, lame, disfigured of face, deformed of limb or even has an abnormal look in his eye or eczema, he cannot serve in the tabernacle (verses 17-21). To present an offering to a holy God requires the symbol of physical perfection as well as symbolic righteousness by the offerings and the anointing. The person with a defect still receives his food from the offerings, but he cannot serve in the tabernacle (verses 22, 23).

For us as believer-priests, the good news is that we are "complete in Christ" by saving faith. And our spiritual defects can be cured by the Spirit's work in us through the Word and with our obedience.

Chapter 22 turns to the relation of the priest to the laws of cleanness. One who is unclean for any cause—from leprosy to having touched a dead animal that morning—must not under penalty of expulsion from his office receive or handle any gift for the Lord's service. And he may not eat of any of the gifts for the priests until he is again clean (verses 1-7).

No one outside the priestly family may eat of the priests' share of the offering. Although visitors or hired servants may not do so, one purchased as a permanent servant or born in the household may eat of the offering (verses 10, 11). As Christians, we are "in the family" both by purchase and by the new birth. A daughter who marries outside the priestly line surrenders her right; but, if she is widowed or divorced and has no children, she may return to her father's table (verses 12, 13).

Anyone who mistakenly eats of a holy gift must make restitution plus one-fifth (verse 14). The priest must not allow unauthorized eating by the offerer or others. Because it lowers God's honor, that offering should be repeated (verses 14-16). Similarly, those who give to the Lord's work today should not expect personal gain from their gifts.

Verses 17-25 give the complete standards for sacrificial cattle, sheep and goats. Whether brought by an Israelite or by an alien in the land, the animal must be without defect. But for a peace offering, an ox or a lamb

with a somewhat misproportioned member is acceptable as a freewill offering, but not to fulfill a vow. A vow requires the full perfection implied by its words. But because a freewill offering is beyond what is required, an animal is acceptable as long as it has no polluting defect.

As we look to Christ as our Sacrifice, we must realize that He is absolutely perfect. But even if our voluntary expression of love and praise lacks the perfection of Christ's character, it is still acceptable to Him.

The final section of this great array of laws (verses 26-33) calls for some measure of maturity in a sacrifice before it may be offered. Christ

was 30 when He came to John for baptism as the Lamb of God and at least 33 at the cross. Presenting our bodies as living and holy sacrifices is aided by the maturity we gain "by the mercies of God" (Romans 12:1).

The chapter ends with a fourfold use of the refrain that is so frequent throughout this part of Leviticus: "I am the Lord." But to its third use is added the theme of Leviticus, "who sanctifies you," and the theme of Exodus, "who brought you out from the land of Egypt." Today we have just as great a need to hear the words of God who has called us to Himself and who has saved us from our sins.

Questions for Leviticus 23:1-14

1. Verses 1-3 give laws for the Sabbath. At what point in the exodus was the Sabbath specifically confirmed for Israel? When was it made law?
2. How did Christ's attitude toward the Sabbath differ from that of the Pharisees (see Matthew 12:1-13)?
3. Compare the Lord's Day with the Jewish Sabbath (see Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10).
4. Review the Passover in Exodus 12.
5. What was the historical background of the Feast of Unleavened Bread?
6. In view of the symbolism of leaven, what is the spiritual teaching of the feast?
7. In what ways is the Passover the Old Testament's redemption?
8. When a feast lasts a week rather than a day or a few hours, what spiritual application is implied?
9. The Feast of First Fruits (verses 9-14) was the day after the Sabbath of the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread. Therefore, what was also taking place in the spring Christ died as the priests prepared to wave the sheaf of first ripe grain?
10. In 1 Corinthians 15, how does Paul use this feast?

The Sabbath and the Spring Feasts

Leviticus 23:1-14

There is a close relationship among the first three feasts of Leviticus 23:1-14. Each emphasizes one aspect of God's salvation.

Leviticus 23 gathers up the sacred times on Israel's calendar. It begins in the spring, following the order God directed at the exodus. These times are often called feasts. But one is a strict fast; and, on the Sabbath, fires cannot be used to prepare meals. Virtually all involve "holy convocations" or assemblies as well as the presentation of additional offerings. Feasts lasting a week had convocations on the first and seventh days.

The Sabbath

The weekly Sabbath is presented first and is in a class by itself (verses 2, 3). It was established by God's example, as He completed creation and rested the seventh day, blessing and hallowing it. Man is invited to share in God's rest in this divine provision for his well-being.

The Sabbath is not specifically mentioned in Genesis after 2:3, but it returned to the foreground when God began to give manna. On the sixth day, Israel was to gather a double portion with the assurance it would not spoil the next day. It would be a Sabbath when no one was to work and no manna would be given (Exo-

dus 16:4, 5, 22-27).

At Sinai, the Sabbath took its place in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). The emphasis is on keeping it holy; no work at all is to be done. Israel is to find rest in recognition of God and obedience to Him.

In Exodus 31, as God gave the tables of stone to Moses, He established the Sabbath as a sign of His relation with Israel. The Sabbath is a continual reminder of their faith and loyalty. The penalty for profaning the day is death, and Numbers 15:32-36 describes a time it had to be carried out.

In Leviticus 23, the Sabbath is given its place as the weekly "appointed time" of the Lord. Fresh emphasis is placed on its being a "complete rest." And because it is "to the Lord," there is to be a "holy convocation" with a special offering (Numbers 28:9, 10) along with the continual burnt offering. There is also to be a blessing, probably prayer, and at times a message.

Christ came into sharp conflict with the Jewish leaders on their interpretation of Sabbath restrictions. He summarized: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27) and "The Son

of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28).

The disciples recognized the importance of the Resurrection—that Christ met with them that first day and again the next first day of the week and that Pentecost was also on the first day. Therefore, they began to hold their principal meeting with its communion of the bread and the cup on the first day.

In Revelation 1:10, John spoke of the Christian day of worship as “the Lord’s day.” In Greek the expression describes the day as not only belonging to the Lord, but also partaking of His character: “the Lordly day.”

While the Lord’s day is primarily in recognition of the Resurrection, much else commends it to us. It preserves God’s principle without the legalism of Sinai; and it proclaims Christianity as universal, not just a Jewish sect.

In the covenant of Sinai, the order was to work six days followed by a day of rest. But in the first day observance, Christ gives rest in His accomplished redemption and new life by the Spirit; and in this strength we go into the week’s work.

Passover

The seven feasts of Leviticus 23 fall into two basic groups with three in early spring, three in early fall and Pentecost in between in late spring.

The first of the feasts is Passover (verses 4, 5). It falls on the 14th day of the first month of the religious year. Fully presented in Exodus 12, its treatment in Leviticus is brief. Here Moses simply gives it its place as first among God’s annual appointed

times.

The Passover celebration is a perpetual memorial of God’s deliverance from the judgment that fell on Egypt and from its bondage.

God’s redemption centered in the Passover lamb, a picture of “Christ our Passover.” The lamb was examined thoroughly to prove it was without defect. Then it was slain, and its blood was applied to the sides and top of the door so that the Angel of Death might see it and pass over that dwelling.

The lamb was roasted without adding any water. As in the cross, nothing is to lessen the heat of the fire. It is eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs that remind each family of the bondage left behind. And those who partake are to eat in haste, dressed for a journey. Today, those feeding on the Lamb and sheltered by the blood are to leave behind Egypt’s spiritual equivalent.

As a sacrifice, it most resembles the peace offering. And like the Lord’s Supper, which carries on from it spiritually, the Passover is distinctly memorial.

In contrast with the Day of Atonement’s strict fast, Passover is a feast; and its atmosphere is less somber. Rather than confessing sin and pleading an atonement, it celebrates deliverance.

Unleavened Bread

The second feast, that of Unleavened Bread (verses 6-8), begins the following day and is directly connected with the Passover. The entire eight-day period is often called “the Passover,” and at times the Passover is included in “the days

of unleavened bread” (Matthew 26:2; Luke 22:1).

The feast’s background lay in Israel’s haste to leave Egypt after the death angel had passed through the homes of the Egyptians. There was not time to waste, so the people took their dough before any yeast was added and packed their kneading bowls in their bundles of clothing (Exodus 12:34).

Of itself, the incident is hardly cause for a feast. God seeks to memorialize the departure from Egypt and its evil life, symbolized by leaven. Those delivered out of bondage must not take into their lives “the leaven of malice and wickedness” (1 Corinthians 5:8). The length of the feast indicates God’s purpose is to establish a principle for life, not just celebrate an event.

Described here briefly, the feast is detailed in Numbers 28:17-25. The seven days begin on the 15th of the first month with a holy convocation on the first and seventh days. No “laborious work” is to be done, only what is essential.

At the convocation, a special offering is presented. It consists of two bullocks, a ram, seven yearling lambs for a burnt sacrifice and a goat for a sin offering—all presented with a meal offering.

There is evidence that at the first convocation this “bread of the sacrifice” was eaten in a place of honor before the congregation by those acknowledged as “princes of Israel.”

The spring Christ died, this convocation fell on the day He was crucified. Some suggest it was this honor of eating as princes that the Jewish leaders did not want to miss because of defilement from entering Pilate’s

judgment hall (John 18:28). Such uncleanness would last through the day, barring them from eating as princes. But it would end at sundown, permitting them to eat the regular evening Passover supper.

The same offerings, with the inclusion of a drink offering of joy, are made each day of the feast.

Leaven, carefully cleaned from every tent and house, is kept out just as carefully for all seven days. For a full week each year, Israel has before it the message that God’s people must put evil conduct out of their lives.

In each day’s offering they are to see the need for atonement for sin (pictured by the goat) and a tenfold emphasis on complete devotion to God (pictured by the whole burnt offerings).

As Christians, we have the spiritual reality of Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us, to urge and enable us both to get rid of the old “leaven of malice and wickedness” and also to feed on the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

First Fruits

The first day of the week after the seven days of Unleavened Bread is the Feast of First Fruits (Leviticus 23:9-14).

God’s preamble to this statute was an encouragement for Israel’s desert years. It indicated He would bring them through the desert into the fruitful land He promised.

On the day after the Sabbath during the days of Unleavened Bread, Israel is to bring to the priest a sheaf of its first-ripe grain. The priest then waves the sheaf before the Lord. This

acknowledges and gives thanks to God for giving a bountiful crop—raising to abundant life the grain that had been planted in death. Waving the sheaf as evidence of this new life honors God and encourages Israel's faith.

After David established Jerusalem as his capital, Israel began to use an area in the Kidron Valley as its source for the sheaf of first fruits. Because of the way the sun struck that area, its barley ripened as early as any in Judea. So the moment the sun set on the Sabbath after Passover, three men with sickles hurried down to the Kidron to cut the grain to be waved before the Lord the next morning.

The sheaf is to be presented before the Lord because all first fruits belonged to Him. Israel is not to cut any other grain until the sheaf is waved. But this presentation also speaks to the people as a guarantee and sample of the coming harvest.

We too have this guarantee in Christ's rising from the dead. He is "the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The order is: "Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:23). Christ risen guarantees our resurrection, for He said, "Because I live, you shall live also" (John 14:19). And because we are united with Him in His resurrection, He guarantees our present resurrection life spiritually.

In Paul's defense before Agrippa, he gives the widest understanding of Christ as the first fruits: "By reason of His resurrection from the dead, He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish

people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23).

As the wave sheaf is brought before the Lord, a perfect yearling lamb is to be offered as a burnt sacrifice (Leviticus 23:12). This reminds Israel that acceptance with God, implied in His gift of the harvest, is primarily based on the death of the sacrifice. A meal offering (picturing the fine-textured obedience of Christ's life) and a drink offering (picturing the presence and work of the Holy Spirit and the joy of the Lord) complete the observance (verse 13).

Compare Leviticus 23's directions for presenting the first fruits with the accounts of Christ's last week of ministry and His resurrection. Early in the morning after the Sabbath that followed the cross, the temple priests were preparing to offer the wave sheaf of the first fruits.

But outside the city wall, near an empty tomb, stood the Infinite First Fruits from the dead, revealing Himself alive to Mary Magdalene and sending word to the disciples of His triumph (John 20:11-17). He may have said, "Stop clinging to Me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (verse 17) in part because He needed first to wave the true first fruits before the throne.

These first three feasts not only are close in time but also present closely associated truths of God's salvation.

Passover declares deliverance from judgment and bondage by the blood of the Lamb. The days of Unleavened Bread speak of a life for God's people free from "the leaven of malice and wickedness." And First Fruits points to the source of the new life, the risen Son of God in whom we

must believe if we are to be saved (Romans 10:9).

Questions for Leviticus 23:15-44

1. What two names are given the feast described in verses 15-22? How is it related to the harvest?
2. How do the ritual and spiritual significance of this feast compare with that of First Fruits?
3. Why is leaven used in this feast?
4. Note the dates of the last three feasts (verses 23-44). What does Trumpets correspond with on the secular calendar?
5. What would trumpet calls naturally suggest? What meanings do you find for this feast?
6. Review the description of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 15. What aspects of it are specially emphasized in Leviticus 23:26-32?
7. What is the blessing celebrated in the feast of Booths (verses 33-44)?
8. If the spring feasts present the great aspects of salvation, what do the fall feasts emphasize?

Pentecost and the Fall Feasts

Leviticus 23:15-44

The convocations of Leviticus 23:15-44 not only observe God's present work in providing for his people but also anticipate a glorious future.

The first three feasts in Leviticus 23:1-14 represent salvation—as redemption from bondage and judgment, a life free from the leaven of sin and a guarantee of our resurrection in the first fruits.

These final three feasts present aspects of the sabbatic rest of full assurance—His trumpet call awaking us to trust Him and to enter His future, His assurance of forgiveness in the atoning sacrifice and His assurance that He will bring us to our inheritance. Between the two groups at Pentecost is the anticipation of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who by His power and ministry baptizes individuals into one spiritual body for witness in the world.

Pentecost

The middle feast of Israel's sacred observances, commonly called Pentecost, is set seven weeks after First Fruits and four months before the next feast. The name is from the Greek word for fiftieth; the feast is on the 50th day after the waving of the first-ripe grain. Its other name is Feast of Weeks. Exodus 23:16 calls it the Feast of the Harvest, but there are other harvests later in the year,

especially the summer's grape harvest. Pentecost is the feast of the grain harvest.

The expression "first fruits to the Lord" is also used of this offering (verse 17). Now that the wheat harvest is complete and the grain ready for use, it is fitting that the Giver of this full harvest be acknowledged in thanks and worship. The portion presented is not barely ripe stalks, but one-fifth of a bushel—finely ground into flour and baked into two loaves—offered to God as the center of a great celebration.

A holy convocation is called with all regular work suspended. Eventually this became one of the three feasts every Israelite man was expected to attend even though living in a foreign country. This practice accounts for the large number of Jews from abroad present for Pentecost in Acts 2.

There is a full array of the great offerings for all Israel: Seven yearling male lambs, a bull and two rams with accompanying meal and drink offerings make up the whole burnt offering, giving its pleasing aroma to God and acceptance for Israel (verse 18). This ultimately speaks of Christ's giving Himself as a sacrifice

wholly to God on the cross.

A goat is offered as the usual sacrifice for the sins of the people (verse 19). It is slain and its blood sprinkled on the altar. There are also two lambs for a peace offering. This is probably a token offering because all could not eat together in the tabernacle. Seemingly those lambs are given to the priest for his own use.

At the convocation's climax, the two loaves and two lambs are waved in honor and thanksgiving before the Lord (verse 20). He has brought the grain to full ripeness as promised in the sheaf 50 days before. Now it can be ground to fine flour and baked in generous loaves, as witnessed by the two. Two is the standard number for witness in Old Testament legal procedure (Deuteronomy 19:15).

This celebration sets before us a striking prophetic picture. In Acts 2, “the Day of Pentecost had fully come” (verse 1, NKJV)—the 50th day since “Christ ... the first fruits of those who are asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20 NASB) had risen from the dead.” In a large upper room in Jerusalem, in obedience to Christ’s promise of spiritual power (Acts 1:4, 5), were 120 men and women who had received the new life.

Like the grain on the stalks in the sheaf of first fruits, they were distinctly individual, lacking a body’s cohesion and power. But when the Spirit was given them that day in permanent residence and power, He “baptized (them) into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The empowered witness of which Christ spoke (Acts 1:8) began immediately with 3,000 added to the body that day (Acts 2:41). With his strong Jewish con-

sciousness, James speaks of the church as “a kind of firstfruits of all He created” (James 1:18 NIV).

There is at Pentecost, however, one element that may seem improper. Amid all the animals to be offered—the lambs, rams, bulls and even the goat—there must be no mark of imperfection. Yet the object of the ceremony, the wave loaf, is baked with leaven. This is no mistake. While the sacrifices look to the spotless Lamb of Calvary, the wave loaf looks to the church. The members of the body are perfect before God in the righteousness of their Head, but in their experience they all too often fall short.

The inclusion of leaven is of God’s grace. When we find we have failed, we should not despair but turn to our Advocate for intercession and claim the Spirit’s renewing work. The leaven is also there so a believer will not refuse fellowship with a local expression of the body of Christ because it is not perfect in every detail. The Holy Spirit has already put this hesitant believer into one body with these other believers.

Because Pentecost is a harvest feast, this passage is a logical place to remind Israel that the gleaning of the fields and reaping of the corners are to be left for the poor and the strangers (verse 22).

The following three “appointed times” form a group within the first three weeks of the seventh month. Like the group in the first month, there are two single special days and one full-week celebration.

The seventh month is expected to be a kind of Sabbath month. Besides the regular weekly Sabbath, there are five special days with convocations when no regular work may be done.

Special offerings are made on all 10 days of the three feasts. Throughout the period, there is the great message of “rest:” assurance toward God.

Trumpets

The fifth appointed time is the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25). On the first day of the seventh month, it corresponds to the secular New Year’s Day.

It is to be free from laborious work, with a convocation at which an offering is made by fire to the Lord. Numbers 29:1-6 describes the sacrifices as a bull, a ram, seven yearling lambs for a burnt offering and a male goat for a sin offering. The large burnt offering stresses the honor to God of an obedience unto death and the offerer’s acceptance with God.

The center of the feast, however, is the blowing of trumpets. They were most frequently blown as signals (Numbers 10:1-9). One trumpet summoned the leaders to the tabernacle; two summoned all the people. A blast or alarm in case of an attack set the fighting men in array, beginning with the tribes on the east; a second blast summoned those on the south. And in the wilderness when the cloud had risen from the tabernacle, a trumpet set the tribes on the day’s journey.

There is also a prolonged blowing of trumpets, sounding them out over the sacrifices at a holy convocation. In Leviticus 23:24 and Numbers 10:10, this blowing is called a “reminder” or “memorial.” It is a striking way to present the offerings to God and a means to bring to mind His goodness and His promises and covenants, which beginning with Abra-

ham were established in the blood of sacrifices (Genesis 15).

The trumpets also sound a call for Israel to awake from the lethargy of a long hot summer. From early June to the end of September, Israel has no special occasion for refreshing its faith and spiritual vitality. The Feast of Trumpets is a call to prepare for entering the mind and heart into the awesome Day of Atonement and, in the following feast, into the joy of God’s having brought them through the wilderness years and into their inheritance.

For Israel, the prophetic aspect of the Feast of Trumpets is that God has a future for His people. There were to be spiritual awakenings after periods of dryness under Samuel, David, and the other early prophets; Hezekiah, Isaiah and their contemporary writing prophets; Ezra, Nehemiah and Zechariah; and the Maccabees. But the final and full awakening will be when Israel “will look on Me whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10) and be ushered into their final full Day of Atonement.

For the church, the trumpets sounded in the Reformation’s restoration of the gospel, in the Whitefield-Wesley revival and, perhaps at the beginning of the last century, in the rise of Bible study and deep interest in the Second Coming.

Day of Atonement

The next appointed time of the Lord, 10 days after Trumpets is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32). Detailed instructions for it occupy all of Leviticus 16 (which see).

Yom Kippur’s place at the center

of the fall's three appointed times is in accord with its importance as the climax of the levitical year. The reference to "exactly the tenth day" in verse 27 and the note in verse 32 that self-denial is to begin at sundown emphasize this sense of precision.

The description in Leviticus 23 does not summarize chapter 16's instructions. That chapter traces the high priest's entering the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, sprinkling blood on the mercy seat, cleansing the tabernacle and altar, confessing Israel's sins and laying them on the scapegoat and then completing the sacrifices.

The seven verses here take up only the people's concerns and duties. For them, it is to be a Sabbath of complete rest. (As with Christ in the infinite atonement, the high priest does his work alone.) Three times in this brief section, God says there is to be no work; the stated penalty is death. This most emphatically portrays Romans 4:5: "To the one who does not work, but believes ... his faith is reckoned as righteousness."

Three times God also says Israel must "humble your souls" ("deny yourselves," NIV). This includes fasting but is intended to go much deeper. What is expected is conviction of sin and true sorrow—perhaps something of what Christ commanded in Matthew 16:24: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself." Failure to do this results in being "cut off from his people" (Leviticus 23:29).

God is saying emphatically that the benefits of the Day of Atonement are not to the thoughtless, careless

or unconvicted. But by entering into the offering of the sacrifice with a repentant heart, the Israelite receives the real Sabbath rest—the forgiveness of his sins.

Booths

The last of the appointed times is the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles, KJV). Beginning the 15th of the month, it is a week when all Israel is to live in booths made of leafy tree limbs, willow branches and palm fronds (verses 39-44). God gave it as a time of refreshing and joy now that the crops are gathered in.

It is, however, more than a national camp-out. It is a feast "to the Lord" with offerings each day, rest from regular work and a holy convocation on the first and the eighth days.

Booths is also a teaching memorial to keep fresh before the people that God did more than deliver them from Egypt (the Passover). Despite delays caused by unbelief and disobedience, He had brought them through the desert of Sinai into the Promised Land and given it to them as a permanent inheritance. It is a week to ponder Moses' words; "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Israel's worship and thanksgiving here center in the special burnt offerings each day. The number of sacrifices is larger than usual, but suitable for the joy of the feast.

The sacrifices on each of the seven days are to include 14 yearling male lambs without defect and two rams, each with its meal offering and drink offering. The number of bulls,

however, is different from the usual regular pattern (see Numbers 29:12-38). The first day's burnt offering is to have 13 bulls, with 12 on the second day, 11 on the third day, on down to 7 on the seventh day.

This may simply be a way to arrive at the perfect number on the seventh day. It has been suggested, however, that because the bulls bring a large appreciation of the burnt offering, the 13 come just short of the doubly high completeness of appreciation shown in the 14 more humble lambs. The number of bulls gradually decreases, as by a naturally lessening enthusiasm, to a still perfect seven.

The second convocation is on the eighth day, which regularly signifies a new beginning. Although equal to the first day in importance (John 7:37 calls it "the great day"), the burnt offering is down to one bull, one ram, and seven lambs, exactly as on the Day of Atonement. It may be that, on the day that speaks of a new beginning, the offering is reduced to predominantly one sacrifice to show that, in its fulfillment, the ultimate and true Sacrifice will be just One.

The form of the feast made it ideal as a joyful means of giving thanks to God for His care through the desert years, His enabling the

conquest and His gift of a good harvest. During Joshua's leadership, it functioned well as a memorial for adults and as instruction for the children. But after that, according to Nehemiah 8:17, it was generally dropped and only fully restored by Ezra and Nehemiah.

The future aspect of the feast is presented by the leading prophet of Ezra and Nehemiah's day—Zechariah. In his prophecy, he gives the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement in Israel's repentance when they "look on Me whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10). Then "a fountain will be opened to the house of David ... to cleanse them from sin and impurity" (13:1 NIV).

In his last chapter, Zechariah pictures the Lord's setting up His kingdom. The feast to which the surviving nations are commanded to come to worship the King in Jerusalem is the Feast of Tabernacles (14:16). Then even the bells of the horses will be engraved "Holy to the Lord" and every cooking pot in Jerusalem will be holy (verses 20, 21).

For the Christian, the future aspect will be more individual and spiritual. But it will be a "Sabbath rest" in the joy of His having brought us to our eternal inheritance to be with Him and like Him forever.

Questions for Leviticus 24-27

1. In 24:2, what is the point of the words *clear*, *beaten* or *pressed* and *continually*? In verse 16, what is the significance of using just the word *Name* (KJV supplies "of the Lord")?
2. In 25:1-7, what things are to rest? From what does Israel rest? How are the people to eat?
3. In 25:8-28, how is a jubilee a "Sabbath of Sabbaths"? What is its central idea? When is it to begin?
4. What makes 26:32-39 so striking to us today?

5. From chapter 27, is it God's estimate of the value of those dedicated that determines their worth?
What about spiritual value?

Highlights of the Final Chapters

Leviticus 24-27

A long with expanded directions for familiar topics, Leviticus 24-27 introduces a new role that finds its fulfillment in Christ: the Kinsman-Redeemer.

Chapter 24 covers three subjects: The first two round out the provision for services in the tabernacle's holy place. First is the clear, pure olive oil to be provided for the lamps of the seven-branched golden lampstand (verses 2-4).

The olives are to be prime—ripe, but firm enough to be “beaten” to yield this pure symbol of the Holy Spirit. The light of the lampstand shines out particularly upon the table of showbread, picturing the light of Christ shining out by the work of the Spirit. Today, if the light of Christ is to shine forth in full clarity and power, believers have the responsibility to be exercised in prayer and godly concern.

As high priest, Aaron had the responsibility of keeping the lamps in order by trimming the wicks and bringing the oil up to the proper level evening and morning. Our High Priest will do the same if we give Him the opportunity “evening and morning.”

Second is the provision made in verses 5-9 for the bread of the Presence or showbread on the golden table opposite the lampstand. Each of the “cakes” is baked from about four

quarts of unleavened fine flour. There are 12 cakes, one for each tribe so all are equally before the Lord.

When the bread was changed each Sabbath, frankincense was placed with the bread on the table and burned as a “memorial.” The incense became a fragrance to God, and the bread became sacred food for the priest. As a whole, it is a covenant memorial between God and Israel looking to the Messiah as the true Bread of Life.

In John 6:32, 33, Christ spoke primarily of the manna, the bread from heaven that gives life to the world. In the bread of the Presence, the emphasis is on Christ as the life sustainer.

The last part of the chapter tells of the son of an Egyptian man and an Israelite woman who in the course of a fight in the camp blasphemed God's name and cursed (verses 10-23). He was held while Moses and the people inquired the Lord's will.

God directed that he be taken outside the camp. Those who heard him blaspheme were to lay their hands on his head, and the people were to stone him to death. God is holy and His name sacred; the Third

Commandment settles that. The law is law even for one born of an Egyptian father.

In the Hebrew, verses 11 and 16 state, “the Name” had been blasphemed. In the inspired thought of Scripture, the “Name”—either the sacred name commonly pronounced “Jehovah” or an ideal union of all His names—is equivalent to Deity revealed. It approximates in a less personal way what Christ was infinitely and personally. (Read Psalm 138:2 in a recent translation for the relation of “Name” to the “Word” of God.)

Chapter 25 turns back to complete what might be called the Sabbath series. Chapter 23 began with the Sabbath of days—the seventh day with its rest from labor. It ended with the sabbatic month with its rest from the pressure of harvest and with the spiritual rest of assurance from God.

Next is the sabbatic year, a period of rest primarily for the land (25:2-7). Every seventh year it is to lie fallow with no sowing or reaping. Similarly, the vines are not to be pruned.

Grain from kernels that accidentally dropped and grew are not to be harvested, but left for the poor, cattle and wild game. Verse 6 shows that the family may use these crops if needed. But the usual way of living in the sabbatic year is that God will give so fine a harvest the sixth year that there will be plenty to meet their need until the harvest of the eighth year (verses 20, 21).

God would let the land enjoy its rest and so produce better crops the six regular years. But He would also have the people rest from the drive to make money and learn to trust Him for provision for the extra year. In

this way they are free to pour out their souls in devotion to Him as their priority of life, making the year truly “for the Lord.”

Israel eventually dropped this observance. In 2 Chronicles 36:21 God declared that in the Babylonian captivity, the land enjoyed its Sabbath: “All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.”

The series climaxes with the year of jubilee, the Sabbath of sabbatic years (25:8-55). This 50th year began on the Day of Atonement of the 49th year because all the blessings of jubilee are based on its atoning sacrifice. That day the high priest takes the blood into the Holy of Holies and sprinkles it on the mercy seat in the presence of God in His glory. Then the sins of Israel are confessed, laid on the scapegoat and taken away. Israel is ceremonially right with God.

The great activity of the jubilee is the restoration of what has been lost. If an Israelite has lost or had to sell any of his inherited property, at jubilee it is restored to him. God has given him a fresh start.

If he has become a bond-servant through inability to pay a debt, at jubilee the debt is canceled. He is a free man again—free to return to his family, to work for himself and to order his own life. Loans and purchases of inherited property are to be made on this understanding; it would be foolish to pay a high price when jubilee is near. Yet spiritually, this is often done.

Jubilee is a period of deep joy for those who had suffered loss and now rejoiced in recovery. It is also a second sabbatic year for all Israel. For a second year, there would be no plant-

ing or harvesting and no pruning or regular harvest of the grapes. God would give in the 48th year an especially good harvest and “volunteer” grain and grapes for those with nothing stored up.

It is a special test of faith and a time of rest from pressure to “get gain.” As well, it is a time for meditation and sharing in the rejoicing of those restored to freedom or inheritances. Twice in a brief passage God warns, “You shall not wrong one another” (25:14, 17). The motivation is that “you shall fear (reverence) your God; for I am the Lord your God” (verse 17).

Prophetically, the jubilee looks to the consummation when, transformed by looking on the One “whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10), Israel will be cleansed and united with her Messiah-King. In true jubilee style, Israel will be released from all the effects of sin and failure. Associated with Him, they will have their part in the millennial kingdom and in “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

Six brief sections on details concerning the jubilee complete the chapter. Israel is to carry out God’s statutes so He will give abundant crops (25:18-22). If they do not sow and harvest, God assures them He will give a crop in the sixth year adequate for three years (through the sabbatic years and jubilee). It is a question of trusting God.

Verses 23-28 present the kinsman-redeemer buying back the property his impoverished relative sold, especially if the sale had been to a non-Israelite. The redeemer would be the nearest of kin who was financially able. If no kinsman volunteers but

the original owner recovers financially, he may redeem himself. The price is the amount originally paid, less the value for its use for the time since it was purchased. If no one redeems it, the property must wait until the year of jubilee to return to its original owner.

Verses 29-34 give an exception to the rule of redemption. If sold, a house in a walled city may be redeemed within one year. Otherwise it becomes the permanent possession of the new owner, unchanged by jubilee. But houses of Levites in cities assigned to them are always redeemable, and their pasture lands are never to be sold.

A neighbor in need is to be sustained by a loan without interest (verses 35-38). If someone sells him food, he is to take no profit on the sale. (Israel is also to do this for a stranger in need.) In this way, the neighbor may continue to live in the land; and the Lord who delivered Israel from Egypt will be honored.

Verses 39-46 describe the relationship an Israelite is to have with a fellow countryman who must sell himself into slavery to pay a debt. The Israelite creditor is not to treat him as a slave, but as a hired man and never with severity. Unlike slaves from other peoples, no Israelite slave is ever to be sold in a slave sale. At jubilee the debtor with his children goes out free to return to his family inheritance.

The chapter’s final section (verses 47-55) turns back to the kinsman redeemer. The situation is one heavy on Israel’s heart: an Israelite in slavery to a foreign creditor living among them. The law gives the enslaved man the right to appeal for redemption to a brother, uncle, cousin or other blood relative. If one

is willing to pay the price, the man can be fully freed. If not, he must serve until the jubilee.

The kinsman is assigned a third duty in Deuteronomy 25:5-9. If a married Israelite dies childless, his brother or other kinsman is to marry the widow and raise up a child to carry on the line of the deceased. If the nearest kinsman refuses, he comes before the elders with the widow and hands over his sandal in token of his failure to perform. The widow has the right to spit in his face to complete his disgrace. The right to redeem then passes to the next nearest of kin.

We see this practiced in the book of Ruth. It involved both a threatened inheritance and the death of Mahlon, Ruth's first husband.

Ruth knows Boaz enough to trust him with her future, and she risks repudiation and disgrace by putting herself at his feet. Boaz acknowledges, however, there is a closer relative. This relative was ready to redeem the property, but he was not willing to marry Ruth. So he handed over his sandal, and Boaz became the kinsman-redeemer.

As Isaiah 59:20 declares and Job 19:25 indicates, the kinsman-redeemer is a clear type of Christ. As incarnate, He is our kinsman (Hebrews 2:14, 15); and He came "to give His life a ransom (price to set a slave free) for many" (Matthew 20:28). And who else can deal with death (spiritual or physical) and make the open-hearted Gentile (as Ruth was also a Gentile) His bride? At Christ's return, the kinsman-redeemer and jubilee will merge.

In chapter 26, Moses the prophet delivers God's message of blessing for faithful obedience and punishment

for apostasy.

Verses 1-13 give the positive side: Bring in no idols, keep the Lord's Sabbaths and revere His sanctuary. If they obey, blessings will include rain in season, crops in abundance, peace and victorious power over enemies. Highest of all, God will multiply them, be their God and own them as His people.

Verse 14 begins the prophetic warning of what will result from apostasy. A series (verses 16, 18, 21, 23 and 27) depicts increasingly severe chastening. God's rods of chastisement progress through sudden terror, disease and invasion to drought, famine and sword. Punishment ends with siege so fierce that Israel will eat its own sons and daughters (verse 29). God will heap their remains on the remains of their idols (verse 30).

Next is a striking prophecy of the worldwide Jewish dispersion (verses 33-39). It stands as the climax of God's disciplinary judgments. Although it has elements applicable to the Babylonian exile, that deportation never included all the people, was not worldwide and did not have the savage treatment over this longer period. This points to the Roman conquest and total dispersion of the Jews in A.D. 70, followed by the pogroms and ghettos of Europe in the Middle Ages on down to Hitler.

The last section (verses 40-45) shows the power that has preserved this people through nearly 19 centuries of hatred and persecution. It is the Lord, the God of Abraham, who brought them out of Egypt and gave them His covenant.

Chapter 27 deals largely with evaluating what has been dedicated to God or belongs to Him and is to be redeemed. First is the evaluation of

what God counts valuable in people dedicated to Him (verses 2-8).

He looks for the qualities of maturity and active dependable strength. The highest value is for those 20 years to 60 years: 50 shekels for the male and 30 shekels for the female. Between 5 and 20 years, the value of the male is 20 shekels and the female, 10. Below five years, it is five and three shekels; beyond 60 years, it is 15 and 10.

The picture points to God's placing high value on the person of spiritual maturity and moral strength. The babe calls out one's love and the urge to care; but, if it does not grow, its chief effect is sorrow. The youth has greater value. A Samuel can begin to recognize God's voice, understand His ways and even gain the confidence of God's people.

But the full value is in the spiritually strong and mature. In spiritual value, many like Priscilla rate the full 50 shekels (Romans 16:3, 4). As for decline at 60, it is not an inevitable development in the spiritual realm; some are like Caleb at 85. Unfortunately, the decline can begin at any time. We all need to be alert to the danger and draw on the resources in Christ for continued strength.

The rest of the chapter (verses 9-24) may suggest some spiritual principles. A thing suitable for sacrifice and promised to God in a vow is holy. It is to be placed on the altar, not shifted around according to one's changing ideas.

A house, whether symbolizing a family dedicated to the Lord or a church, is maintained at a real cost: a godly life by its leaders, consistent

teaching of the Word, nights of fervent prayer and selfless love.

It is similar in the taking up of an area for planting seed. It is costly; but, if the price is not paid, it is turned over to others. Verse 25 reminds us that in all these things, the value is "after the shekel of the sanctuary." God's standard of value is not man's.

The Hebrew expression translated "devote" in verse 28 refers to the kind of irrevocable turning over to God what was to be done with the spoils of Jericho. This was disregarded by Achan, causing the shameful defeat at Ai and Achan's death.

The final detail is a reminder of the tithe as a legal requirement on all income of any kind (verses 30-33). This is in contrast to New Testament giving, which is voluntary and to be motivated by nothing less than our appreciation of the grace of Christ (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The Fullness of Time

Eternal God, unrestricted by time, acts within time and always on time in relation to the world. Nowhere is this more significant and clear than “when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” into the world as the promised Messiah.

At that point, the Roman empire was at the zenith of its power, unchallenged in authority. Peace was established from Britain to the borders of India. Citizens traveled freely, unrestricted by political barriers.

Roads reached throughout the empire and, except for winter, shipping served every port of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic from North Africa to Britain.

The ways were prepared for messengers of Christ to go to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Rome’s incorporation of distinct nationalities and regions into one empire reduced opposition to foreign religions.

At that time, by his conquests and empire, Alexander the Great had made Greek the dominant language of the eastern Mediterranean area, and it continued to spread after his death. By the birth of Christ it had become the most prominent language of the Roman world.

Even in Rome itself, Greek was the language of literature, philosophy, and culture for the educated people. It was understood in even the most remote areas of the empire.

Not only was it a nearly universal language, it was also as perfectly suited to an accurate presentation of the Christian message as any prominent language ever known. The variety of its verb forms enabled speakers and writers to be exact in regard to time and degree of certainty that proved remarkably advantageous in declaring the Gospel. Fine shades of meaning could be expressed by its wide vocabulary.

In the religious sphere, it had exactly the words and forms needed by Paul, Peter, Luke, and John to record the message perfectly. Into this language the Old Testament had been translated, so that by the time of Christ’s birth, the treasures of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms were available to the Greco-Roman world and, according to recent studies, were better known than we had formerly realized.

Not only was the Greek language itself a fine vehicle for disseminating the gospel of Christ, the whole culture of the Hellenistic world made people conscious of a wide range of philosophic and religious ideas that would be prominent in the apostolic message.

Greek philosophers had discussed origins, the nature of man, righteousness, graciousness, self-control, and similar matters.

Actually, the Apostle John’s great expression, “The Word,” by which he designated Christ as the full presentation of the mind and heart of God,

had been used in a somewhat similar way by Plato and made more familiar by the Alexandrian writer Philo.

John took a previously known but vague idea and made it specific, personal, and significant.

By the days of Paul, the idea of “salvation” had become prominent. The question of the Philippian jailer, “What must I do to be saved?” did not involve a concept unfamiliar to the Roman world at the time.

At that point, throughout the Roman Empire, a longing had begun in many hearts for something better than the decadence around them. The traditional gods of Greek and Roman mythology were subject to all the passions and failures that marked mankind. Their conduct was base.

Pagan religion was bankrupt.

Although Greek philosophy had risen to a high degree, particularly under Socrates and Plato, now even the philosophers were admitting—and some bewailing—that their philosophy had not been able to halt the moral decline.

The feeling of need for something to lift the level of life, to bring some kind of “salvation,” began to come into contact with ideas and passages from the Old Testament. Two results occurred:

The Latin poet Virgil wrote his Fourth Eclogue. It centers on a “puer” (its Greek equivalent in Acts 4:27, 30 is translated “boy” in the King James Version and “servant” in the New American Standard Bible) who was to come and deliver mankind from the dragon of evil and bring in a reign of righteousness and peace.

It so strongly reflects the Old Testa-

ment prophecies of a Servant-Deliverer that it is commonly referred to as Virgil’s Messianic Eclogue.

The second and more important result was the turning to the Jewish synagogue by large numbers of Gentiles throughout most of the Roman world.

Disgusted with the stories of the gods and the deification of the emperors and deeply concerned over the growing degeneracy around them, they could see only one place that offered a ray of hope—the place where Moses and the prophets were read, where the true God and righteous standards were proclaimed—the synagogue.

To realize how vastly important a preparation for Messiah this actually was, one need only remember that Paul, as he came to a new place in his missionary journeys, made the synagogue—wherever there was one—his first objective.

This was not just because the gospel was to be “to the Jew first,” it was also because in that synagogue he would find the potential “cream” of the Gentiles spiritually, the people whose hearts were prepared to receive the message.

In relation to thinking Gentiles throughout the Roman world, certainly “the fullness of the time was come.”

Virgil’s poem had also helped introduce to responsive Romans another element in the preparation for Christ’s coming—expectancy of the Deliverer.

Other, more obscure writers with closer ties to the Old Testament followed. By the time of Christ’s ministry, a sense of expectancy had risen in a small portion of the Gentile world. But vastly greater

was the sense of expectancy among many Jews.

It was, of course, the specific expectancy of the promised Messiah; and, even at His birth, it was seen in the godly remnant represented by the aged Simeon and Anna and by John the Baptist's parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth.

About thirty years later, as the Baptist began his ministry, Palestine seethed with expectation of some great prophetic event; and John's powerful preaching raised that expectancy to a peak.

Israelites with responsive hearts were ready.

At that time, the prophetic timetable was in place. Back at the very entrance of sin into the race, God in pure grace gave the first promise of the Deliverer; and in successive periods through the centuries, He confirmed and gave further detail regarding this Anointed One—His nature, His character, His work as suffering Servant and conquering King.

Genesis 3:15 had indicated this when God said that the "Seed of the woman" would be hard bruised but would crush the enemy's head.

With the conclusion of the ministry of Zechariah and Malachi, the prophetic portrait of Messiah was complete—even to the exact way He would present Himself to Israel as its King (Zechariah 9:9). However, there had to be a pause.

The prophet Daniel (Daniel 9:25, 26) had given a definite length of time between the decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem by Artaxerxes in Nehemiah 2 and Messiah's being "cut off." That period was sixty-nine

"weeks" of years (483 years), which would focus the calendar on 30 A.D.

If Messiah were to come to maturity, fulfill His public ministry as described in Isaiah 61, and be "cut off" about 30 A.D., He must be born a few years before the year one.

So when Jesus was born in Bethlehem about 4 B.C., the fullness of the prophetic timetable had come; and only one born at that time could possibly be the Messiah of Old Testament promise. (The seeming paradox of Jesus Christ's being born in 4 B.C.—four years "Before Christ"—is due to a sixth century calendar maladjustment.)

To prepare for Christ's coming, God had to demonstrate that man needed a Savior, that he could not by his own effort make himself right. So, God brought a succession of tests under various conditions upon man. Adam had been tested under the most favorable circumstances—perfect innocence within and a perfect physical environment around. Yet he fell, and sin entered the race.

Following the Fall, although he possessed conscience as an endowment from creation and although he acquired experiential "knowledge of good and evil" from having eaten the forbidden fruit, man irrecoverably corrupted himself and brought on the judgment of the Flood.

Following that, God authorized human government with the judicial "power of the sword." But man did no better with government over him. Babel and the introduction of idolatry were the results of that test.

God then chose one man, Abraham, and his descendants to carry forward His purpose. He gave

them promises of immeasurable blessing not conditioned on any work, but in pure grace. Those promises were sure and remained valid through the centuries, reaching climactic fulfillment in the coming of Christ.

In the meantime, however, a final test was in order. If men could personally experience the clearly supernatural delivering power of God and then have in explicit form exactly what God wanted of them, would they now respond in obedience?

So Israel was miraculously delivered from Egypt and given the Law at Sinai.

“All that the Lord has spoken we will do,” the people said.

But their self-confidence was ill-founded. Within a few days, they were breaking the core of the Law in idolatry and corruption.

So it continued through the centuries, despite the numbers of times God gave Israel deliverance and a fresh start through great prophets and leaders He raised up. Their repeated apostasy and deepening corruption finally brought the judgment of the captivities by Assyria and Babylonia. A chosen, delivered, and greatly privileged people under the simple, explicit Law of God had failed as badly as any previous group.

The captivities did cure Israel of open idolatry, and the rest of the period of Law can be considered as a somewhat new and special phase of this test of man.

During this time between the Babylonian captivity and Christ's birth, there arose a group of Jews passionately devoted to the Law. The test now centered on the question, “Can a thoroughly ardent devotion to the me-

ticulous keeping of the Law make a person right?”

The answer is obvious the moment we realize we are referring to the Pharisees. Despite their fine beginning, Christ had to denounce them as superficial, self-righteous hypocrites.

He said they “devour widows’ houses, even while for a pretense (they) make long prayers” (Matthew 23:14). He said they “tithed mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23). They “are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27).

These, with the skeptic Sadducees, were the leaders in demanding the death of the Son of God. Man under legalism, even with high promise at first, still ends in deep failure and demonstrates with terrible finality his need of the Savior.

From every aspect, then, it was “when the fullness of the time was come,” that “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).

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To introduce each chapter in this study of Hebrews, Dr. King proposed questions to prepare the heart of each student in advance for the exposition he would give.

QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY OF HEBREWS ONE

1. From your present knowledge of the epistle, state the overall theme.
2. What important doctrine of the Christian faith is declared in Hebrews 1:1?
3. In verse 2, the primary meaning of the words "by His Son" in the original is "in a Son." What might this add to the significance of the statement?
4. What advantages would you see in God's speaking "in" and "by" a Son over His using prophets?
- 5A. State what each of the descriptions of Christ in verses 2 and 3 actually means. (If you have several versions available, compare their translations of "express image.")
- 5B. How then is the office of Messiah (prophet, priest and king) fully seen in Christ?
6. Why do you think Hebrews 1 contrasts Christ with angels?
7. State how each Old Testament quotation shows the superiority of Christ over angels.
8. Why must Psalm 45:6, 7 (verses 8, 9 here) be addressed to Christ, not God the father? Give three reasons.
9. With what expression in the early part of the chapter does the quotation from Psalm 102 (verses 10-12 here) correspond? Did you note under question 7 what else is declared about Christ in this quotation?
10. What is it in Psalm 110:1 that caused Christ to make it His final challenge to the Jewish people (Mark 12:35-37) and the writer of Hebrews to make it his climactic proof of the deity of Messiah?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 1

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

The early Christians loved the book of Hebrews and early church writers quoted it as much as any other New Testament book.

It is a great book, excellent in style, magnificent in the depth of its teaching, and unquestioned in the early church as to its inspiration, despite its being anonymous.

The question of its authorship was early and often discussed with only inconclusive results. The very keen literary scholar of the third century, Origen, concluded, “Only God knows surely who wrote Hebrews.”

There is, however, one very significant bit of evidence in the epistle itself. Hebrews 13:23 indicates that the writer, if not Paul himself, belongs to the Pauline circle since he is Timothy’s close associate. This explains the well-recognized Pauline influence in the book and tends to confirm its authority.

Hebrews was apparently written shortly before 70 A.D. when the Zealots were putting pressure on all Jews both to unite in a struggle against Rome and also to conform to the traditional Jewish faith.

The theme of the epistle—the superiority of Christianity over Judaism—carries an urgent appeal to Jewish professed believers not to

turn back to Judaism but to go forward in faith in Christ.

Chapter one is a definitive revelation of God the Son. Anyone questioning the authority of that revelation need look only here: God has spoken.

1:1. God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets ...

This affirms from the outset that the Old Testament was God speaking. He spoke periodically, “at many times”—from the days of Moses (drawing on earlier revelation) to the post-exilic prophets and leaders—and “in various ways”—significant history, poetry, and prophecy.

Yet it was God’s Word, partial, preparatory, but authoritative—even to Christ. Compare His replies to Satan’s temptations and examine His ministry right on through to the Cross and the Emmaus road.

We now come to the perfect Spokesman.

1:2a. (God) hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.

The Old Testament promises are now accomplished. In contrast to

speaking by prophets, God now speaks “in (or by) a Son.”

In the parable of the vineyard (Mark 12:6), the stress is on the vastly higher honor a son enjoys compared to a servant. Here that certainly is included, but much more is in mind.

Here we have the emphasis that a son can speak for his father with authority, finality, and completeness. And when we are dealing with God the Father and His Son, that is true in the ultimate degree because the Son is one in nature and essence with the Father.

It is also thoroughly suitable to have an expression that means literally “in a Son,” for the closeness of the Father and the Son in the work of revelation was already absolute.

This is the Self-revelation of God, the only revelation that is perfectly complete. This is the ultimate basis for our confidence in the New Testament.

Now follow seven specific qualifications of the Son to be the perfect Spokesman:

First, He is the one ...

1:2b. Whom he hath appointed heir of all things.

This takes us back into the eternal purposes of God. There we find high among those purposes the Father’s will to honor the Son.

All creation is to be for Him, for His honor, for His delight. Not an alpine flower on an unscaled peak, not a sunset on an empty sea fails to fulfill its ultimate purpose. They honor and delight the appointed Heir.

And man with his potential even for fellowship with God was included in this inheritance.

Second, He is the one ...

1:2c. By whom also he made the worlds.

He is Creator of all that is in time and space. Literally, this would read “through whom He made the ages.”

This is a step closer to us and our particular universe than having all things be “for Him” as “Heir.” All things are now seen as His creation, made and set in place “through” Him. He therefore understands them all perfectly and is the perfectly qualified One in whom God speaks.

Third, He is the one ...

1:3a. who being the brightness of his glory.

He is the radiance of God’s glory. In this and the next qualification we move right into what Christ is in Himself.

In this, He is the visible manifestation, the “outshining” of God’s glory, symbolized by the Shekinah Glory of the Old Testament. In Him are seen in full brilliance the excellencies of God’s character. Here is certainly a superb qualification for the work of revelation.

Fourth, He is ...

1:3b. the express image of His person ...

He is the “exact representation of His being” (NIV). The word for “image” is interesting. It originally meant an engraving tool. Then it came to refer to the lines and indentations in a die that, when pressed on a softer metal, gave shape and detail to a coin or other object.

So here it is saying that Christ is not some secondary copy, some hazy or inaccurate reflection. He is the immediate and exact presentation of the being of God, the absolute delineation of His very essence.

It is the strongest language possible to show the oneness of Christ with God the Father without endangering the truth of the Trinity. Christ put it in the simplest of terms: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Fifth, He is the one who is

1:3c. Upholding all things by the word of His power.

Compare this to Colossians 1:17—"And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

Here in Hebrews the writer turns back to Christ's work. He not only created all things in time and space, but He also carries that work forward by sustaining the universe, the stars in their courses, the electrons in their movements, and man as a responsible moral agent even when his choices are contrary to God's.

Christ is in full and vital contact with that to which God would use Him to speak.

And this "upholding" is by the "word of His power." We see samples of this power operating in Christ's word in the Gospels. The word that sustains the universe is the word that calmed the storm on the lake and called Lazarus from the tomb.

And it is still the same today.

Sixth, He is the One who has ...

1:3d. By himself purged our sins.

He has made purification for sins. Here we see Him incarnate and engaged in the supreme work for which He came, "the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

We have been considering His qualifications to be God's definitive spokesman whom the prophet fore-

told by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15.

Now we see Him as the Priest who makes the infinite sacrifice on the Cross. He had spoken of it as a "ransom" (Mark 10:45), the price for setting a slave free.

He had spoken of it as a "baptism" (Luke 12:50), the taking of the old thing we were into death so that in His resurrection we might be raised to *a new life—a resurrection life!*

He had spoken of it as a "cup" (Matthew 26:39), the wrath of God against our sins.

That sacrifice has now been made once for all. "It is finished," as He said. The believer stands before God cleansed and in all the acceptability of Christ.

As to Christ's being God's Spokesman, who could be better qualified than the One who has accomplished the work that is now to be proclaimed?

Seventh, He is the One who ...

1:3e. Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

He sat down at God's right hand. The Father in all His majesty has proclaimed the mission on which He had sent His Son to be fully accomplished, and He has seated Him at His right hand in the place of honor and royal authority.

The three-fold office of Messiah is now thus before us.

Christ is God's Prophet, infinitely qualified to speak for Him.

Christ is God's Priest who has offered the one sacrifice that makes the believer perfect before God.

And He is God's King, victorious and sovereign but awaiting His reve-

lation to the world when He will come in power and glory.

We are now given proof from Judaism's own Scriptures, the Old Testament, that the Lord Jesus Christ has the right and the authority to be the Spokesman for God.

For us, if we are Gentiles, this may well be a demonstration that the Christian message is not the creation of the fertile theological brain of the Apostle Paul or of the religious enthusiasm of Peter or of the soaring spiritual insight of John.

The heart of the message had been specifically presented centuries before in the writings of Israel's prophets and leaders.

This proof is given in the form of a contrast between Christ and angels.

1:4. Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

At least two reasons why angels are selected for the contrast are worth considering.

First, angels were recognized as the highest order of created beings. If Christ is higher than these, He is uncreated; He is God.

Second, angels had had a part in the giving of the law of Moses (Galatians 3:19), and Judaism was now making them the source of the Old Testament's dignity. If Christ is proved higher than angels, then the New Covenant He brings in is better than the old which they sponsor.

Of the seven quotations that follow, the first two deal with Christ's Sonship.

1:5a. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

This repeats Psalm 2:7. The one of whom the Psalm speaks is obviously Messiah-King, and He is just as clearly declared to be the Son of God. He is begotten, not created. He is the Heir and coming Ruler of all, in whom the purposes of the Father will be fulfilled.

This opening quotation proves Messiah to be God the Son. "This day" may have the sense of the "eternal now" of God's viewpoint, just as Christ could say, "Before Abraham was, I am."

Acts 13:33 ("God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee") relates Psalm 2:7 to the resurrection which in the course of human history fully proclaimed Christ to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4—"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead").

1:5b. And again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a Son.

This repeats 2 Samuel 7:14. Here in the heart of the Davidic Covenant, God's promise rises from Solomon, the primary reference, to David's Greater Son, Messiah. God the Father identifies Him as His Son and shows that in Him David's throne and kingdom will continue forever.

We next have two quotations showing the contrast of angels with Christ.

6. And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

This is a quote from the Septuagint (the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm it)

of Deuteronomy 32:43. There it records that as God presents His First-born to the world, He gives the command, "Let all the angels of God worship him."

The contrast between Christ's place and honor and that of angels could not be more forcefully stated.

1:7. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

This repeats Psalm 104:4.

Here the Old Testament declares that angels are simply servants of God, powerful but just servants. He uses them as "winds," having moving power and usually unseen except in their effects, and as "fire" to consume in judgment or perhaps to prepare for refining.

Verse 14 may well be considered at this point since in it the writer again shows by contrast the superiority of Christ to angels as ministers of God. While Christ did "minister" to us and "give His life a ransom for many," it was a voluntary service and primarily in the spiritual realm. The ministry of angels relates largely to the physical realm.

Now follow two psalms that address Christ as God.

1:8. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom.

1:9. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore, God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

This one quotes Psalm 45:6 and 7.

The introduction to the quotation highlights the contrast of this passage with the one previously given in Hebrews 1:7. There, angels are servants

doing their assigned tasks. Here the Son is addressed "O God," His throne is eternal, and its scepter is righteousness.

The commendation of His loving righteousness and hating lawlessness speaks clearly to us today.

The passage quoted in verse nine cannot be viewed as addressed to God the Father for at least three reasons: (1) The expression "Thy God," (2) the fact that rule over the kingdom is Messiah's by right, and (3) the fact that He has "fellows" or "companions" which is true of Christ incarnate but not of God the Father.

Messiah is here addressed unquestionably as God. The anointing with the "oil of gladness" speaks of a high festal occasion such as Christ's ascension and seating on the Father's right hand.

10. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.

11. They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall become old as doth a garment.

12. And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

These verses quote Psalm 102:25-27.

Having proved from Psalm 45 that Messiah is properly addressed as God and in accord with Christ's own claims, the writer now cites the Psalmist's poetic description of the work of creation as that of Christ, who is addressed as "Lord" in the psalm.

The thought of the psalmist then moved to the transitoriness of the material world in contrast to the Creator's eternity and unchanging character.

The last words of verse 12 are re-echoed at the end of the epistle: “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.”

Then follows the climax of the argument.

13. But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

14. Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Christ chose this quote from Psalm 110:1 as His own final and climactic challenge to the Jewish people in His last public message to them in Matthew 22:42-45. Now the writer to the Hebrews makes it his climactic proof of Christ’s person.

Messiah is more than just David’s son for David “in the Spirit” calls Him “My Lord.” Messiah is deity and is seated by the Father’s command at His right hand. This would be at the ascension for it is presented as a fresh seating. It is to continue “until I make Thine enemies thy footstool,” that is, until the Second Coming.

So the Old Testament did leave room for a period of indefinite length between the ascension and the second advent!

God saw our age, its character and course and allowed it in order to produce strong spirits for the eternal future.

It is our part to give Christ the same throne in our lives that He has in the presence of the Father today.

Questions for the Study of Hebrews 2

1. Define what the writer was referring to by his “Therefore” (“For this reason”) in Hebrews 2:1.
2. Compare the pictures presented by two different translations of the last verb in verse 1, (for example, the KJV and the NASB or the NIV).
3. State as simply as you can the argument of verses 2 and 3a (through the word “salvation”).
4. From verses 3 and 4, outline the sources of confidence we have in the truth of the Gospel message. Explain each.
5. Study Psalm 8:3-6 as well as Hebrews 2:5-7 and describe God’s intended place for man.
6. List and explain the great doctrines of the Christian faith that are referred to in verse 9?
7. In verse 11 explain the meaning of “are all of one.”
8. What other reason does verse 14 give for Christ’s taking humanity besides His being sympathetic toward us? How did His death render Satan powerless and deliver believers from the bondage of the fear of death?
9. Explain why it is important that Christ be “made like his brethren” (verse 17).
10. How is verse 18 a strong word of comfort to believers today?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 2

Hebrews, some say, “begins like an essay, proceeds like a sermon, and ends as an epistle.” But it calls itself a “word of exhortation” (13:22) and this emphasis comes out strongly in a series of parenthetical passages, one of which begins chapter two.

Fully in line with the writer's thought, these passages represent a pause in his argument, allowing him either to enforce what he has been saying or to add a strong warning. In Hebrews 2:1-4 he exhorts his readers to pay attention.

Christ, through whom God has definitely spoken, is God the Son, transcendent in His person, character and work to accomplish the Father's purposes. A revelation from such a Source carries the heaviest obligation to heed it.

The opening “Therefore” brings all the high honor shown to be Christ's in chapter one to bear upon the appeal now beginning.

2:1. Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

Failure has drastic results; and (as both the New American Standard Bible and the New International Version translate the last verb of verse one) we can easily “drift away” from God's message.

The implied picture is a boat which, if not securely fastened to its mooring, will drift with the tide and be in deep trouble. (And, if the tide of the world was not toward devotion to God in the apostles' day, it has

hardly changed for the better today!)

Verse 2 is an argument from the Old Testament.

2:2a. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast ...

(NIV translates “steadfast” as “binding”—firmly authoritative.)

2:2b. and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward

(NIV translates “recompense of reward” as “its just punishment.”)

What must be the situation for those who ignore what God the Son has provided at infinite cost? The inspired text gives a very strong answer in verse 3:

2:3a. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

Christ has not just brought more law. He has brought a salvation infinitely great from its beginning in the heart of God and through to both its accomplishment on the Cross and its outworking in believers' lives by the Spirit. It finds its consummation as “many sons are brought to glory.”

The first “we” of verse 3's question is emphatic—how shall “we” escape (the ones to whom the Gospel has been preached) who have such vastly greater privilege than people in

Old Testament days. The answer to the question is “*in no way!*” One does not have to fight against this salvation to be lost. Just neglecting the remedy for sin brings death.

The writer now validates this great salvation—

2:3b. Which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord ...

In other words, it was inaugurated by the Word of the Lord when Jesus, baptized by John, anointed by the Spirit, and triumphant over Satan’s temptation stood in the synagogue of Nazareth and read from the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah (Luke 4:16-21).

Then came His discourse of which the opening sentence was an inauguration of this “great salvation.” The words were as simple and direct as language can be: “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

Salvation was launched by Messiah’s presence there in the power of the Spirit to fulfill the promise of God and it

2:3c. was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.

We have powerful evidence from the witness of the apostles, the 500-plus who saw and heard him after He rose from the dead and from the other early followers who saw His work and heard His words from those who later preached them.

These all published the Good News far and wide so that by the end of the first century the word had reached to the edges of the Roman world. The message was “confirmed” as solid historic fact, quite irreversible by doubt, attack or philosophic questioning.

2:4a . God also bearing them witness ...

The literal is beautiful: “God joining them in bearing witness.” The Gospels record the Father’s witness to Christ during His earthly ministry and culminating in His resurrection.

Those supernatural attestations are undoubtedly included in this statement, but its major reference would be to the miraculous witness recorded in Acts, events that occurred right along with the early preaching.

Interestingly, similar events seem to have occurred in modern times when new mission fields have opened to the Gospel.

God bore witness in four ways:

2:4b. Both with signs ...

Signs indicate there is meaning in the event. God is seeking to impart truth. It is John’s favorite word for the carefully selected miracles recorded in his Gospel. The supreme sign was, of course, the Resurrection; but healings by the apostles throughout the book of Acts are signs of God’s merciful power working to commend the message of Christ.

On the other hand, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and of Herod (Acts 12) point out the reality of God’s righteous judgment.

2:4c. And wonders ...

These witness to God’s power operating in behalf of His own. One wonder was the earthquake that came in response to prayer that the church might be bold to speak the Word (Acts 4:29-31). The earthquake that cracked open the Philippian jail, freeing Paul and Silas and preparing the jailor for saving faith, would be another (Acts 16:25-29).

2:4c. and with diverse miracles ...

These are such works of power as might be illustrated by the raising of Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:40) or the deliverance of Paul from death by the viper's bite on Malta (Acts 28:3-6).

2:4d. And gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.

Is this speaking of God's giving the Spirit to believers or the Spirit's giving them various gifts?

Both are true. God gave the Holy Spirit to believers at Pentecost, baptizing them into one Body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Every subsequent filling with the Spirit is in the final analysis a gift of God.

But this phrase would seem to indicate that these gifts are given to believers by the Spirit according to His sovereign will to confirm the message of Christ.

The most important of these gifts is prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1), the telling forth of God's message. As given to Peter at Pentecost, it resulted in some 3000 (in the city that 53 days before had rejected and crucified Christ) now owning Him Savior and Risen Lord.

Paul too experienced this gift before kings and governors, congregations and crowds of all kinds across the Roman world. And it is still the one gift we are to "especially desire."

Many other gifts are mentioned in the New Testament, such as evangelism, shepherding, teaching, healing, helps, governments, tongues and their interpretation.

(Note that here again sovereignty and man's responsible agency come together: Gifts are given "according to His own will" yet in 1 Corinthians

12:31 we are to "earnestly desire the best gifts.")

As the writer now leaves his exhortation and resumes his main line of thought, he moves from the definitive revelation given through God the Son to salvation by His atoning death. The message now is God's goal for man (Hebrews 2:5-8).

Here, then, is the answer to man's search for identity. It is God's answer to modern man's question, "What am I?"

Man is not an absurd glob of protoplasm. He is the creation of God, who, in making man in His own image, purposed to have a fellowship with him that would include sharing His own sovereignty over the natural world.

2:5. For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, of which we speak.

As the writer introduces his new subject, he uses the now familiar contrast with angels, but in a somewhat different way. "For He did not subject to angels the world to come concerning which we are speaking." That is: A new order for man and the world—God's ultimate goal—is to be brought in, and it is not angels but men to whom He will give the rule there.

2:6. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

The Psalmist (Psalm 8:4-6) had laid it all out. Man is a minute speck in a vast universe. Yet the fact is that God has a concern about man, about you and me. He has visited man—Adam in Eden, Abraham at his tent door on the plains of Mamre (Genesis 18:1), in other theophanies and in visions and dreams. But supremely

and in infinite fullness, He has “visited” man in Christ.

2:7a. Thou madest him a little lower than the angels.

“**Lower than the angels**” would seem not to refer chiefly to man’s being housed in a physical body that puts him in direct contact with the material world and a range of experience closed to angels. Rather, he is “lower” in wisdom and power and, for the time, in freedom of movement.

The positive aspects of man’s creation are very high:

2:2b. Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor.

This corresponds to “Let us make man in our image” in the creation account in Genesis 1:26. The “glory and honor” of man, his worth today, is that he was created in the image of God.

That image would center in his having personality, moral consciousness, the power of choice and the spiritual potential to have fellowship with God Himself. Manifest excellence of character (the essence of “glory”) and the respect due to such character would be his crown.

The other element in God’s creative edict in Genesis 1 is “Let them have dominion,” reechoed in Psalm 8:

2:7c. And didst set him over the works of Thy hands.

2:8a. Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.

Man was not created to live in subservience and fear, defeat and frustration. He was to be in ascendancy over the forces around him, having fellowship with God in His rule as a sovereign under The Sover-

eign. This was and still is God’s intended place for man.

2:8b. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

Is this the understatement of the New Testament? We certainly do not see all things subjected to man. Sin entered and what we see is millions on sickbeds or worse, millions in utter slavery to alcohol.

And in some sense more ironic, we see man’s most vaunted accomplishment—the exploration and fission of the atom—threatening his annihilation. When sin is in the heart, it turns power into horror.

Is there any answer? Yes. There is one “man” who meets both God’s ideal and man’s need, the Man Christ Jesus. The verses that follow show the saving career of the God-Man, Christ Jesus (Hebrews 2:9-18).

2:9a. But we see Jesus ...

Turning from man’s bleak failure to see Jesus, we discover the fulfillment of Psalm 8. When God the Son became man, taking true humanity into union with deity in His person and beginning His service in humiliation on earth, He became the One

2:9b. Who was made a little lower than the angels ...

The expression translated “a little” may also mean “for a little while” and this also would be true since Christ’s time of humiliation ended with the resurrection and ascension though His being Man continues forever (1 Timothy 2:5).

The phrase ...

2:9c. For (on account of) the suffering of death

... may be connected with either what precedes or what follows. Both connections make perfect sense and are unquestionably true in their meanings. The Son did become incarnate “for the suffering of death.” God as God cannot die.

Furthermore, if He was to represent man in His atoning sacrifice, He must be united to man.

By bringing in the words ...

crowned with glory and honor,

... the writer shows that in Christ Jesus there is the complete fulfillment of God's purpose in the creation of man. Christ's spotless life during the thirty years in Nazareth and his symbolic promise in the baptism by John to go into death for man's sin brought the Father's first recorded acclaim accompanying the descent of the Spirit on Him.

This was followed by a further “well pleased” at the transfiguration and again just before the Cross (John 12:28). In all of this He moved—as man—in perfect obedience “even to death on a cross” and so—as man—He was “crowned with glory and honor.”

“On account of the suffering of death” is quite properly connected with “crowned with glory and honor.”

At the conclusion of the verse, the writer gathers up the earlier points, saying, as it were, all this—the Son's humbling Himself in incarnation, His spotless life of obedience for which He was “crowned with glory and honor” and His suffering death—all was in order ...

9d. That He by the grace of God should taste death for every one.

Christ came to the Cross with the infinite value of deity and the acceptability of a spotless sacrifice validated by the crown of glory and honor that was His as man.

“By the grace of God” is a reminder that the whole work shows unmerited favor on God's part.

“Taste death” is not at all just taking a little—as though to see how one likes it. It is to feel, to experience personally, the full and awful character of death for sin, death under the wrath of God. (Note that in Mark 15:23 He refused the wine mixed with myrrh that would deaden pain and consciousness at the Cross.)

And it was “for every one.” We can say honestly and without mental reservation to anyone we might meet that “Christ loves you and died for you.” This one verse presents at least seven great doctrines of the faith: incarnation, the perfection and glory of Christ as man on earth, the grace of God, the atonement, the ascension, the enthronement and crowning of the Son.

In the rest of the chapter the writer works out some of the details involved.

2:10a. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory.

God the Father is the one referred to in the first part of this verse so, when the expression that follows is used of Christ (as in Colossians 1:16 “all things were created by him and for him” and Romans 11:36 “for of (from) him, and through him, and to him are all things”), it obviously does not indicate He is in any way less than deity.

To put it positively, if the same

high descriptive phrases are used of Christ as are used of God the Father, the deity of Christ is substantiated all the more.

He is here designated “captain of our salvation.” The word can be translated “author” or “leader,” for it has the idea of one who opens up a way for others as a “trail blazer” or in military usage as a “point man” who leads a group into enemy territory and opens it up for them to occupy.

The salvation that Christ has “opened up” is shown to be utterly grand—the *bringing many sons to glory*. They were captive slaves, condemned to eternal death; but now they are not only saved, they are also sons of God, destined to share in His glory eternally.

So it was fitting that God in His righteousness and wisdom should ...

2:10b. Make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Christ is not only the one who is perfectly sympathetic with those who suffer; but, more importantly, as the perfect Sacrifice He bears the wrath of God against our sin and by that “obedience unto death” provides a righteousness in which we stand complete.

So by experiencing suffering He became the perfect sympathetic High Priest and by suffering the full penalty of our sins He became the perfect Savior.

2:11a. For both he that sanctifieth (Christ) and they who are sanctified (the believers) are all of one.

Literally, “all of one” should read “all from one”—from one Father. Though in different ways, He is Father to both Christ and believers—to Christ by the eternal relation in the

Triune Godhead and to us by the new birth in which we receive new life from God through Christ.

2:11b. For which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

He might have been so because of the vast difference between man and God, but the grace in God’s salvation has spanned that chasm. In proof of this the writer first cites Psalm 22:22 at the point of change in thought from the suffering of the Cross to Christ in resurrection:

2:12. Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

This prophecy of David’s had fulfillment in Christ’s word recorded in John 20:17: “Go to my *brethren* and say to them I ascend unto My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.”

He specifically called them “brethren” and did it at the point of entering into resurrection activity exactly as portrayed in the psalm. And in His statement Christ “declared” the name of God that to believers is probably the fullest and most significant: “My Father and your Father, My God and your God.”

The writer gives a second proof from Isaiah where in the midst of great prophecies of Messiah who is Immanuel, chapter 8 presents a son of the prophet as a sign. Then from the Greek translation of Isaiah 8:17-18, the writer of Hebrews quotes:

2:13. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children whom God hath given me.

The first quotation suggests Isaiah as a picture of Messiah in His absolute trust in the Father.

On this basis, the second quotation shows Christ united to His "family" as pictured by Isaiah and the "the children whom God has given me." The Old Testament first by statement and then by picture presents Messiah and believers as "all of one family."

Verses 14 and 15 carry on from the closeness of Christ and His "family."

2:14a. Forasmuch (Since), then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood ...

The early manuscripts reversed the order to "blood and flesh" in order to make a conscious distinction with the phrase "flesh and blood" because the customary use (1 Corinthians 15:50) of "flesh and blood" connotes weakness and moral failure.

The humanity Christ took was free from any sin-induced weakness or failure because of the Spirit's work in the Virgin Birth.

2:14b. He also himself likewise took part of the same.

If He was to save men by an atoning death in their place, He must be validly united to them as well as able to die. By the incarnation He qualified in both areas.

Now follows one of the great purposes of the Cross:

2:14c. That through death he might destroy (render powerless) him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

That "power of death" was in Satan's hand only because of man's sin that had alienated him from God and put him under Satan's dominion.

Sin unatoned for gave Satan his power. So Christ, as He spoke of the Cross, could say (John 12:31): "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (that is out of the place of au-

thority). For the Christian today, Satan is a defeated foe; and it is ours to claim that victory in all its power.

2:15. And deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The fear of death was strong in classic times as is vividly shown in both epitaphs and general literature of the day. At times, the despair accompanying this fear is deeply touching. For the believer "the bondage," "the sting of death," is gone because the Lamb of God has taken it away and has risen from the dead in manifest victory.

Now physical death for the Christian is the gateway to glory, to being "present (at home) with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Two different types of translation have arisen regarding verse 16. The King James Version reads:

2:16. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

Note that the words "him the nature of" and "him" are supplied. This makes it a simple declaration that Christ did not become an angel but a man of Israelite blood.

That is manifestly true, but it makes the "wherefore" of verse 17 rather difficult to understand and the early part of that verse somewhat repetitious.

The prominent newer translations have used the well-recognized meaning "lay hold on to help" or just "help" which does not call for any supplying of words and makes the "wherefore" of verse 17 easily understood and the flow of thought smooth.

It reads, "For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives

help to the seed of Abraham” in NASB and “For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants” in the NIV.

The chapter concludes with a summary of Christ’s qualifications for His priestly work.

2:17. Wherefore, in all things it behooved him to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation (atonement) for the sins of the people.

Since it was Christ’s purpose to minister to men as Savior and High Priest, it was incumbent on Him to be made like His brethren (mankind as represented by Israel) in every aspect of true humanity (namely birth, growth, fatigue, etc.). Sin was not an integral part of man as created by the hand of God. It came in later.

Hebrews 7:26 (“For such an high priest became us (was fitting for us) who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens”) shows that the author had no thought of any sin in Christ; His being tempted, far from showing the presence of sin in Him, demonstrated its complete absence.

The “becoming like His brethren” enabled His being “merciful.” He knows by personal experience what touches man. Who knows the heartache of rejection and betrayal as He? He has good reason to be “faithful” as man’s representative before God

since He is one with man and “faithful” to God’s purposes since He is God the Son.

Supremely, He can as High Priest make a valid atonement (not “reconciliation” which is a different word) for the sins of the people since He is man, offering Himself as the spotless sacrifice of infinite worth. “Reconciliation” is God’s work of drawing man back into fellowship with Himself.

The writer concludes the section with a strong word of comfort for believers down to the present.

2:18. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to help (come to the aid of) those that are (being) tempted.

The cutting cruelty of Satan’s attack in the wilderness (where hunger to the point of starvation must be chosen rather than the vibrant health that was His perfect right as Son of man; when the path to the Cross must be chosen rather than the immediate rule of the nations that was His absolute right as God’s King, with countless other temptations) made Christ the perfect Help for us who are being tempted today.

He came through them all victoriously, but He “suffered;” and it is ours to claim both His victorious power and the comfort of His compassion.

Questions for Hebrews 3:1-4:13

1. To whom is the author writing? Who are they to “consider” (verse 1)? See also Colossians 3:1-3.
2. How is Christ an Apostle?
3. Compare and contrast Moses and Christ in verses 2-6.

4. To what specific event does 3:11 refer? See Numbers 13:30-14:24.
5. How was the land of Canaan God's rest for Israel?
6. What does Canaan picture for the Christian today? See Matthew 11:28; Ephesians 1:3.
7. How would you state the writer's appeal in 3:7-4:7?
8. Why didn't Israel enter the promised land and what is the warning/exhortation for us (Hebrews 3:12-4:2)?
9. What is the significance of the fact that instead of the regular word for "rest," a different word meaning a "keeping of Sabbath" is used in 4:9?
10. How do you relate verses 4:12 and 13 to the passage they conclude?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 3 and 4

The writer to the Hebrews in chapter one has shown Christ as God the Son, the infinite and definitive spokesman of the Father.

In chapter two he has presented Christ as the God-Man, the perfect fulfillment of God's goal for man and the perfect Savior and High Priest.

A strong exhortation not to slip away from the mooring lies between the two presentations.

As he begins chapter three, the writer turns again to exhortation but on a rather quiet note at first. In the first six verses of the chapter we have a call to consider Christ in contrast to Moses:

3:1. Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession (literally, confession), Christ Jesus.

This gentle appeal addresses his readers as believers. (This he feels to be true of them even in the powerful warning to come in chapter six.) As believers, then, they are "saints," set apart ones, who show God's kind of character, being actively *for* him and *His* in every sense of that word.

They are "brethren" because they have life from one Father. So they are "companions of a heavenly calling;" they are part of a great company that is called of God to enjoy eternity in Heaven and to be marked by a Heavenly life here and now (compare the fringe of blue on the garments of Israel in Numbers 15:38-41).

The appeal itself is appropriate beyond words. "Fix your thoughts on Jesus." Paul in Colossians 3:2 makes the same appeal: "Set your affection on things above" (already identified in the previous verse by the words "where Christ sits at the right hand of God"). Someone has said, "To be occupied with Christ is to be under his delivering power."

3:1b. The Apostle ... of our confession.

An apostle is one "sent forth" with an authoritative message. Christ, then, is supremely "the Apostle," sent forth by God the Father with a message of the utmost authority—the Word of God.

It is that Word that we "confess" and, confessing it, we as well as the Twelve are "apostles" in a secondary sense. Christ said (John 20:21), "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."

3:1c. And High Priest of our confession.

What we "confess" to the world and treasure in our own hearts certainly includes our having a great High Priest interceding for us at the Throne of God. It is a great subject and is taken up specifically beginning at Hebrews 4:14.

In the next two verses we have the comparison and contrast of Christ with Moses.

3:2. Who was faithful to Him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

Moses was a truly great man and no Christian should fail to acknowledge it. The Jews generally regarded him as “highest,” though some may have seen Abraham in his personal character as finer. Certainly as a leader, law-giver, and writer, Moses was superb. His frequent face-to-face meetings with God show an intimacy unmatched in Old Testament times.

Christ and Moses are comparable in a number of ways. In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses himself says, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet ... like unto me,” speaking, of course, of Messiah.

And the intercession of Moses for Israel after the sin of the golden calf, when he pleaded with God (Exodus 32:32): “If Thou wilt forgive their sin ... and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written,” is a beautiful picture of the reality in the Cross.

Here in Hebrews, their faithfulness is compared. Christ's is absolute; but Moses' faithfulness, too, was fine as exercised in God's “house” (that is, with God's people viewed as His household). The mention of “house” triggers the start of the contrast.

3:3. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who hath built the house hath more honor than the house.

Moses is seen as representing the “house” of which he was the leading member; but Christ is the Builder of the house, not just as Creator but chiefly as Redeemer.

It was redemption that was central in constituting Israel the “house of God”; and Christ in His sacrifice

on the Cross was the redemptive reality of which the Passover lamb was the token (compare “Christ our Passover” in 1 Corinthians 5:7).

Obviously, then, Christ, the Builder of the house, has vastly more honor than the house He built—which included Moses.

3:4. For every house is built by some man, but He that built all things is God.

Here the universal principle in regard to houses is carried to all created things; they had to have a builder and He was God Triune (each Person had His part).

3:5. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after.

3:6. But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

The writer is now ready for the full contrast. Moses was a servant in the house (the word is not “slave” but does mean “servant”), faithful to God his Master in the duties assigned to him. He was particularly valuable for his early testimony of the Coming One in prophecies from Genesis 3:15 (the first Gospel promise) to Deuteronomy 18:15 (quoted above) and scores of magnificent types of Christ and His salvation. (Some of these will be presented later in Hebrews.) All of these were preliminary and preparatory to the message of God's definitive Spokesman seen in chapter one.

Now in full contrast to Moses, Christ is “faithful” as a Son, not just *in* but *over* God's house. And as Christ indicates in John 8:35,36, the Son has His high place in the “house” eternally with authority to a give to

former slaves the freedom that makes one “free indeed.”

The Christian is “free” and part of the very household of God over which Christ is sovereign.

In the clause at the end of verse six (“if we hold fast ...”), the writer introduces a note of deep concern for his readers that will echo throughout the epistle. The “if” in no way implies any threat to our security as part of His “house.” The writer’s aim is simply to make them realize there must be the actuality of faith.

He warns against professing Christ without the reality of a deep and abiding faith in Him. We show our commitment by “holding fast our confidence and the hope of which we boast firm until the end.”

He does not want them to be “rocky ground” hearers—as in Christ’s parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:20, 21)—who hear the Word and at once with joy receive it, yet have no firm root. When affliction or persecution arises because of the Word, they quickly fall away.

In the next section (Hebrews 3:7-4:8) we have the exhortation proper—God’s offer of rest.

The writer uses Psalm 95:7-11 as the heart of his appeal and quotes it as the clear word of the Holy Spirit to the readers of this epistle. It is as crucial to us in our spiritual lives today as it was to Israel in the psalmist’s day or to the early church.

3:7. Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear His voice,

3:8. Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness,

3:9. When your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years.

3:10. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart, and they have not known My ways.

3:11. So I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest.)

The psalmist’s scope is Israel’s whole forty years in the wilderness, a period marked by repeated murmurings and disobedience because of unbelief.

Although they had seen God’s deliverance in the Passover and His mighty works at the Red Sea and in the wilderness, yet they “hardened their hearts” and “provoked” their God.

One event, however, was absolutely crucial for the whole generation of responsible adults who came out of Egypt—their decision Kadesh-Barnea.

They had just seen the awesome evidences of God’s presence on Sinai. They received the Law from Him through Moses with the plan of the tabernacle and its grand and deeply significant furnishings and ritual.

Now they had come to the edge of the Promised Land. Spies brought back a unanimous report on how fine the land was in crops and minerals, in climate and beauty.

But ten of the twelve saw the high walls of the towns and the people as giants. They totally forgot Jehovah of Hosts.

Caleb and Joshua gave their report and in the “confidence of faith” (Numbers 13:30) urged, “Let us go up at once and possess it for we are well able to overcome it.”

The choice was before the people; they believed the “unbelievers,” threw aside the offer of God, bemoaning their misery, blaming their leaders, and wishing they were dead!

God's reaction was final: "So I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter My rest." That generation, except for Caleb and Joshua, died in the wilderness.

But God had made His offer and Israel's failure did not change His purpose to have His people in that Canaan-rest. The people of the new generation, not under Moses, the man of the Law, but under Joshua would physically enter Canaan and enjoy some of the promised blessing; but the full rest awaited the coming of the greater "Joshua," the Lord Jesus ("Joshua" is, of course, the Hebrew form of our name "Jesus").

Canaan, as God's "rest" for Israel, held a wide range of blessings primarily physical but with strong spiritual significance. There was rest from wandering, from the uncertainty of "where next?", and the heartache of always being a stranger with no "home."

The depth of this feeling was seen nearly 3,500 years later when hundreds of Jews returning to their newly opened "homeland" knelt down at their first opportunity and kissed the ground of Palestine.

It meant rest from always being on the edge of want and discouragement. Canaan was a good land, a "land flowing with milk and honey." Grain grew well; grapes, figs, and olives were abundant; cattle and sheep thrived there; and copper in good supply could be mined. Provision was abundant.

But God's rest did not mean stagnation! There were enemies to drive out for "the iniquity of the Amorites was now full" (see Genesis 15:16). Power for victory was theirs by faith and obedience, and wonder-

ful rest is found in knowing the power of God is yours.

Beyond the immediate activity is the high purpose of God to make Israel, planted at the crossroads of the ancient world, a mighty witness to His power and glory, His righteousness and lovingkindness.

God's offer of Canaan-rest was much more than just living in Palestine. The appeal of the psalmist to enter the "rest" is addressed to people who were living there at that moment.

Beyond that, Hebrews 4:8 (NASB) says, "If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day after that."

The "rest" that God is still offering is the *spiritual* provision, pictured by what Canaan would have given to obedient Israel as suggested above. It is not primarily Heaven, for God's own will not be involved in warfare there. Canaan had almost continuous conflict.

The central emphasis of this rest is what Christ offered in His great invitation: "Come unto me ... and I will give you *rest*" (Matthew 11:28), rest from the burden of sin and rest from anxiety by knowing the Father's loving care.

Its full extent would include all that is in Christ for a truly Christian life; "life more abundant" is Christ's word for it.

Paul's expression "all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies" (Ephesians 1:3) might suggest its character; (Ephesians 6:10-12 includes warfare) and "more than conquerors" expresses its victorious quality.

Of the greatest importance is rest from bondage to self as seen in 2 Corinthians 5:15 ("should no longer live

unto themselves but unto Him”) and Galatians 2:20 (“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” NIV).

In the next four verses the writer makes a direct appeal.

3:12. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

3:13. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

3:14. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

3:15. While it is said, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

He is saying, “Examine your hearts to make sure there is no unbelief lurking there, for unbelief means departure from God.”

Then, as you gather or meet incidentally, encourage one another in Christian faith with a keen sense of the fact that now is the testing time, the time of earning the Lord’s “Well done.”

Don’t let anyone, because of your disinterest, be hardened against responding to the Gospel by the deceitful appeal of sin. Remember the high place we have if ours is a real, abiding faith, not a “stony ground” profession; we become “partakers of Christ.” So once again, hear and respond to the psalmist’s call.

A new application is now made by a series of analyzing questions.

3:16. For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? (NASB)

3:17. But with whom was He grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

3:18. And to whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not?

3:19. So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

The writer, by these questions, is moving inexorably to the conclusion that unbelief brings ruin. All the responsible adults who came out of Egypt, except Caleb and Joshua, provoked God by their unbelief though they had experienced His deliverance from Pharaoh and had come through the Red Sea dry shod.

They had seen His provision in the wilderness and heard His covenant at Sinai, yet they refused to trust Him and enter the land. At that moment they claimed to prefer bondage in Egypt or death in the desert to facing the quite mortal inhabitants of Canaan in faith in the Lord of Hosts.

The same turning away in disobedience and rebellion was repeated throughout the forty years so that God’s anger was all too frequently provoked.

The force of the word “sinned” in verse 17 is in accord with its use in the epistles.

In 1 John, the sins in view are not habitual or in repudiation of the Lord; they are forgiven under the propitiation and advocacy of Christ and, upon confession, fellowship is renewed.

In Hebrews, “sin” is the crucial repudiation of faith and obedience toward Christ; and it is fatal. It is apostasy from God, and it brings death as seen in the text.

The writer has made his point. Israel at Kadesh-Barnea, for all its experience of God’s power and graciousness, did not really believe God and therefore could not enter God’s

rest.

In Hebrews 4:1-8 we again have a warning addressed to the readers.

4:1. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

4:2. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Since the promise of entering God's rest has been left to us in Psalm 95 (and in the ministry of Christ), we should every one of us make absolutely sure we are not missing out on it.

Good news of rest in all its comfort and uplift was preached to us as well as to them; but although they heard the message, it did them no good. They and the message were not united by faith. Faith links the believer and the Word just as it links the believer to Christ. The result is life and fruit.

4:3. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into My rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

The principal part of the verse simply shows that, when one responds to the Word and so is linked to it by faith (and to Christ the living Word), he enters God's rest.

(The translation of the oath in the KJV is strictly literal and follows part way the form of any human oath, "If I do not do such and such, may I suffer so and so." The translation, "They shall not enter my rest," just makes it more easily understood. It is the same in verse 5).

The latter part of the verse reminds us that although personal

faith is necessary for entrance into God's rest, the work of God providing it all has been finished since creation.

This reference to creation nicely introduces the second symbol or picture of the rest God is offering, the *Sabbath* rest. It is presented here and fully dealt with in verses 9 and 10.

4:4. For He spoke in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all His works.

In the six creative days, God did a complete work establishing the heavens and the earth right down to man in His image. Finding the results "very good," He rested on the seventh day.

It was not that He was tired; it was rather that this was a suitable recognition of His complete and perfect work. And man was invited to join God in His rest, to enjoy it with Him.

So God "blessed it and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:3). It beautifully pictures the spiritual rest, based on the finished and perfect work of Christ.

4:5. And in this place again, If they shall enter into My rest.

4:6. Seeing, therefore, it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

4:7. Again, He limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time, as it is said, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.

4:8. For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

Returning to the Canaan-rest as seen in Psalm 95, the writer's thought is very clear. God has provided a rest, and He will see to it that some enter and enjoy it.

The ones to whom it was first offered did not enter because of their disobedience. So in David's day God specified a new period marked by a fresh offer in Psalm 95.

The physical entrance into Canaan under Joshua was certainly God's will, but it did not exhaust God's promise of rest. The Psalm with its renewed offer, so many years later, proves it: "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Hear and enter His rest.

4:9. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

4:10. For he that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His.

In verse 4 a new symbol presenting God's rest was briefly introduced. Now the author takes it up again, employing a rather striking method in doing so.

Up to this point he has been using the regular word for "rest," but here he changes to a very special word meaning "a keeping of Sabbath." Both the fact of the change and the meaning of the new word challenge our best thinking.

The principal emphasis of the word, as confirmed by verse 10, is the rest from labor on the Sabbath day. As God rested from His work on the seventh day, so man rests from his labor as he observes the Sabbath.

The full spiritual truth, pictured by the external Sabbath, is grand. Of all man's toil the most grueling, the most heart-rending is the attempt of a sincere man to earn his own salvation. To enter into God's Sabbath rest means you cease from your own works (verse 10) to rest in Christ and His finished work.

It is exactly what Paul gives in Romans 4:5—"To him that *worketh* not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

A "keeping of Sabbath" in the Old Testament order, however, included more than just the Sabbath day. There was the Sabbath month with three "feasts," each in its own way stressing the rest of assurance as well as forbidding labor.

The Feast of Trumpets told of God's concern for Israel and His having a future for them. The Day of Atonement gave the greatest assurance the human heart can know—the atoning blood sprinkled on the mercy seat before the Lord.

Then the Feast of Tabernacles, a week of celebrating God's bringing them through the wilderness and into their inheritance, reminded them that God does fulfill his promises.

The Sabbatic Year gave rest to the land—it was to lie fallow, with trees and vines not pruned and volunteer products left for the poor and the birds. The Israelite was to learn rest from self-seeking. Trusting God, he was to live on the stored fruits of the previous years.

The Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Jubilee, completed the series. This fiftieth year gave rest from all the effects of sin and failure. The enslaved (for debt or any other cause) went free. The lost family inheritance was returned. All rejoiced in the Lord's full restoration.

What is pictured here begins in a sense at salvation; but in its fullness, it will be accomplished in the presence of God in Heaven.

God's "rest" does not imply lethargy. This is demonstrated in the

concluding exhortation of the section.

4:11. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Uniting the aspect of the Canaan-rest with that of the Sabbath-rest, the writer pleads that they make every effort to enter that rest. The verb stresses eagerly throwing one's self into an activity to see it accomplished.

Sloth in spiritual things, easily united with unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea, brought disaster to a whole generation of Israelites.

4:12. For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

4:13. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight (laid bare), but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

The transition to verse 12 is striking. The writer is saying, "As you have been hearing Psalm 95 and the establishing of the Sabbath in Genesis 2, you have been touching something powerful, the Word of God."

It is "living" (NIV), permeated by the life of God, and so it gives life to the spiritually dead. It is life-sustaining, as Christ quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

It is "active," accomplishing God's purposes as Isaiah 55:11 declares: "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please." It convicts, cleanses and transforms.

"Sharper than any two-edged

sword" refers to the famous short sword of a Roman soldier.

There is no man so "tough" that he can successfully resist its cut. It pierces to the ultimate depths of a person's being—as far as the soul and spirit.

Is this not a difficult division? Certainly, but the Word does it (for example, it distinguishes what is just "soulish" from what is truly spiritual. Man's spirit responds to the Holy Spirit and moves out to fellowship with God).

The Word is a critic, able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart. The Word does it when we neither expect nor want it! It is God's grace at work using the critic for correction.

As we move to verse 13, we get a significant glimpse into the mind of a writer led by the Spirit. The Word is so fully identified with God Himself that suddenly, and without any explanation or transition, he is talking not about the Word but about God.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight, but all things are laid bare before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account.

The "laid bare" may well have had in mind the inward parts of the sacrifice revealed by the knife of the priest. No camouflage deceives God. No one fools Him about his inward spiritual condition.

Whether or not I have "ceased from my own works" to rest in Christ's finished work, entering God's "rest" of Canaan and the Sabbath, is absolutely "laid bare" before Him.

If we cannot fool God, we better not fool ourselves. One day we are all going to "give account to Him."

Questions for Hebrews 4:14-5:14

1. What examples of "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" do you find in the Gospels?
2. There are two understandings of "yet without sin" (v.2): (1) apart from His having indwelling sin and (2) no sin resulting. Both are true. Which fits the context better?
3. How do "mercy" and "grace" (v. 16) differ?
4. How do you distinguish "gifts" from "sacrifices" in 5:1?
5. What ritual in Leviticus 16 did the human high priest have to follow when making sacrifice for his own sins as referred to in Hebrews 5:2, 3.
6. Why do you think the writer quoted Psalm 2:7 here in Hebrews 5:5?
7. Why do you think he quoted Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews 5:6?
8. When, do you think, was the highest occasion of what is described in verse 7?
9. At the end of verse 7, how was Christ "heard"?
10. Identify two examples of "solid food" mentioned in 5:11-14. Does verse 13 suggest mature Christians take no milk?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 5

Bible-believing Christians reject having special orders of priests, not because we deny our deep need for a priestly ministry for us before God. We fully recognize that need.

Our reason is that we have in Christ a great High Priest who alone is perfect and perfectly capable of representing us before the Throne of God.

We also see in Scripture the priesthood of all believers (and this will be presented later on in this epistle).

The truth of Christ's great high priesthood, mentioned in Hebrews 2:17 and 3:1, is the subject of the passage before us now. The last three verses of chapter four begin the presentation of Christ as our High Priest.

4:14. Seeing, then, that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

He is seen here as the victorious Messiah, passing in triumph through the various heavenly realms right up to the Father's Throne to take His place as our priestly Representative.

(Those heavenly realms may, in view of His high priestly character, be thought of as corresponding to the various parts of the Tabernacle: outer gate and court, the outer veil and Holy Place, and the great inner veil through which only Israel's high priest entered the Holy of holies and that only on the Day of Atonement.)

Christ is still Man, "a Man in the glory," united to us, assuring us that we too shall be there one day. So He is designated "Jesus," His human name, but with full recognition of His deity at the same time. He is "the Son of God" in perfect position to exercise His high priestly office at the Throne.

If this truth really lays hold of our hearts, we are not going to fail to "hold fast our confession."

A further reason for an unwavering faith is the deeply felt sympathy Christ has with us in our trials.

4:15. For we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

He is "touched with the feeling of our weaknesses." He knew them, not just by omniscience but by personal experience as a man. He knew toil. From Joseph's death until Christ was thirty, He was bound to the carpenter shop of Nazareth as the main breadwinner of the family.

In His ministry He was often hungry, fatigued, homeless, misunderstood even by His own family. His heart went out to people in need, physical or spiritual. He "had compassion" on the 5,000 because they were hungry and on the multitudes

because they were “like sheep without a shepherd.”

Perhaps most striking of all would be His tears for the sorrow of Mary and Martha at the grave of Lazarus, though He fully knew that in a moment He would raise him from the dead.

He was “tempted in all points” in every area of life, physical, emotional, spiritual. The same temptations struck Him that strike us; the fact that He was perfect did not change the “test.” (“Test” and “temptation” are the same word in the original.) The same testing acid that completely breaks down fool’s gold leaves real gold totally unchanged.

But then, did He really feel the force of temptation? The answer is “Yes, doubly so.” It is not he who goes with the storm who knows its full force, but he who stands against it. Christ stood against it.

His temptation by Satan involved things that were uniquely His rights: a properly nourished body, honor before men (Psalm 2:12), rule of the nations (Psalms 2 and 72). His temptations were sharper than ours are.

The final phrase translated “yet without sin” has been understood in two different ways. One makes it mean that Christ “was tempted as we are” except that He had no indwelling sin. The other that He was tempted just as we are, but no sin resulted.

Both are true to the facts; the question is which is most in accord with the context and the writer’s purpose in the passage.

The purpose is obviously to encourage steadfast faith in his readers. With this aim in mind, he cites Christ’s sympathy for us in our

weakness and the fact that He has been tempted just as we are.

For him now to say, “But He had no indwelling sin,” is true but far from encouraging. To say, “Yet no sin occurred,” seems to carry forward the encouragement and imply “He was victorious in those temptations and, in His loving concern, He will carry us through also.”

Verse 16 concludes this particular exhortation.

4:16. Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Knowing Christ in all the sympathy just described leads us to turn confidently to Him in our need. “Boldly” has no element of brashness or irreverence but does emphasize freedom to speak, to open one’s heart. There is no place for self-pity; in our need we turn confidently and actively to the “Throne of Grace.”

The choice of that name for His throne shows we come not just to One who is a sympathetic high priest but to one who has established our access, our welcome, by His atoning sacrifice. Like the “mercy seat” in the Tabernacle of old, it is only the sprinkled blood that makes it so. Our “boldness” has its ultimate basis in the Cross.

Have you found “grace to help”—there—in your time of need?

The two words “mercy” and “grace” seem here to be used almost interchangeably; but, where there is a difference, “mercy” seems to point to God’s more general acts of compassion, while “grace” is deeper, more specific, and more in the spiritual realm—its emphasis being on “undeserved favor” (compare Romans 11:6).

Here the grace is to help us in any kind of need: temptation, lack of wisdom or strength, need of spiritual uplift, or the grace to reckon self dead.

In chapter 5, verses 1-10 give us *seven characteristics of a high priest*, with our great High Priest very much in mind.

The first (verse 1) points out that He is appointed to represent men before God.

5:1. For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

The "For" is interesting (though omitted by NIV); it seems to infer that the reader has already moved in thought to see Christ at that "Throne of Grace." Like any high priest selected from among men, Christ, too, was appointed to make an offering to God. His offering actually had all that was symbolized by the "gifts and sacrifices for sins" mentioned here.

The "gifts" refer to the sweet savor offerings of Leviticus (chapters 1-7) and include the whole burnt offering in which all the sacrifice rose to God as it was consumed by the fire. It pictures Christ giving Himself in the totality of His being on the Cross. Israelites gained acceptance by means of this offering, and our perfect acceptance is in that which it pictures.

The meal offering spoke of the even-textured righteousness of Christ's earthly life offered up to God; and, significantly, it was always united with a slain sacrifice. This points to the fact that Christ's earthly life does not stand as a ground of our being received by God apart from His

atoning death.

The peace offering spoke of reconciliation effected and fellowship with God enjoyed. There was part for God, part for the priest, and the rest for the offerer and his family and friends. The Passover had its closest relation to this offering.

The thank offering, too, was close to this testimony to Christ our Peace.

The non-sweet savor sacrifices dealt specifically with sin's guilt.

The sin offering proper (referred to in Hebrews 13:11 and following) when sacrificed for a priest or for the people as a whole was not only slain but the fat was burned on the altar, the blood was sprinkled in the Tabernacle and the rest of the young bull was taken outside the camp and completely burned.

All this strongly portrays the deep dealing with sin in the Cross of Christ. Sin—right down to the root principle—was put away in the consuming judgment of death at Calvary, "outside the gate."

The trespass offering was for offenses involving injury to God's order or honor or to a neighbor's rights. It required restitution to the injured one and a good-sized sacrifice because it is an offense against God's standards. Christ made infinite restitution to God's honor in His "obedience even unto death."

Our High Priest, then, has offered, in the Cross, "both gifts and sacrifices for sins." His assertion was, "It is finished;" the resurrection was God's confirming answer.

The second characteristic of a high priest is compassion on the ignorant and erring.

5:2. Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

5:3. And by reason for this he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

We have already discussed this in relation to Christ under 4:15. Here the point made is simply that the human priest has the basis for dealing gently with those going astray because he has the same weaknesses and failures as they, and for the latter he himself must bring an offering.

This is all fully seen in Leviticus 16 where Aaron first offered a sacrifice for himself; after he was accepted, he could offer for the people.

The third characteristic is that the high priestly office was not self-assumed.

5:4. And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

5:5. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee.

5:6. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Because of its authority and importance, no one was to take the office on his own initiative; the high priest must be called by God. Exodus 28:1 gives Aaron's call and the impressive inaugural confirmed it.

Much less did Christ advance Himself as a candidate for the office. But the Father, from past eternity, had planned this honor for Him and in due time announced it, particularly in the Psalms.

Hebrews cites two passages, the first from Psalm 2:7: "Thou art my Son."

This is the basic, qualifying call. A son is one to carry out his father's purposes. Since in the purpose

of God the Father the redemption of man required a great High Priest, a call to that office is implied in Christ's Sonship. Beyond that, the offering this High Priest is to make must be of infinite value. That value is found only in deity and is available for sacrifice only in the Son Incarnate.

The second quotation is Psalm 110:4 where David records Jehovah's sworn declaration to Messiah: "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

Here we are very briefly introduced to one of the most significant and perhaps intriguing subjects in Hebrews—the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. It is fully presented in chapter seven where we shall seek to study it carefully.

In this instance, it is cited simply to prove conclusively that Christ did have a direct call of God as high priest. That this is the ultimate order of priesthood will be shown later.

The fourth characteristic goes beyond the experience of any purely human priest, presenting Christ in His inward suffering that came to its climax in the anguish of Gethsemane and Calvary.

5:7. Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death... .

"In the days of His flesh" refers to Jesus' life on earth, His ministry in humiliation, when the glory of deity was largely veiled and men generally saw only His humanity.

During that whole period, Christ felt with steadily increasing intensity the awfulness of the sacrifice He was to make (compare the words He used

for the cross: first “mine hour,” then “a ransom,” “a baptism,” and finally “the cup,” that is, the wrath of God.)

The “prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears” are the inspired description of His experience, climaxing in the Garden when “sweat like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44) showed the unspeakable intensity felt even in His physical body.

He was in prayer, prayer to God, the One “who was able to save Him from (or out of) death.”

(Christ in Gethsemane, under a tremendous sense of what it meant to bear the wrath of God, began with a petition to be delivered *from* the “cup” but instantly chose God’s will fully. The result of that choice arising in the prayer was that God delivered Him “*out of*” death.)

And was heard because of His piety (NASB)

...

gives the fifth point. Christ “*was heard*” in the first cry of anguish and given strength to choose the will of His Father. He had an angelic witness (Luke 22:43) to that answer.

He was enabled to move through trial, mocking, scourging, and supremely through the mighty sacrifice of the Cross, fulfilling to the most minute detail the whole redemptive plan of God. So on the third day the empty tomb proclaimed that He had been gloriously “heard” ...

Because of His piety.

This may well be the highest use of the word in Scripture. It has in its meaning a large element of reverence, of giving God His place as God. This is well expressed in the NIV’s “reverent submission,” and is, of course,

fully seen in Philippians 2:8’s “becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (NASB).

The ease with which the writer moves to Christ’s obedience (the sixth characteristic) indicates how closely this is related to “piety.”

5:8. Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.

“Although He were a Son” gives us His high background. He is God the Son, infinite, eternal, and thoroughly accustomed to command. Now, in His mission as the Savior, He who knew all things by omniscience “learned obedience (in personal experience) from the things He suffered.” However early these sufferings began, they certainly culminated in Gethsemane and Golgotha.

Verse 9 gives the final and summarizing characteristic of our High Priest:

5:9. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

He became the perfectly valid priestly representative of men by the incarnation and the perfectly sympathetic priest by the testing and suffering of His earthly career.

He became the perfect revelation of God’s gracious love in bearing the penalty of our sins on the Cross.

And supremely, He was the perfect sacrifice: spotless in life and character, infinite in value as the very Son of God and set to yield Himself up voluntarily to God as pictured by the whole burnt offering rising Godward by the fire of the altar.

It was thus He became the “source” of eternal salvation. The word translated “source” (“author” in the KJV) may also be rendered

“cause”. It was even used as the “case” a lawyer presented in court. So we might say that Christ “made perfect through what He suffered” is the “case for eternal salvation” that He, as our Advocate (1 John 2:1), presents in the court of God.

Those who benefit from this “eternal salvation” are described as “those who obey Him” rather than the usual “those who believe.” This is done not only because Christ’s primary and crucial *command* was “*Believe*” but also because of the deep assurance that those who really *do believe* are those *who obey*.

5:10. Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

This verse repeats God’s designation of Christ as “High Priest after the order of Melchizedek,” using the word “called,” implying the granting of authority, and meaning at times to “salute.” The verse thus fittingly concludes this section on our High Priest while it also acts as a link to the appeal that follows.

The final verses of chapter five form the introduction of this strong exhortation on spiritual growth, using the Melchizedek priesthood as a sample truth that those addressed were not mature enough to take in readily.

5:11. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

It is not just that the writer has much to give on Melchizedek but finds it hard to give because they are lethargic listeners. That is true; but the deeper point is that they have “become” (NASB) unresponsive because they have slipped into an atti-

tude that is deadly (then and now), the attitude of no concern about spiritual growth.

Verse 12 continues the evaluation of their spiritual condition.

5:12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food.

They have had adequate time to have become teachers of the Word (required in elders, 1 Timothy 3:2, and a goal for every believer, Ephesians 4:12-13). Yet actually they have lost out so badly they are themselves in need of basic teaching. This teaching the writer calls, “the elementary principles of the oracles of God.” It consists of the great foundation truths introduced in the Old Testament and fully declared or taken for granted in the New Testament.

He also calls it “milk” in contrast to “solid food” and prescribes it as their diet until there is enough growth to enable their taking solid food with real relish.

Verses 13 and 14 conclude the discussion of “milk” and solid food.

5:13. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.

5:14. But solid food belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

What the writer is saying is not that a Christian who takes some milk occasionally is a “babe,” but that one who takes nothing but milk certainly is.

And now a new example of “solid food” is introduced to take its place with the Melchizedek priesthood. A “babe,” living on milk alone, would be

“unaccustomed to the word of righteousness.” This, it is inferred, would mean a very real loss; and to this, Paul would agree for he gives it high prominence early in Romans.

We may summarize it in three aspects. The first is God's righteousness manifest in His condemning man's sin (Romans 1:18). The second aspect is the perfect righteousness of God in receiving the believer solely on the basis of his faith in Christ as Savior and Risen Lord (Romans 1:17; 3:21-26).

The third aspect is that Christ-Ascended is our Righteousness. Jeremiah (23:6) declared Messiah to be: “The Lord Our Righteousness;” and Christ showed in John 16:10 that the Spirit would “convict of righteousness, because I go to My Father.” That is, the righteousness that God receives is Christ.

John Bunyan in *Grace Abound-*

ing expressed it strikingly, “God cannot say to me, ‘John, where is your righteousness?’ for my Righteousness is there before Him.”

Solid food, then, is for the mature; they enjoy it, it strengthens them and they have the potential to be used by God as His instruments in the world.

These full-grown are, likewise, the ones who “by constant use have their (spiritual) senses trained;” for one of the most needed activities in the church today is distinguishing what is really good from what, no matter how fine it appears, is actually evil.

So whether our conscious aim is more to fulfill God's will for our lives or more to be useful to our Savior, the call to all of us is to grow and to go on to maturity.

Questions for Hebrews 6

1. How closely related are “the elementary teachings” of Hebrews 6:1 to “milk” in 5:12, 13?
2. Does “not laying again the foundation” of verse 1 influence your understanding of “leave” in the earlier part of the verse?
3. Define “repentance from dead works.”
4. Under what circumstances was there “the laying on of hands” in the Old Testament? What did it signify?
5. Do you see any significance in the fact that the word translated “partakers of the Holy Spirit” (v. 4) is translated “companions” (fellows, KJV) in 1:9?
6. Is it significant that there is no mention of faith (“believe” or “trust”) in verses 4-5?
7. Carefully interpret verses 7 and 8, including what the rain represents.
8. Explain why the writer expresses himself as he does in verses 9, 11 and 12.
9. In verse 18, what are the “two immutable” things?

10. Interpret each symbol from 18b through 20a showing the connection of thought between each.

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 6

The writer's purpose in giving us this chapter was certainly not to lay out a battleground for theological debate, however much it may seem so at times.

This chapter is basically an ardent plea to press on to spiritual maturity, and the strongest warning in the epistles is here to back it up.

The first three verses of the chapter give the path for spiritual advance.

6:1. Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith toward God,

6:2. Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

6:3. And this will we do, if God permit.

The end of chapter five indicated that severe losses result from prolonged spiritual babyhood. So now the call is issued, beginning with "leaving the elementary principles of Christ."

The "leaving" in no sense means "abandoning," as is shown by the explanatory phrase "not laying again the foundation." We are to recognize that the foundation, consisting of the elementary teaching of both the Old Testament and the Gospel, has been laid. We are not to keep digging it up, working it over and then attempting to lay it again.

We need to move beyond constant preoccupation with the elementary and get into the full range of Christian truth. We need to move on

to maturity.

Getting down to particulars, the writer mentions some sample foundation truths.

"Repentance from dead works" heads the list. These "dead works" are not just acts recognized by the world as evil. They include, quite pointedly, works not arising from the new life in Christ but performed to show how fine, how ethical, the person is of himself.

The result of these works is to bind the person in spiritual death because salvation is (Romans 4:5) "to him that worketh not, but believeth." It is a settled foundation stone that there is no merit in us before God. We turn in repudiation of all self-righteousness when we truly come to Christ.

"Faith toward God" was settled as foundational truth far back in Abraham. Challenging all other grounds of acceptance with God, Genesis 15:6 declares: Abram "believed in the Lord and He counted it to him for righteousness."

Then come two symbols each with a significance that spans both Testaments and forms an enduring foundation stone.

"Baptisms" meaning "washings" embody the elementary principle that cleansing is absolutely necessary for

entrance into God's presence, His worship and His service. This was settled once for all in the Mosaic revelation and is deeply imbedded in the innate conviction of every normal person.

"The laying on of hands" is the second symbol, one probably not so well-known. During the offering of a sacrifice, the offerer was to lay his hands on the head of the animal just before it was slain. This was more than just a symbolic laying of his sins on the sacrifice, though that was true and fully seen in the high priest's confessing the sins of Israel as he laid his hands on the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:21).

The central and basic idea, however, is identification—that the offerer and his offering are now one and that, in his offering, the offerer goes into death for his sin.

This is foundational truth for the Christian; we, by saving faith, are one with our Sacrifice and have died in and with Him. So Hebrews 6 declares it to be elementary truth, a fully settled thing beyond any question and one from which we go on to maturity.

The final two samples are obvious foundational truths of the Christian faith.

"The resurrection of the dead" was shown in the Old Testament (for example, Psalms 16:9, 10; 17:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2, 13; Hosea 13:14) and proved forever by Christ's resurrection. Without it, Christianity would have no message to mankind (compare 1 Corinthians 15:12-20). Any attempts to "dig it up" for questioning will block spiritual growth then and there.

"Eternal judgment" is settled for-

ever in the righteousness of the moral Governor of the universe. If He is God, He must punish sin. That He has done it vicariously in the death of Christ the Son simply magnifies the wonder of His grace.

In verse 3, the writer expresses a rather modest confidence that those addressed will respond to the appeal and "go on to maturity." Including himself again with the readers, he says, "This we shall do," and adds, "if God permits."

This latter expression shows a deep conviction that apart from God's inward working no spiritual advance will be made and that, as given in Philippians 2:13, "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure."

(So again, the Scripture shows the concurrence of man's responsible agency, "This we shall do," and the divine sovereignty, "if God permits.")

Now, in order to give weight to his plea for spiritual advance, the writer in verses 4-6 launches into one of the strongest warnings in Scripture. He is saying in effect that the lack of spiritual growth is not only blameworthy in itself, it may indicate absolute peril; and he would take no chances even though he feels his readers are real believers.

As has often been said, "He would rather bore them with warnings than have them perish for lack of them."

6:4. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

6:5. And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come,

6:6. If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to

themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

The idea of the passage is this:

One who has had the grand privileges such as are described here and who has now turned away in repudiation of Christ is in a hopeless position. He has nothing to bring him back to the place where faith can be exercised.

The first of these privileges is that of having been "enlightened," of having come to a clear understanding of the Christian faith.

(Numerous examples of this have been before the public in the last fifty years—preachers and others who knew very well what the Bible taught and scoffed at it, speaking of historic Christianity as "a slaughterhouse religion." They railed against "the peril of worshiping Jesus," etc., and died in unbelief.

They may have "tasted of the Heavenly gift" (that is, caught the flavor of the grace of God in Christ) and may even have become enthusiastic about the attractive character given by Christ to those who have been born again. But, personally, they remained in unbelief.

Hundreds of thousands are like this in many countries today. They resemble the ten spies of Moses' day who agreed the Promised Land was good; they had tasted its fruit and liked it. But without faith to enter, they died in the wilderness.

The next privilege in a strictly literal translation would read "and having become sharers with the Holy Spirit." The basic idea of this key word is "sharing" in an experience, position or work. So in Luke 5:7 the word is, of course, translated "part-

ners;" they shared in the work of fishing.

In Hebrews 1:9 the NASB and the NIV properly translate this word as "companions;" they and Christ shared many of the experiences of life.

Likewise, in the general writing of the time preserved on papyri in Egypt, the word is commonly used of "associates" in business or the professions—just as our "Wm. Smith and Associates."

Those to whom the writer is referring had been "companions" of the Spirit. They had gone along as the Spirit witnessed to the truth of Christ by sign and miracle. They had been right there as the Spirit wrought His mighty work of transforming lives. They were in a place of tremendous privilege; but the word, "companions," does not necessarily imply any deeper heart relation to Christ than belonged to those in Matthew 7:22 who had prophesied in Christ's name, in His name cast out demons, and in His name done many wonderful works. And Christ has to say, "I never knew you."

But, of course, the one who had this privilege to an unparalleled degree and then repudiated Christ was Judas Iscariot.

Verse 5 continues the list of advantages with "have tasted the good (or fine) word of God." They have come to feel the beauty of its message not just in the style but in its content, its ethical standards, its presentation of God's character, its meeting of the heart-cry of man in his need. The Bible has become to these a superb book.

"And the powers of the age to come" refers to the display, in

Christ's ministry and the apostolic period, of the powers that are to characterize the Millennial kingdom. These people had seen the power of God at work around them bringing in life and healing, righteousness and peace, and deliverance from Satan's control. Now comes the warning itself: If these "fall away, it is impossible to renew them to repentance." They have eliminated all that could lead them back to the point where faith could be exercised.

The ultimate reason for the hopelessness is "because they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame" (that is, they repudiate Him as the Savior, spurning His claims as men did at Calvary). Such is the unspeakable result of turning away from Christ after having full light and testimony in regard to Him.

Those who claim the support of this passage for their rejection of the "eternal security" of the believer should carefully consider the fact that the passage proves too much if their interpretation is followed.

Their position characteristically urges that those who have "fallen away" can and should be saved again, while this passage says it is "impossible to renew them again to repentance." Furthermore, in all the description of those under consideration in these verses, there is no mention of faith (belief or trust) or of obedience to God or Christ.

Among those who hold the security of the believer, some claim the "falling away" is just failure to continue to bear fruit. Fruitlessness is, of course, serious; but it is not to be referred to as a repudiation of Christ, a new crucifying of the Son of God.

Besides that, in Revelation 2 and 3, where there was failure that certainly included lack of spiritual fruit, there is the repeated call to "repent"—the very opposite of Hebrews 6:6.

Others have claimed that the passage is presenting a purely hypothetical case—that it couldn't actually happen. The difficulty with this suggestion is that, if the "falling away" could not happen, then there is no really valid warning and the passage seems rather pointless.

The conclusion to which we are brought is that this passage is a strong and thoroughly valid warning. However great may have been one's privileges as seen in verses 4 and 5, if he has not exercised real, personal faith in Christ—demonstrated by the fruit of the Spirit and a sincere desire for spiritual advance—he could turn away, repudiate Christ and be hopelessly lost.

In verses 7 and 8 the writer gives a parable-like illustration.

6:7. For the earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth herbs fit for them by whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God;

6:8. But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is near unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.

The ground represents men in their individual responsibility to God, the rain His showered provision, privileges and opportunities to respond to Him.

The question is how the ground will use the rain—to produce a good crop of grain and rejoice the heart of the owner or to grow thorns and thistles and be worthless, "near to a curse" (or a curse in the near view) "and its end" (and in the end) "to be

burned.” The point is clear: Man is fully responsible for his use of the provisions and privileges given by God.

Now in verses 9 and 10 the writer turns again to the confidence he has in the reality of the faith his readers profess, a confidence he suggested in verse 3.

6:9. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

6:10. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shown toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Though the writer has just given this very strong warning, he himself is “convinced of better things” than might be implied by the warning. He feels that his readers are real believers because he sees in them what he calls “things that accompany salvation.”

He is referring to the fact that when a person is saved it shows in his life. There will be some manifestation of the life of Christ imparted in the New Birth. There will be “work” out of love to God and to His people.

This the writer cites as true of his readers in the past and continuing in the present. God takes note of it and the Apostle John lets us find assurance in it for ourselves. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14).

The expression in verse 10, “love, which ye have shown toward His name,” points to God not as vague and far away but as revealed to men in all His glorious character. The “ministering” is to be just as practical as is needed!

Verses 11 and 12 form the con-

clusion of this great exhortation.

6:11. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;

6:12. That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The writer now expresses his own desire for his readers—his prescription for their needs. They should show the same diligence in their spiritual life and advance that they have been showing in their ministry to others.

The result will be “the full assurance of hope” with its peace and joy to fill their lives. So he calls on them not to be sluggish but active “imitators” of the heroes of “faith and patience” who inherited the promises.

Has it seemed a dark and dreadful passage? It does force on its readers the dreadful results of apostasy from Christ, especially on those who have gained a clear understanding of His message and have observed the Spirit’s varied witness to Him.

But just the certainty that we *have* trusted the Savior, that we do love Him and His people and sincerely want to grow spiritually, brings us into the light and joy of full assurance that is God’s desire for His own.

The final section of the chapter takes up this subject of assurance, dealing first with God’s assurance to Abraham (verses 13-18a).

6:13. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,

6:14. Saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

6:15. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

6:16. For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

6:17. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,

6:18. That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation.

God in sovereign grace chose Abram there in Ur and called him by the multiple promise of Genesis 12 to be the head of a special people for Himself. Abram believed and obeyed, coming into Canaan after his father's death.

But God knew his need of assurance during the years of delay in fulfillment and gave him His oath. Hebrews quotes from Genesis 22:16,17 where, after the offering of Isaac, God answers Abraham's obedient faith with a renewal of the promise and declares He has so sworn.

As the writer notes, God has sworn by Himself since there is none greater by whom to swear; and God would give him the strongest assurance men know—the means for ending their disputes.

In Genesis 15 God in a vision to Abraham condescended to use the most solemn form of oath known to man. The symbol of His presence moved between the split halves of the sacrificial animals as His promise (that a seed would possess Canaan) was made an oath.

The core of the vision certainly looked forward to God's presence moving in the sacrifice of the Cross to assure fullest blessing for His own; for in Genesis 22, after the offering and preservation of Isaac, the son of promise, there is the appropriate addition to the general promise of the

words "and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed."

In verses 17 and 18a the writer points out that God's adding the oath to the promise was to assure Abraham and his heirs through the centuries of the absolute reliability of His Word.

There are now two immutable things on which Abraham's faith can lay hold: God's promise based on His eternal purposes and His oath based on His unchangeable faithfulness.

The expression "impossible for God to lie" in no way contradicts His omnipotence; His infinite power (and freedom) are always exercised in perfect accord with His absolute holiness. (Here is one "impossible" in which our hearts can rejoice.)

By the middle of verse 18 "the heirs of promise" (verse 17) are seen to include us, Abraham's spiritual descendents under the New Covenant. So the chapter closes with a swiftly moving description of believers today and the basis of their perfect assurance through the Anchor of Hope.

6:18b. Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

6:19. Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

6:20. Where the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

First, then, we believers, for whom God's promise and oath form a "strong encouragement" are described as those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us."

We have realized the peril of our position as sinners under the storm of God's judgment and have "fled" (at

the decisive moment) to the “refuge,” the Cross of Christ. We have “laid hold on” that sin-atonement sacrifice as ours in active appropriating faith.

We see this once slain but now risen Savior as the Author and very Essence of the “hope set before us” in the Word—from forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God right on through to eternal glory.

Now that we have found the haven, this hope becomes our anchor to keep us secure and at peace whatever the pull of the tide around. (No wonder the early church used the anchor as one of its symbols.)

Again the symbolism changes and the unseen depths where the an-

chor finds its secure hold become the unseen inner sanctuary, the holy of Holies of God's Presence “within the veil.” There in that place of infinite and ultimate security because of the Sprinkled Blood, our “Forerunner,” “even Jesus” (He is still united to us as man), has entered.

Our Hope, our Anchor, who became the Forerunner “on our behalf,” has opened the way into the Holiest and has taken up His great high priesthood in the very presence of God, “an High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.”

The full grandeur of this “solid food” is given in the chapter that follows.

Questions for Hebrews 7 and 8

1. Study Genesis 14:17-24. In view of Hebrews 7:3, note what Genesis does not say about Melchizedek as well as what it does.
2. From Hebrews 7:3, 15 show the relation of Melchizedek to Christ. In what sense can Hebrews say “without father,” etc?
3. If we see Melchizedek as a type of Christ, what is the significance of his bringing “bread and wine”?
4. What is the writer seeking to prove in verses 4-10 and what arguments does he use?
5. In verse 11 a new priest's being appointed shows that the Levitical order did not bring in perfection. What related area was affected and what specific regulation is cited? (Read verses 15, 18, 19 in a newer translation.)
6. What is the connection between verse 3's “without end of life,” verse 16's basis of Christ's Melchizedek priesthood, and verse 25's basis for Christ's complete saving work?
7. In 6:17,18 the “promise” is “unchangeable”; but in 7:11-16 and 8:7-13 what things are being changed?
8. How did what Christ Himself said in Matthew 26:28 lead us to believe that the Cross was a principal element in His being the guarantee of this new and better covenant (7:22)?
9. In 8:1 what is the meaning of Christ as High Priest being on the right hand of the Throne? How does this fit the Melchizedek priesthood?
10. How does the use of “true” in 8:2 correspond with Christ's use of it in John 6:32? How would you define it?

11. How does the New Covenant differ from the Mosaic Covenant of Sinai (Exodus 20-24)? (In 8:9 God says the new is not like the old.)

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 7

Christian, here is an inspired test of your spiritual maturity.

In chapter 5 the writer of Hebrews said he had much that he wanted to give his readers on Melchizedek. But, he admitted, he found it hard to teach them because of their lack of spiritual growth.

It was questionable whether they could take in and enjoy “solid food” such as this. For that reason, he gave the plea and warning of chapter 6.

Now under the Spirit's guidance he does give at least some of that teaching. The test is then, “How well do you understand and enjoy this passage on Melchizedek?”

The first three verses of chapter 7 present this man Melchizedek, who is one of the most intriguing figures of the Old Testament.

7:1. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;

7:2. To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;

7:3. Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

He is a king from the area of Jerusalem and at the same time is a priest of the most High God. Probably, he is best described as a surviving representative of those who early had a knowledge of the true God. The dual office of priest and king begins

his qualification as a type of Christ since Zechariah had declared that the “branch” (Messiah) would be “a priest upon His throne” (Zechariah 6:12, 13).

Our one view of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 shows him, in obedience to God's leading, moving to meet Abraham as he returns from his defeat of the Eastern kings who had captured Sodom and carried off its wealth and leading men, including Lot, Abraham's nephew.

Now Abraham was not only tired, he was also about to meet the king of Sodom, who planned to get Abraham under his influence by flattery and bribe. Abraham needed refreshing and special spiritual strength for the test ahead. God gave him both by this priest Melchizedek—bread and wine and the blessing of the most High God with a pointed reminder that the victory was His work.

Abraham responded by giving a tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek, and he met the king of Sodom in full spiritual victory. “Not a thread to a shoelace” will he take from Sodom, and God replies, “I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

Melchizedek's name means, “King of righteousness,” perfect for one who is to picture Christ in whom personal righteousness is absolute, who is “The Lord our Righteousness,”

and who as King will bring in eternal righteousness at His coming.

The text continues “and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.” There is significance, this time, in the order of the names. Peace is a vain hope until true righteousness is brought in, and this comes only as Christ brings it into the individual life and at His Second Coming into the world.

Verse 3 gets into the core of the symbolism of Christ’s high priesthood. With a full sense of the Spirit’s control of Moses as he wrote, Hebrews takes the portrayal of Melchizedek in the exact way it is given in Genesis as a picture of Christ.

In Genesis 14 Melchizedek simply appears, ministers and disappears; there is no mention of family, background, birth or death. So, *as the picture stands*, he is “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life;” he, therefore, nicely points to actual eternity in Christ.

By the presentation in Genesis, Melchizedek is “*made like* the Son of God” and his order of priesthood is characterized by “abiding perpetually.” (This “made like” in verse 3 and “after the likeness of Melchizedek” in verse 15 prove that Melchizedek was not a theophany; if that were true, he would not be “*like* the Son of God,” he would *be* the Son of God.)

If we see Melchizedek as a type of Christ in His present priestly ministry, one other item in Genesis 14 glows with significance. Melchizedek brought to Abraham not a lamb to be slain, but “bread and wine,” the emblems of a completed sacrifice in per-

fect portrayal of Christ’s ministry at the Throne in the value of His finished work on the Cross.

We now begin a series of proofs of the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Aaronic. The first of these is Abraham’s giving tithes to Melchizedek and being blessed by him.

7:4. Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.

7:5. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham:

7:6. But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises.

7:7. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.

7:8. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.

7:9. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham.

7:10. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him.

Abraham was a great man, acknowledged so by every Jew. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, confessing that Melchizedek, in his priestly ministry at least, was greater than he.

More than that, the Levitical priests, who by the provisions of the Law collected tithes themselves from their brethren, in a sense paid tithes to this non-Hebrew Melchizedek! They did it in the act of their source and representative, Abraham.

(This doesn’t mean that a child’s personality comes only from the father; it simply means that the father is the representative source. Adam, as our racial source, was man’s rep-

representative in Eden; and Christ, as the source of our new life, was and is our representative with glorious results.)

United with the victor's paying tithes to Melchizedek was the latter's blessing of Abraham. The universally accepted order was that the greater blessed the lesser; so again, the pre-eminence of Melchizedek's priesthood is demonstrated.

In Verse 8, the contrast is that in the situation around us it is mortal men who receive the tithes, but in the scene presented in Genesis 14 the tithes go to one pictured as "living on."

"The order of Melchizedek" is marked by "endless life," as shown by the "forever" of Psalm 110:4 and realized in Christ risen.

Verses 11-19 develop the theme that a change of priesthood shows imperfection in the old order.

(The subject is important today because a considerable number of teachers and preachers tend to minimize the distinction between the New Order and the Old. They even discount to some extent the glory of the New. (This certainly does not come from a study of Hebrews!)

7:11. If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

7:12. For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

7:13. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.

7:14. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

7:15. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest,

7:16. Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.

7:17. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

7:18. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.

7:19. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

The argument may be summarized in this way: If the Levitical priesthood had brought in perfection, why should there be a change? But a change was announced in the Old Testament itself in Psalm 110:4. And a change in priesthood means a change in the ritual law.

The statement in Psalm 110:4 is addressed to Messiah, and He is of the tribe of Judah from which the Mosaic Law did not envision any priest arising. And Melchizedek, who sets the pattern for this new priesthood, is still more remote than Levi.

Furthermore, the qualifications for this priesthood are totally different from the Levitical, which were on the basis of "physical requirement" (that is, descent from Aaron and no physical defects).

Verses 18 and 19 summarize the argument so far. On the one hand, there is the setting aside of the former commandment (constituting the Aaronic priesthood). It was weak and useless (to save sinners or make perfect those who have been saved), "because the Law made nothing perfect."

On the other hand, there is "the bringing in of a better hope" (by Christ and His work), "through which we draw near to God."

(Hebrews has now shown us, in connection with the Melchizedek priesthood, a definite change in God's arrangements so that the believer in this age has full assurance, a clear bright prospect for the future and close fellowship with God even now.)

7:20. And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest:

7:21. (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, the Lord swore and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek:)

7:22. By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

God has shown His infinitely greater interest in Christ's high priesthood by giving His oath, in contrast to the absence of any oath in the appointment of the Levitical priests. (Their work was, after all, of the nature of a token.)

By this oath in all its grand significance, Christ became the guarantee of the covenant that God is about to inaugurate. Christ showed us that this guarantee centered in the Cross when He spoke the words, "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood." Moses' words were in exact parallel when at Sinai he sprinkled the people saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you." In chapter 8 we shall look more fully at this "better covenant."

The final argument for the superiority of Christ's high priesthood is now given.

7:23. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

7:24. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

7:25. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by

him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The argument is simple, but the conclusion is grand beyond words. There were large numbers of the Levitical priests, since death prevented their continuing in office; their ministry was without real continuity and, therefore, insecure.

Christ, on the other hand, is risen and lives forever; His priestly ministry is continuous, unchangeable and absolutely secure.

He is able, therefore, to save "completely" (or "forever"—the original has the idea "to the very end and goal") "all who come to God by Him." (This is the glorious heart of our security.)

This grand result is by Christ's intercession at the Throne. If it is a question of the believer's sinning, He is the "Advocate" (1 John 2:1) with a perfect plea: "Atonement has been made."

There is also the whole range of intercession for spiritual advance in believers, for special guidance and enablement by the Spirit in difficulty and for the making of "all things to work together for good" "that we should be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:28, 29). The resulting contrast between high priests concludes the chapter.

7:26. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

7:27. Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

7:28. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

It was fitting, in view of the grandeur of God's grace and the extent of our need, that we should be given such an high priest as Christ.

He is holy "in every aspect of His being," "innocent and undefiled" (qualified to be the sacrificial Lamb), "separated from sinners" by His moral character (and so He can be the truly helpful "Friend of sinners"), "and exalted above the heavens." He is there where we need Him!

Thus, of course, He has no need, as the Aaronic priests continuously do, to offer sacrifice for Himself. He was the sinless Son of God while they were sinners themselves.

After the sacrifice for themselves, they offered for the people, day after day, year after year. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice, once for all, of infinite value, in the atoning death of the Cross.

So the chapter, as it closes, leaves us with two alternatives for high priest: men with infirmity (sinful and mortal, ministry discontinuous), appointed under Mosaic law, or the Son of God, made perfect forever (risen, ever living, continuous in His intercession), appointed by the oath of God which came after the Law.

We say we choose the latter, but how often do we think about Him there at the Throne interceding for us? How well do we respond to that ministry as it touches our lives?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 8

This chapter is virtually continuous with chapter 7. Two topics dominate it. The first is that our High Priest is ministering in the “true Tabernacle, the very presence of God.”

8:1. Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

8:2. A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

8:3. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer:

8:4. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:

8:5. Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle; for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.

Carrying on from the previous chapter, the author emphatically writes it down, “The summarizing point of what has been said is this: We do have such a high priest”—that glorious High Priest, pictured by Melchizedek in his ministering to Abraham, identified by David as his Lord in the psalm, and now seated on the Father’s right hand and ministering to His own.

“The Throne of the Majesty in the heavens” is, of course, the throne of God, but of God in all the majesty of His divine being and sovereignty. And Christ is “on the right hand,” the

place of honor and authority of that Throne.

The presence of God, however, is marked not only by sovereign majesty symbolized by a throne. It is marked also by holiness so that it is a “sanctuary” (verse 2). As High Priest, this is where Christ belongs, where He functions.

And the “sanctuary” to which the writer turns for an earthly picture is not Herod’s magnificent temple or even Solomon’s glorious edifice. It is the Tabernacle of Moses’ day.

Why? The Tabernacle was made according to God’s explicit directions. It was uncomplicated by man’s additions (compare verse 6). It is the perfect type of the “true” Tabernacle, the Heavenly “dwelling” where God’s glory is fully manifested and where Christ exercises His ministry.

It is the “true,” not at all implying that the Tabernacle in the wilderness was in any sense false. It is using “true” in the same way Christ used it in John 6:32. (The manna wasn’t false or unreal!)

The “true” is that which has eternal spiritual reality and comes wholly from God. That is why the text says of “the true Tabernacle” it is that “which the Lord pitched and not man.”

Verse 3 reechoing 5:1 speaks of Christ, as a priest, needing something to offer. To this, of course, all the epistle replies: He both had and did offer “a more excellent sacrifice” (presented at length in chapters 9 and 10).

The writer's thought at this point, however, turns to the location of Christ's ministry. If He were on earth, He could not even be a priest; that position is completely occupied by the sons of Levi. His tribe is Judah. His family line is of David. His priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek, combining kingship and high priesthood.

The Levitical priests offer their “gifts as prescribed by the Law” (verse 4), but (of utmost importance) their service in the sanctuary where they minister is a “*copy and shadow of the heavenly things*” (verse 5). It is for just this reason that God called for such care erecting the Tabernacle. He said, “See that you make it according to the pattern shown you in the mount.”

The work of Christ in the atoning suffering and death of the Cross is the real accomplishment of God's salvation, the “true” that has the Heavenly quality, infinite value and eternal validity. The Levitical sacrifices were types and tokens looking forward to and picturing the actual fulfillment in the Cross.

In summary, Christ in His work on Calvary fulfilled on earth the types and pictures in the Old Testament priestly service. Now He ministers in the power of a completed atonement and an endless life as a priest after the order of Melchizedek in the presence of God in Heaven.

Verse 6 forms a transition from

priestly ministry centered on sacrifice to the new and “better covenant” now to be considered.

8:6. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

The same transition had been used by Christ at the inauguration of the Lord's Supper when He followed “This is my body which is broken for you” with “This cup is the New Covenant in my blood.”

The specific idea of the verse is that while the superiority of Christ's ministry over that of the Levitical priest is great, the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old is equally great. The New has Christ in His more excellent ministry as its Mediator and it has “better promises,” too.

Verses 7-12 present this New Covenant.

8:7. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8:8. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

8:9. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

8:10. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.

8:11. And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

8:12. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. (Verses 8-12 are quoted from Jeremiah 31:31-34.)

Verse 7 cites the indisputable fact that, if the first covenant had been perfect, no one would have begun to think about a new one. But a new one has been put forward by God, so verse 8 speaks of His “finding fault” though not directly with the covenant itself.

Now there is nothing wrong with the Ten Commandments themselves or with the spiritual principles pictured in the sacrifices, washings, etc! The “fault” is in the people. (“Finding fault *with them*” because “they continued not in my covenant”—verse 9).

The Old Covenant was conditional (Exodus 19:5,8; 24:3,7); its blessings in large measure depended on Israel’s obedience which usually was short-lived. There is no “if” of man’s work in the New Covenant; God says “I will.”

The time of inauguration of the New Covenant in the text before us is simply future to Jeremiah’s day, but the setting in Jeremiah 31 indicates that it will take place as God begins to deal with His ancient people in gracious renewing work.

That work, begun at Christ’s First Coming, was interrupted for the Jews nationally by their rejection of their Messiah but will be fully resumed at His Second Coming. For believers, Jew or Gentile, the New Covenant was prepared for in the teaching of Christ and established in the Cross as He said when He took the cup at the Last Supper.

Jeremiah 31:29-30 records God’s saying that at this same time He will put a stop to the saying, “The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children’s teeth are set on edge;” everyone will then be individually responsible before Him. The provisions of

the New Covenant are certainly in accord with this principle.

There is also a significant omission. Though there had been much about Israel’s possessing the land both in the prophets and in covenants beginning with the Abrahamic, there is nothing of that here. All moves on a spiritual level suitable to Christ’s application of the covenant to all His own whatever their geographical location. They are all “in Christ” and under “the covenant in My blood.”

The first great positive characteristic of the New Covenant is that God “will put His laws,” His standards, “into their minds and will write them on their hearts” (verse 10).

This means that God’s standards, now internal, are made ours personally. We not only know the words, we begin to think in accordance with them. And now too our hearts are brought in; we are motivated by love and our wills are directed toward God’s will.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 speaks about this same work of God with emphasis on His gift of “a new heart and a new spirit.” The promise includes the presence of “My Spirit” in the believer. As Christ in John 3 speaks to Nicodemus about the New Birth, He has this passage in Ezekiel chiefly in mind. Both the New Covenant and Ezekiel certainly imply the New Birth.

The second characteristic (the end of verse 10) appears as something of a result of the first and gains emphasis from that fact.

Though the words had been frequently used, in this context the promise carries the force of “I will really be to them all that the True

God can be and desires to be"—a Heavenly Father personally concerned for His own, loving infinitely, and ready to reveal Himself in ever increasing fullness with the goal of intimate fellowship.

"And they shall be My people," God's special treasure, witnesses to the transforming powers of His grace and reflections of His character now and for eternity. And in a very practical way they will be His instruments in the world, yielded and fit to be used by Him. They are to be truly "for him" to the depths of their beings.

The third characteristic (verse 11) is that all under the New Covenant will have a basic knowledge of God as the Covenant-keeping LORD. There will be no need to instruct one's neighbor (literally "fellow citizen") or brother under this covenant.

Israel under the Mosaic economy had both its priests who were charged with the instruction of the people and also its prophets to teach and exhort. Under the New Covenant today all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and His teaching assures each an essential knowledge of the Lord.

He uses the Word and gifted teachers (Ephesians 4:11-13) for maturing the members of the body of Christ. But as 1 John 2:20 (NASB) declares, "You have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know (the truth)."

Israel, when they "look upon Me whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10) and when they repent and accept Him, will enter into this part of the New Covenant, too.

The fourth and final characteristic (verse 12) uses language so familiar to us that we may easily lose its

full significance. God declares that under this covenant He will freely exercise His mercy toward sinners and forgive their sins so completely He will not remember them again forever.

Does this mean that God is abandoning His righteous judgment against sin? No, indeed. It means that the New Covenant offers full forgiveness and a standing in perfect righteousness on the basis God has planned eternally: the judgment of sin in the atoning Sacrifice of Christ.

It is exactly as Christ said that night before the Cross, "This is the New Covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins." And the result is, as Paul sums it up in Romans 3:16, that God "might be just and the Justifier of him who believes in Jesus."

So Jeremiah's announcement of the New Covenant takes its place in the New Testament in perfect accord with the Gospel of Christ and the inspired teaching of the epistles. Let no believer minimize its grandeur or the peace of heart and uplift of spirit it imparts.

The final verse clinches the writer's argument.

8:13. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

The very fact that God speaks of a "New Covenant" makes the former obsolete; and if a thing is "obsolete and aging," it will soon disappear.

Not only is man not able to qualify for acceptance with God by route of works of law, God has marked that route closed. He has pointed out even more clearly the way of the Cross, the unfailing route of faith in Christ as

Savior and Risen Lord.

Questions for Hebrews 9

1. Read the chapter, noting not only the general assumption of spiritual significance in the Tabernacle but also the specific statements showing this and the expressions describing the relation of the earthly Tabernacle to the Heavenly.
2. Why were the three things put in the ark (v. 4)?
3. Where did the high priest put the blood? What relation did this establish and effect for the cherubim and the contents of the ark (verse 7)?
4. Why does it say "sins committed in ignorance" (verse 7)?
5. Why was the way into the Most Holy Place not disclosed in Old Testament times (verse 8)? Study verses 9-14.
6. Why couldn't the tabernacle ritual make the worshiper "perfect in conscience" (verse 9)?
7. Contrast the effectiveness of the blood of animals and the blood of Christ in taking away sin (verses 11-14).
8. In verses 15-20, there is a play on the two meanings, "covenant" and "testament" ("last will") of the one Greek word. How would you translate the word in each occurrence?
9. Why must verse 22 be true? Two physical things could not be polluted according to the Old Testament, a spring and a seed for sowing. Can you see why?
10. In what ways was Christ's a "better" sacrifice than those of the Levitical priests (verse 23)?
11. What rules out the so-called "Sacrifice of the Mass" (verses 25-28)? See also John 19:30.
12. What significance do you see in the way believers are described in verse 28?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 9

In chapter eight, the writer of Hebrews gave a full presentation of the New Covenant and included the fact that it is distinctly different from the covenant of Sinai.

God's standards are to be put into the minds of His own, written on their hearts. He is to be fully "God" to them; they are to be wholly *for Him*. All His people will know Him, and forgiveness will be complete forever on the basis of the atonement to be made by God's Suffering Servant.

Now the writer moves to consider Israel's service of worship under the Old Covenant and particularly the early center for that service in the tabernacle.

9:1. Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

9:2. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread; which is called the sanctuary.

9:3. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the holiest of all;

9:4. Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;

9:5. And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

The writer first presents the tabernacle very briefly. (Note verse 5 where he implies he would like to deal with it all "in detail" but feels he should not do so in this epistle.) Without mentioning the court with both its brazen altar for atonement

and acceptance with God by the sacrifices and its brazen laver for cleansing before entering the tabernacle, the writer comes directly to the holy place.

Here he locates the golden lampstand with its seven lamps, speaking of the One who is the perfect Light. And he also mentions the table with its twelve loaves that speak of Messiah, the true Bread of God for His own.

On the other side of the heavy veil that divided the tabernacle lay the holy of holies, the sacred room where the presence of God was manifested. Two objects are mentioned in connection with this most holy place.

The first of these raises a question. The word used can mean "altar of incense" (so used by Philo and Josephus); and since that altar would otherwise not be mentioned in this description, the text of the New American Standard Bible (NASB), New International Version (NIV), and many writers have accepted that translation.

The problem is that Hebrews places this object in the holy of holies while Exodus and Leviticus place the altar of incense in the holy place, close to the veil and just opposite the ark of the covenant but *not in* the holy of holies.

The word used can also mean “censer” (a portable metal bowl in which incense is burned). This is the meaning of the word in the Greek translation of the Old Testament; and it is the prominent meaning in the Greek writings of the time and the translation in the King James Version (KJV), as well as the NASB margin.

Leviticus 16:12,13 shows the high priest on the great Day of Atonement taking the golden censer full of burning coals into the Holy of Holies and burning incense before the Lord until it covered the mercy seat.

So there is one occasion when this golden censer *is* in the Holy of Holies. It has taken over the work of the altar of incense in the most important ceremony of Israel’s worship to God.

It is at this exact point—with the high priest ministering in the Holy of Holies—that the “earthly tabernacle” most fully pictures the heavenly sanctuary where Christ our High Priest is ministering today.

Might this be the very reason the writer mentions the portable “altar of incense,” the golden censer, as being in the Holy of Holies? This fits the situation he has in mind.

If, however, we accept the translation “altar of incense,” the best explanation would seem to be that it really belongs to the Holy of Holies since its ministry was directed toward the manifest presence of God over the mercy seat and it was to be placed close to the veil and directly opposite the ark (Exodus 30:6).

It was, then, as close as possible to God’s special presence and yet available to the priests for their regu-

lar burning of incense “before the Lord” because they were not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies.

By far the most important object in the Holy of Holies was the ark of the covenant, an acacia wood chest completely overlaid with gold. On its lid of solid gold, golden figures of cherubim, one at each end with wings outspread over the ark, faced each other and looked down toward the lid.

Within this ark were the stone tablets of the law, a golden jar containing some manna and Aaron’s rod that budded. Each was retained in connection with a sin of Israel. The tablets of the Law had been renewed and placed there after Moses broke the original in reaction to Israel’s idolatry with the golden calf. The manna was “laid up before the Lord” to show God’s answer to Israel’s murmuring about starvation. The rod was there because it showed, by resurrection, God’s answer to the Israelites’ rebellion against His appointed leaders.

The symbolism here is most significant. The cherubim, executors of God’s holiness (compare Genesis 3:24), are looking down at the ark in which are the three memorials of sin.

The lid, forming a seat or throne, with emblems of holiness above and memorials of sin below, would seem to be potentially the most absolute judgment seat. Yet, in total contrast, it is the mercy seat, the throne of grace. Why? Because the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement is sprinkled there.

Holiness sees the propitiatory blood, and God says (Exodus 25:22): “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the

mercy seat.” (The Gospel of Christ is here in picture as the heart of Old Testament worship.)

The theme of verses 6-10 is that the Old Covenant restricted entrance into the Holy of Holies because of the inadequacy of its priests and the merely symbolic, temporary nature of its sacrificial system.

9:6. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God.

9:7. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:

9:8. The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:

9:9. Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

9:10. Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

When the tabernacle was set up and its furnishings were in place, the priests went about their ritual service in the open court and in the holy place. But only the high priest—and he only once a year—entered the Holy of Holies. After he had filled that sacred censer with incense, he first brought in the blood of his own sacrifice and sprinkled it on the mercy seat. Then he brought in the blood of the sacrifice for the people.

The instructions are interesting. He was to sprinkle only the area of the mercy seat close to the edge on his side and on the ground in front of the ark. There was to be no self-assertive flourish out over the whole area and certainly no irreverent exploration of the space where God said

His presence would be. The sprinkling was to be done seven times in accordance with the perfection of all that was being pictured.

The expression at the end of verse seven in the KJV, “errors of the people,” is to be understood as “sins committed in ignorance.” These concerned the professed people of God. The general provisions of the Law made no allowance for forgiveness for anyone committing flagrant willful sin. Such sin was of the nature of apostasy and either brought the sinner exclusion from the covenant or death—as in the case of murder or adultery.

In verse eight, the writer gives a clear declaration that the tabernacle ritual portrays to us actual truth from God. He says that by restricting entrance into the Holy of Holies, the Holy Spirit is showing us that during the Old Testament period the way into the true “Holy of Holies,” the full presence of God, was not yet disclosed. (The whole subject will be gloriously completed in chapter 10.)

That earthly tabernacle, the writer shows, was a symbol (“illustration” NIV) for that particular time. It pictured in a material way the principles of propitiation and holiness governing man’s approach to God.

The gifts and sacrifices offered there were of the same nature. They were symbols and tokens of the ultimate sacrifice, but they could not “make the worshiper perfect in conscience.” The blood of any number of bulls and goats cannot completely satisfy the righteous judgment of God against sin, and man’s conscience knows it.

Verse 10 points out a further reason the Levitical ritual could not

make the worshiper “perfect in conscience.” Those ritual regulations are largely occupied with food and drink, various washings and ordinances for the physical body. They are temporary, imposed only until “the time of reformation,” or in other words, until “the new order” (literally, “making thoroughly straight” NIV). This refers to Christ’s first coming and to His work centered in the cross and resurrection. The words that follow immediately, “but Christ being come,” confirm this understanding.

The next section (verses 11-14) emphasizes that the tabernacle where Christ now ministers and the blood by which He entered the sanctuary are the eternal realities of God.

9:11. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

9:12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

9:13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

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

Our High Priest is marked by the full range of blessings hinted at in the Old Testament and spelled out in full in the New (compare Ephesians 1:3) but in no way ministered through the temple in Jerusalem.

While Christ often used the temple courts and porches as teaching places, His high priestly work was done in the sanctuary of a tabernacle “greater and more perfect” than even that instituted by Moses. It was not

built by human hands, nor did it belong to this creation.

Neither was the blood by which He entered His sanctuary that of goats and calves. It was “His own blood.” By this, He entered the true Holy of Holies “once for all” in the power of a finished and “eternal redemption” (a buying back to set free by paying the price).

We may, at this point, gather up the contrasts between the two sacrificial bloods, that of goats and calves and that of Christ. In value, theirs is quite limited. His is infinite, the blood of God the Son Incarnate. Theirs can picture purity, but no more. His embodies absolute holiness. They can be killed but cannot offer themselves in voluntary sacrifice; they cannot know or feel the wrath of God nor give themselves to be wholly *for* God. Christ did all this in complete consciousness and infinite fullness.

In verses 13-14, the author argues that if, as Judaism recognizes, the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a red heifer (Numbers 19) applied to a defiled person make him ceremonially clean, how much more will the blood of Christ fully cleanse one in heart and conscience? For He, enabled by the Holy Spirit, offered Himself as an unblemished sacrifice to God, cleansing the believer from “dead works” to serve, as a real worshiper, the living God.

Verse 15 introduces a new section dealing with the necessity of death if a “last will” (the Greek word for “covenant” also means “a will”—there is a play on the two meanings here) is to be in force.

9:15. And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by the means of

death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

9:16. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

9:17. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

9:18. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.

9:19. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people.

9:20. Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.

9:21. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

9:22. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Because Christ has provided the foundation by “offering Himself without spot to God,” He is the mediator of the New Covenant. Looking back at transgressions under the Old Covenant that God forgave in light of sacrifices that were merely of token value, Christ has provided the real value; and God’s righteousness stands clearly vindicated (compare Romans 3:25).

Now, “since a death has taken place” (compare NASB verse 15), we turn to the “*last will*” aspect of the covenant Christ mediates. In this aspect His death put the “will” in force, and He arose to be the executor, bringing us—the “called”—into the place of joint-heirs with himself in God’s “eternal inheritance.”

Verses 16-17 simply make the obvious fact doubly emphatic. If a last will is to be in force, the testator must have died. Even in the case of the covenant-testament of Sinai

(verse 18), “a death has taken place.”

After Moses had gone over all the Law with the people, he took the blood of the sacrifices and sprinkled it over the people and the covenant scroll, saying very simply, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.”

The sprinkled blood had put the covenant-testament into effect in much the same way that, on Pass-over night, the sprinkled blood on the houses of Israel proclaimed “a death had taken place.” Those within are sheltered and belong to God.

In verses 21 and 22, Moses is traced as he continues to apply the cleansing blood, sprinkling now the tabernacle with all its furnishings. This leads the writer to summarize the witness of the Old Testament: “Almost all things are, according to the Law, cleansed by blood.”

God had set His signposts pointing to the cross as the one means of cleansing. (Even the two things mentioned in Leviticus 11:36-37 as free from the danger of defilement are significant: a fountain of water symbolizes the Holy Spirit indwelling the heart and seed for sowing symbolizes the Word bringing new life abundantly.)

Then comes the climax of the section, the grand biblical principle pervading both Old and New Testaments: “Without shedding of blood there is no remission”—no forgiveness.

If the atoning death of Christ is not central and absolutely essential to one’s faith, that person has not entered into Christianity. He has no valid claim to being a follower of biblical revelation.

The final section of the chapter rises to a high peak in the epistle. It may nicely be remembered as presenting the three appearances of Christ but with special emphasis on the once-for-all nature of His sacrifice.

9:23. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

9:24. For Christ is not entered into the holy place made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

9:25. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

9:26. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

9:27. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment;

9:28. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

In accordance with God's principle that shedding blood is necessary for forgiveness and cleansing, the earthly "copies" (or representations) must be purified with the blood of animal sacrifices. The heavenly realities themselves, however, require "better sacrifices" than goats and calves, and this they most surely received in infinite measure in Christ.

He did not enter the "holy places made with hands" (certainly not the sanctuary of Herod's temple nor even the tabernacle set up in Moses' day). The tabernacle, as we have seen, was the "figure (copy) of the true," but it was into "*the true*," that is, "heaven itself," that Christ entered as the risen Lord. And He entered with the

evidence of the atoning sacrifice He had made in His own blood.

It is here we begin Christ's three appearances. The second of the three marks the start of His present activity, described in the text: "Now to appear in the presence of God for us."

He is there "on our behalf" as our righteousness, our Advocate if we sin, and our Great High Priest in all the grandeur we have previously seen. This is our confidence, however rough the path of our lives may seem.

Verse 25 begins the great emphasis on the once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice. His work is in full contrast to that of earthly high priests. Theirs was to enter the most holy place year after year on the Day of Atonement, offering blood "not their own."

If Christ were the same as they, He would have had to suffer many, many times through the centuries (raising questions as to the value of His sacrifice, the meaning of "It is finished," the significance of the ascension, etc.). But He is actually in total contrast to the Levitical priests and the claimed "sacrifice of the mass."

Christ "has now *once-for-all* at the end (climax and consummation) of the ages appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." The sacrifice is "once-for-all" because of its nature as the infinite suffering and death of the Son of God.

"End of the ages" carries the idea that the ages of man's testing and the ages of preparation for Messiah climax and consummate in the cross and resurrection.

The phrase "to put away sin" presents one of the most glorious

truths of Scripture. Sin as guilt is removed “as far as the east is from the west.” Sin as the root principle of the old Adamic nature is taken into death in the cross. And sin’s very presence will, on the same basis, be swept from the earth beginning in Christ’s Millennial reign and ending in the “new heavens and new earth.”

Verse 27 introduces an illustrative parallel. It is appointed for men that they move through life and die *once*. There is no repeating of earthly life and physical death. That phase of their existence is over and the next phase for them is the judgment.

So it was appointed for Christ that He move through the bearing of sins in suffering and death *once* and finish that part of His work. There is no repeating of that sacrificial event. He arose from the dead and ascended to the throne in complete triumph.

The next great event for Christ (His third “appearing”) is His second coming. In describing this advent, the writer uses a phrase that has puzzled some readers though it is thoroughly in line with what he has been saying.

It reads: “He shall appear the second time *“apart from sin.”* It means “without further providing for deliverance from sin” or “not to minister remission of sin,” or very simply

(as in NASB and NIV) “not to bear sin.”

The ultimate purpose of His first appearing was “to bear sin,” and that purpose was accomplished in absolute finality on the cross.

For those who have spurned His offer of grace, His second coming will mean judgment. But for believers, He will come bringing “salvation” in all its glorious complete meaning. Our bodies will be delivered from the ravages of time and disease and made like His in resurrection. We will be delivered from the presence of sin and made “like Him” spiritually (1 John 3:2). We will be brought into His presence to share in His personal fellowship and His reign forever.

And how are these described for whom this “eternal weight of glory” is in store? They are “those that *eagerly await Him*” (NASB). They have seen their bondage and condemnation in sin and have turned to Him in faith as the Savior who bore their sin and is their risen Lord.

The result is that they really love Him and call from their hearts with John at the end of Revelation: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” The question is—“Do I have that heart of eager, loving welcome for Him?”

Questions for Hebrews 10

1. In verses 2 and 3, what is the new proof of the imperfection of the Levitical sacrifices?
2. Why is it not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (verse 4)?
3. In verses 5-10, trace the writer’s thought in his use of Psalm 40 to his conclusion in 9b and 10.
4. How did Christ’s sacrifice differ from those of the priests in the Old Testament (verses 11 and 12)?
5. Does verse 14 help you in placing the comma either before or after “forever” in verse 12?

6. In verses 15-18, what is shown by this new quotation from the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31?
7. How is the veil of the tabernacle a "type," picturing the flesh of Christ both before and after the cross (verse 20)?
8. How are we to "draw near" (verse 22)?
9. How does one provoke (stimulate) others to love and good works (verse 24)?
10. Explain how the end of verse 26 is true.
11. What is the punishment for the apostate (verses 27-31)?
12. Compare the exhortation of chapter 6 with that in verses 26-39. Has the writer changed in his view of the readers' relationship to Christ?
13. How does the writer use Habakkuk 2:3-4 compared to Paul's use of it in Galatians 3:11?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 10

Chapter ten brings to a climax the contrast between the Old Testament sacrificial ritual and the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

A heart-warming appeal—to come confidently into God's presence and really worship—follows it. The writer issues the final major warning of the epistle before introducing the life of faith in the triumphant 11th chapter.

The first three verses of chapter 10 point out the inability of the Levitical system to make worshipers perfect.

10:1. For the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

10:2. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

10:3. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

The ceremonial law, symbolic in its very nature, could only present a “shadow of the good things to come” through the work of Messiah. (A shadow indicates the existence and magnitude of something real, but it doesn't have the power to do the work of that real substance.)

The law awaited New Testament revelation to give the “very form” of the real atoning work of Christ. The Word then applies that work to the believing heart, making it perfect in its standing before God and conse-

quently at perfect peace.

Verse two brings in a new aspect: “If the Levitical offerings had made the offerers perfect, would they not have ceased to be offered?” For if the offerer were “cleansed,” his conscience would no longer condemn him or call for any further offering.

But year after year, the offerings reminded the Israelites that their sins still needed atonement. (Since the destruction of the temple, conscientious Jews suffer the agony of not having even a token sacrifice of the Levitical order.)

Verse four declares categorically the impossibility that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

10:4. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

The comparison to Christ is obvious. But we should recall what the writer of Hebrews suggested previously: The value of bulls and goats does not measure up to the value of God's Son; the merely symbolic cleanness of the animal contrasts with the absolute holiness of Christ; an animal is incapable of giving itself voluntarily as a sacrifice, of feeling the awful guilt of sin or the wrath of God against it or of being wholly *for God* in obedience even to death.

The next section (verses 5-10) presents the One whose blood can

take away sin as He is seen by David in Psalm 40:6-8.

10:5. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

10:6. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

10:7. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.

10:8. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein, which are offered by the law;

10:9. Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

10:10. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The writer picks up the voice of the Savior in the messianic section of David's psalm, declaring that the ritual sacrifices are not God's full will nor do they give Him real pleasure. This is deeper than the criticism of Israel's sacrifices and observances in Isaiah 1:11-23.

There, the offerers' insincerity makes the sacrifice unacceptable; here in Psalm 40, it is the offerings themselves. The latter is exactly the point of Hebrews.

The introductory words "Wherefore, when He cometh into the world" show the connection with the preceding verse. Christ became flesh to provide a satisfactory sacrifice—a true atonement for sin.

The quotation is from the early Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint and differs from our Old Testament text in the final words of verse five. The Hebrew literally reads, "Ears hast Thou digged for me." In the epistle it reads, "A body hast Thou prepared

me." There is no known variant in the Hebrew text that might account for the difference.

The Septuagint translators may well have seen that the "digging of ears" for Messiah symbolically stood for His being given a complete body for *obedient* service to God. (Isaiah 50:5 fully confirms the opening of the ear as a symbol of making one obedient.)

So, with possibly some thought of the well-known love of the Greeks for beauty and symmetry, especially as seen in the human body, the translators chose to use the more complete and easily understood symbol, rather than the more striking but more difficult Hebraic picture. The term "body" certainly fits the writer's purpose of presenting Messiah in perfect obedience to the Father's will, giving Himself (emphasized by "body") in sacrifice.

All aspects of atoning sacrifice would be covered by the words used in verses five and six, including that of the whole burnt offering. In the same way, Christ gave Himself totally to God on our behalf, securing our standing in perfect righteousness.

While the end of verse five points to the incarnation as preparation for the work Messiah would do, verse seven opens up His heart and mind as He enters His mission. He is set on a path of absolute obedience to the Father's will, dedicated to the accomplishment of that redemptive purpose.

"In the volume of the book it is written of me" was probably given its fullest exposition on resurrection afternoon, when Christ talked with the two disconsolate disciples returning to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). God

grant that our hearts, too, may “burn within us” as we think over the Old Testament portrayal of His doing the Father’s will.

In verses eight and nine, the writer again cites God’s displeasure with the ritual sacrifices established by the Law and quotes Messiah’s words, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.”

The point of all this is now shown: “He (Messiah, executive of God’s will) takes away the first (old order, Covenant of Sinai, and its ritual sacrifices) that He might establish the second (new order, New Covenant, and the infinite once-for-all sacrifice). So Hebrews shows Psalm 40:6-8 joining Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:1-38 in declaring a fully new order that God will bring in to replace the Mosaic Law.

Behind this promised change, according to verse ten, is the will of Eternal God through which we have been “sanctified.” God has now set us apart for Himself, given us perfect righteousness in Christ and is conforming us to His image. All this was accomplished on the Cross where Jesus Christ’s blood was offered once for all.

The final contrast between the many ineffectual offerings and the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ is given in verses 11-18.

10:11. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

10:12. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

10:13. From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

10:14. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

10:15. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness for us: for after that he had said before,

10:16. This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

10:17. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

10:18. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

The Levitical priest had to offer, day after day, the same sacrifices that could never take away sins. To the Old Testament saints, these only “covered” sins temporarily, as a token, pointing toward the Cross. These sacrifices could not discharge the debt nor satisfy the righteous judgment of God.

In complete contrast, Christ offered one sacrifice for sins “for all time,” as the New American Standard Bible puts it. (Some question whether the phrase refers to the offering for sin or to His sitting down at the right hand of God.)

Although either “for ever” or “for all time” would be correct, the former is preferred. The passage stresses the once-for-all nature of Christ’s work. Verse 14 uses “for ever” with the thought that the one offering did the complete work.

After making his offering, Christ sat down on the right hand of the throne. This beautifully confirms that He finished His redemptive service.

No Levitical priest ever sat down in the tabernacle or temple sanctuary; the reason is obvious. (Stephen’s seeing Christ “standing” shows the extent of the Lord’s sympathy for His martyr and the warmth of His welcome.)

The Greek translation “from then on” (verse 13) (that is, after Christ was seated in honor) indicates that a

period of indefinite time lies between the ascension and his triumphant second coming. We also see this in the “until” of Psalm 110:1. The two messianic psalms mentioned are in perfect accord with Christ’s repeated call for instant expectancy and readiness for His coming.

Lest anyone should possibly miss it, verse 14 again gives the basis of that triumph; God has prepared a people for fellowship with Himself eternally.

“By one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” They are “perfected forever” in the full New Testament sense; they are given a standing in perfect righteousness, their conscience fully cleared, their old Adamic nature taken into death; and they are “risen with Christ” to walk in newness of life as full-grown “sons.”

The section concludes with the witness of the Holy Spirit to the truth just declared. In the promise of the New Covenant through Jeremiah, the Spirit has shown that God will bring in a new order, writing his standards in men’s hearts and minds. He will truly be “God” to them, and they will really be His with all of them knowing him. The writer concludes this section with the climax—“and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

Such a promise implies the same basis as full New Testament salvation, because a complete forgiveness of this kind by a righteous God requires the accomplishment of an infinite sacrifice that only God Incarnate could make. When that infinite sacrifice has been made and on its basis God has fully forgiven His people, there is neither need nor justifi-

cation for further offerings for sin. For the Christian who has really seen the cross, the matter is settled.

The next section is the spiritual highpoint of the chapter and deals with our worship and faithfulness in view of Christ’s finished work.

10:19. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

10:20. By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

10:21. And having a high priest over the house of God;

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

10:23. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for he is faithful that promised);

10:24. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works:

10:25. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

The first four verses encourage us to come into God’s presence. This passage ranks high among other similar ones in Scripture. We now have “boldness to enter the holiest,” to approach the very throne of God. There is nothing brash about it, but a strong, reverent confidence and an assurance of freedom to speak one’s heart.

This privilege is based (note the “therefore”) on the completeness of Christ’s work detailed in preceding chapters. We may come with thanksgiving, petition, adoration, and best of all, for fellowship.

Three ground rules ensure that we are no longer restricted as in Old Testament days. The first—at the end of verse 19—is “by the blood of Je-

sus.” This deals with the judicial aspect. Atonement for sin has been made, so God is free in righteousness to welcome all who believe.

The second is “by a new and living way ... through the veil, that is, His flesh.” The Greek translation reads, “recently slain and living way.” Christ is “the Way” (John 14:6), recently slain but now in resurrection life and power. The aspect here is entrance into the Holiest. In the tabernacle and temple, the great veil hid God’s glory and barred the way into His presence because of man’s sin.

The veil, says Hebrews, was a picture of Christ’s flesh, His human body. It veiled God’s glory within; and, by manifesting God’s perfect standards, it showed man to be a sinner and, without atonement, barred from His presence. But at Christ’s death, the Synoptic Gospels record that the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom. John told of Christ’s flesh being rent by the soldier’s spear.

Hebrews brings it all together. The veil that hid God’s glory and barred the entrance to His presence was rent in the atoning death, and now the “way” into the Holiest is open for every believer. Significant, too, is the fact that the veil was torn, not destroyed or removed. It remained as a testimony to the work accomplished, just as in Revelation 5:6 the Lamb in heaven is “as it had been slain.”

The third basis for confidence in coming to God is that we have “a great high priest over the house of God.” The One to whom we are united by faith, our Representative and Intercessor before the throne, is also in charge of all things in our

heavenly abode. Christ said He was going to prepare a place for us. If He has done this in regard to our permanent dwelling, we can be sure all is prepared for our coming in spirit.

In verse 22, we find the exhortation to which all this has been leading, “Let us draw near.” This, of course, speaks of *consciously* coming into God’s presence. Every believer has been “made near by the blood of Christ,” an unchanging part of our salvation. This “drawing near” is an act of mind, heart and will; it is strongly affected by our spiritual condition. Hebrews lists some needed elements for a good entrance into God’s presence:

“A true heart.” Sincerity is certainly an important part of this, but “true” suggests that our attitudes and affections be in real accord with God’s heart of gracious love.

“In full assurance of faith.” We have clearly seen the object of our faith, the Son of God crucified and risen and exalted. If we have personally appropriated His saving work, we can say with Paul that “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded ...” (2 Timothy 1:12).

“Our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” The blood of Christ in His once-for-all sacrifice has been applied so that our hearts are cleansed and our consciences cleared of any nagging accusations of unatoned guilt.

“And our bodies washed with pure water.” A let-down? No. If our external lives are not clean through the “washing of water by the Word” (Ephesians 5:26), we are not going to enter with confidence into His holy presence. If there is any reference here to baptism, it is to the transfor-

mation of our lives through the consciousness of our union with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection confessed in that ordinance.

The latter part of the section turns to specific appeals for our faithfulness in spiritual life and service.

The first of these is to “hold unswervingly to the confession of our faith,” no matter what pressure came from Jewish nationalism for war with Rome or in opposition to the Christian faith.

We may experience opposition today from humanistic philosophy or a plain rebellion against God. We are to let the truth and blessing embodied in our hope and the knowledge of God’s faithfulness keep us steady in our Christian confession. Hudson Taylor expressed it: “Feed on His faithfulness.”

The second appeal is that we set our minds on others. This will give a sense of unity and spiritual reality to any body of Christians. One sure way to “stimulate love and good works” is to have these qualities ourselves.

The third call almost shocks us: Could Christians, only 35 years after the Cross and resurrection, have gotten into the habit of not meeting with other believers on the Lord’s Day? Evidently some had, for this verse exhorts them to assemble.

If spiritual decline or cooling in their love for Christ has caused them to forsake fellowship, they are in danger of further decline. We must encourage believers to fellowship together and to grow in Christ, especially as we see signs indicating the nearness of His Coming.

The final major warning against apostasy extends from verses 26 to 31.

10:26. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no sacrifice for sins.

10:27. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

10:28. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

10:29. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

10:30. For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

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

In chapter six, the lack of spiritual growth raised the possibility of no real faith existing; here, the forsaking of Christian fellowship raises the same question.

The warning begins, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth ...” The writer does not accuse those staying away from fellowship of such sin (though that would probably cause one to forsake Christian gatherings).

He warns instead, that if there is deliberate continual sinning when one fully understands the truth, then that person has repudiated Christ. There no longer remains any sacrifice for sin since he has rejected the one final sacrifice. He will fear the judgment and raging fire that will consume the adversaries (Isaiah 26:11).

The fate of those who despised Moses’ law was death without mercy

on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (Punishment was for idolatry, breaking the Sabbath, confirmed disobedience to parents, and similar offenses.)

How much more sacred is the person and the work of the Son of God! How much severer punishment, then, does he deserve who has “trampled under foot the Son of God,” denied any sacred significance to His blood (“wherewith he was sanctified,” that is, potentially—just as “bought” is used of false teachers in 2 Peter 2:1), and “treated the Spirit of grace with proud insolence?”

This is apostasy, and just because the apostate doesn't suffer immediate physical death doesn't mean there is no punishment. Dispersions change, but not God's character.

To prove that punishment is certain, the writer of Hebrews quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35 and 36, where Moses sums up his ministry in song. God requires a general judgment (“Vengeance is Mine”) as well as a specific judgment of His professed people.

Hebrews 10:31 summarizes both Christ's awesome warnings of “Gehenna,” “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43 and 44) and Paul's “the terror of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:11). Jonathan Edwards entitled his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an *Angry God*,” but the *Living God* has a greater sense of judgment stemming from His deeply righteous character.

After facing the worst, the writer, as in chapter six, finds grounds to expect the best. In verses 32-35, he makes his appeal:

10:32. But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

10:33. Partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

10:34. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

10:35. Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

The primary appeal is to their original devotion. We might put it like this: “Is the thought of suffering and loss tending to shake your loyalty to Christ? These threats of suffering are not new; you faced that when you first accepted the Gospel. You found power in Christ to endure then, and He is no different today.

“You suffered affliction (as in a wrestling bout), and were made public spectacles with insults and persecutions as you stood side by side with those who were so treated; and you bore it triumphantly. You risked showing sympathy to those in prison; and, when officials seized your property, you accepted it with joy knowing you had an eternal treasure in heaven.”

The writer now presents his summary appeal: “Do not throw away your confidence, which is in Christ and the Father's good purposes. Your life is in His hand and you will be richly rewarded. He will give you power for your daily walk and—for your ministries in this life and throughout eternity—glory.”

The final section (verses 36-39) is a call for patience. It also introduces chapter 11 and presents the “text” passage for that “life of faith” discourse.

10:36. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

10:37. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

10:38. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

10:39. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

The writer notes in his readers' lives more of what, in chapter six, he called "things that accompany salvation," showing his confidence that they are true believers. Their need, then, is for "patient endurance" in their daily lives, endurance through the unexciting periods, the periods of waiting, working and undergoing trial.

Most Christians, as they seek to do God's will, experience these periods. By enduring, they find that God has been doing His work, conforming them to Christ and preparing them for His promised blessing.

Habakkuk 2:3-4, a great Old Testament passage, shows how we can patiently persevere through times of hardship. It is addressed to Jewish people during a testing period that could end at Christ's coming. Verse 37 refers back to it.

It begins: "In just a little while" to

encourage their expectancy; Christ's coming is imminent. "He who is coming will come." This gives the certainty of that coming, just as many of Christ's own declarations do. "And will not tarry" shows He will not be one moment behind the time set in infinite wisdom by the Father.

The next quotation from Habakkuk is famous: "The just (or 'My righteous one') shall live by faith." Paul quotes it in Romans 1:17 to show the key place of faith in salvation and in Galatians 3:11 to show specifically that justification is not by the law but by faith. This concept enlightened Luther and became the watchword of the Reformation.

In Hebrews, it has the same meaning as in Habakkuk; a believer can triumph only one way during trial: "by faith." The next chapter shows faith's outworking in the lives of Old Testament heroes.

This chapter ends with God's warning, "If any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." God grant every one of us the ability to answer: "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who exercise faith to the saving of the soul."

Questions for Hebrews 11

1. Hebrews 11:1-3 gives four functions of faith. Describe each function.
2. Why was Abel's sacrifice better than Cain's? What does Abel say though dead?
3. What special relation with God does Genesis 5:24 say that Enoch enjoyed? What does Hebrews imply as the basis of this relation and of his pleasing God?
4. Trace the functioning of faith in verse 7. (Don't miss the last clause.)

5. Trace the development of faith in Abraham in verses 8-10 and 13-19. How does the final development of Abraham's faith relate to saving faith in Romans 10:9?
6. Can you picture Sarah's conversion from doubt to faith as a result of Genesis 18:10-15? Note the conclusion in naming the son "Isaac" (Laughter).
7. Compare and contrast Isaac's blessing his two sons and Jacob's blessing Joseph's two sons (11:20-21).
8. Show how faith was stimulated and how it functioned in verses 23-26 and 28.
9. To whom might the writer be referring by the various descriptions in verses 33-35a? Note the inclusion of those in 35b-38 who accepted suffering and hardship.
10. Verse 39 confirms verse 2, but what does verse 40 show about how the Old Testament saints will ultimately receive the promised blessing in its fullness?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 11

This is one of the great chapters of the Bible, God's honor roll of the heroes of faith. Its theme or text, given in 10:38, is the grand word from Habakkuk 2:4, "The just shall live by faith," for the chapter is a record of the functioning of faith in the lives of God's heroes through the early centuries.

The introduction (verses 1-3) states some of faith's characteristic operations.

11:1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

11:2. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

11:3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

What we have here is not strictly a definition of faith, not, at least, in its essence. Its essence is shown in Romans 4:5, "to him that worketh not, but believeth." The one who abandons any attempt to earn his acceptance with God and entrusts himself completely to the God of grace and His provision in Christ has exercised saving faith.

The same faith-committal is the principle for Christian living today—just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to live in him (Colossians 2:6).

Faith, then, being of this nature, functions in a variety of ways. Four important examples are cited.

First, faith gives "substance" (assurance of reality) to the things we hope for. To Abraham it gave an assurance of the reality of the city

"whose architect and builder is God" (verse 10). For us, it gives the same assurance concerning Christ's coming and our sharing in His likeness and fellowship eternally.

Second, faith gives certainty in regard to things not seen. Moses (verse 27) could endure "as seeing him who is invisible." So to us by faith spiritual things come to have the greatest certainty: our standing with God in righteousness, Christ's presence with us and the Spirit abiding in us. By the "conviction" of these things we too can endure.

Third, faith gains the commendation of God. It is not just that faith enabled the pious of old to obey God and so to be approved; they were approved for the faith itself. Abraham is the clear example. Genesis 15:6 reads, "And he believed in the Lord; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness." So it is for real faith today.

Fourth, faith enables us to understand what we have experienced, particularly that everything in space and time (literally "ages") was prepared by the commanding word of God without use of pre-existing material. Faith enables this because it sees God as God, the infinite Source

and Orderer of all, the One who has the wisdom necessary for the intricate design of all life, especially man. His word, the expression of His will and power, accomplished all this just as His word does in the new creation.

The next section (verses 4-7) is composed of three citations of faith that brought full acceptance with God.

11:4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

11:5. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

11:6. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

11:7. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

The first citation presents the faith of Abel and brings out the basis of acceptance with God for man in sin. Abel was not accepted just because his attitude was nice; he was accepted because in faith he brought a "more excellent sacrifice" than Cain. This is made doubly sure by the further expression, "God testifying of his gifts" (NIV, "when God spoke well of his offerings").

Abel's sacrifice was better because it confessed the holiness of God, the wages of sin as death and so the necessity of a blood atonement. Thus, though cut off early in life, by the faith in which Abel offered his sacrifice, he still speaks. His

message is, "Acceptance is by the slain Lamb."

The second citation is of Enoch. Every loyal Jew knew the statement of Genesis 5:24, "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." This walk with God was more than just a godly life, though such a life is, of course, a prerequisite. It is the experience of conscious personal fellowship with God, His presence felt, His gracious love appreciated, His strength again appropriated.

Can this happen in an evil day like ours? Yes, Enoch lived in an evil day, too. Faith still gives certainty to things not seen and takes God at His word when He promises His presence and fellowship.

But verse 5 has still more to say. Enoch's walk so pleased God that He put on it the most spectacular mark of approval; He exempted him from death, translating him directly to glory, just as Christ will do for all His own at the rapture.

Verse 6 picks up the thought of pleasing God and points out that without faith any pleasing of God is impossible. In fact, faith is essential from start to finish in spiritual things. One does not even come to God unless he believes that He truly lives and responds to a seeking heart with real and gracious concern.

The third citation is of Noah, who demonstrated that faith is essential to salvation. Noah's deliverance, which beautifully pictures God's spiritual work, begins with the warning of judgment not yet experienced by men but counted certain by faith.

Moved by reverence for God, Noah obeyed and built the ark. He condemned the world by his action

and proclaimed God's provision so that those perishing did so despite their a full opportunity to be saved.

Salvation is wholly of God.

Those who believe enter the ark (believers are "in Christ") and pass through the judgment that falls on the ark, the instrument of salvation. Beyond judgment is the rainbow that declares, "Judgment once executed will not be required again." Noah comes out into a new sphere, worships at a new altar and is heir of this new realm. But the inheritance stressed here in Hebrews is his being "heir of the righteousness which is by faith," the righteousness that guarantees all spiritual blessings because it is, in essence, Christ—"the Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6).

The third section (verses 8-19) gives highlights of Abraham, the giant among the heroes of faith.

11:8. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

11:9. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

11:10. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Amid the splendors of Ur of the Chaldees the call of God came to Abram: "Get out." Ur's sin was advanced; its religion polluted. "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you and I will greatly bless you." That meant giving up the comfort of home and the glory of Ur for an unknown midland out between Mesopotamia and Egypt. It was even off the main caravan routes.

Yet he obeyed! How? By faith. He

trusted the promise of God and by faith saw God—"the God of glory" as Stephen, in this same connection, called Him (Acts 7:2). So the glory of Ur grew dim before God's glory.

Having brought Abram into the land, faith now kept him a pilgrim. The land as a material thing was not the goal, so Abram did not settle down. That could mean stagnation. His life is marked by a tent as befits a pilgrim.

The figure continues: "He looked for a city," God's city, the place of nearness and fellowship. It has "foundations" just as it is seen in Revelation 21:14, 19; it is unshakably established in the glorious attributes of Christ symbolized by the precious stones.

The classic comment on the end of the verse, "whose architect and builder is God," is worth noting. This city is not Babel.

11:11. Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

Verse 11 brings Sarah into the account. When the Lord visited Abraham (Genesis 18:1-15) and was eating dinner under a tree by the tent door, He renewed his promise of a son. Sarah was listening inside the tent and laughed to herself at the idea. The Lord rebuked her, reminded her of God's power and repeated the promise.

Now Sarah was afraid and lied to the Lord. Hebrews points out her spiritual recovery. Whether by the Lord's rebuke or by the example of Abraham's faith (or both), she now trusted the God of the impossible and in due time gave birth to her first-

born son. So, by the operation of faith the laugh of doubt was changed into joyous laughter celebrated in the son's name, Isaac (Laughter).

11:12. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

As suggested in verse 12, this was the first step in the fulfillment of God's promise both to make of Abraham a great nation with descendants "as numerous as the stars in the sky in number and as the sand on the seashore" and also in Abraham's seed to bless "all nations on earth" (Genesis 22:17-18).

All this took place through one who was "as good as dead" that Abraham might begin, in faith, to lay hold of Jehovah as the God of resurrection and that we might see that the son of promise was given by the supernatural work of God as in the new birth today.

11:13. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Other blessings also result from God's delays: better appreciation of the gift, opportunity to be more occupied with the one who promised and the spiritual development described in verses 13-16. These patriarchs all "died in faith, not having received the promises," not even the Promised Land in actual possession.

And none of God's people in Old Testament days saw the ultimate fulfillment in Christ, but in varying degrees of faith they all—Abel to the last believer to die before Simeon—saw the promises "afar off, and were

persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Faith such as this is not to be discounted.

11:14. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

11:15. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

11:16. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Verses 14-16 describe the mind of these pilgrims. They are seeking "a country of their own." They are not thinking of the country from which they came out (Mesopotamia, Egypt or any other), for they could have returned had they wished. They had their eyes set on a better goal, the heavenly country.

Real faith kept not only Abraham a pilgrim, but also kept all Old Testament believers pilgrims in spirit; and God fully acknowledged them as His own. And note too: They sought a "country." God has prepared a "city," where there is greater provision for comfort as well as nearness for frequent fellowship. When God prepares the city, the fellowship will be glorious.

11:17. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promise offered up his only begotten son,

11:18. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

11:19. Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Now we turn back to Abraham for the highest point of this great chapter, the climactic test of Abraham's faith. The command is re-

corded in Genesis 22:2, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest ... and offer him [upon a mountain] for a burnt offering.”

Here is severity beyond any other human test. (Is the depth of the test in proportion to the height of Abraham’s place with God?)

Abraham faced a combination of fierce dilemmas: It is wrong to kill, yet now it is commanded by God; this is his only son (Ishmael, child of the flesh, doesn’t count with God), the one in whom all the promises of God rest; and Abraham’s love for Isaac is God-given (cited in the command itself), yet now for love to God he is to slay him.

Only in one way can he obey—by faith, faith that laid hold on God as transcending this whole incomprehensible, impossible situation; faith that knows God is right, infinitely loving, and that He is the God of resurrection. (Note Genesis 22:5, “I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and [*we will*] come again to you.”)

In the obedience of faith, Abraham went to Moriah, built the altar, laid the sacrifice on it, and raised the knife. He had touched, in fellowship, the Father facing the cross; and now, as he hears the word of release, he touches Him again, this time in the joy of receiving his son as from the dead.

The deepest trial had become his highest triumph; the development of his faith had reached God’s goal (He is the God of resurrection; compare Romans 10:9). Abraham had become “the friend of God” (2 Chronicles 20:7), a place opened up by Christ to every believer today (John 15:15).

Verses 20, 21 cite two final bless-

ings given in faith, one by Isaac of his two sons and the second by Jacob of his two grandsons born to Joseph.

11:20. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

11:21. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

Isaac blessed both Jacob and Esau by faith in the sense that faith sees the future in the light of God’s promises and thus ministers His blessing. That, of course, is not the whole story here. Isaac preferred Esau and planned to give him the great prophetic blessing though he knew God had chosen Jacob. Jacob, at Rebekah’s prompting, deceived his blind father and secured the blessing.

When Isaac realized the situation, a crisis resulted. All of self within him urged, “reverse it. It’s your blessing. You’ve been cheated.” But then the Lord’s earlier word giving Jacob the preeminence came strongly to mind, and faith saw that God had overruled a bad situation to the accomplishment of His purpose.

So Isaac bowed to God and in faith gave the decision: Jacob shall be blessed. Esau’s blessing is marked by a clear view of the future; he is to inhabit the harsher, drier land and “live by the sword.” In periods of restlessness he will throw off Israel’s yoke from his neck (Genesis 27:39-40). But it is to two more incidental things that Genesis and Hebrews direct us. As Joseph placed the two boys before his father, he put Manasseh, the older, on Jacob’s right and Ephraim on his left.

Jacob, ready for the blessing, crossed his arms. Joseph objected. Jacob in effect replied that he knew

exactly what he was doing; God's high blessing was for the second born, just as for Jacob himself. (This is often called the "law of the second born"—not Cain but Abel, not Ishmael but Isaac, not the child of natural birth but of new birth.)

The other detail, especially pointed out in Hebrews, is Jacob's leaning on the top of his staff as he worshiped. At Bethel God had revealed Himself to Jacob and he had responded. But through most of his life, Jacob continued to count on his own strength and cleverness (particularly with Laban), even resisting, for a time, God's wrestling angel (Genesis 32:24, 25).

Now that his independence is gone and he can minister blessing and worship by faith, his dependence on God is pictured by "leaning upon the top of his staff."

Faith was awakened in Joseph by the promises in his early dreams, and faith was exercised throughout his spectacular career. But the instance cited in Hebrews is an example from the end of his life.

11:22. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

Hebrews implies that Joseph's faith did not necessarily come to its highest point in "the great famine relief plan" (though that certainly required real faith on his part); it may have been in the provision of his last will. Joseph may, by faith, minister bread to famine-stricken Egypt, yet he still knows that Egypt is not the permanent place for God's people. By faith in God's word and character, he is sure that God will take them back

to the inheritance He promised to them.

Beyond that, faith in God has fully united Joseph with God's people; and, though he is second only to Pharaoh in Egypt, he orders that his body not be buried there but that his bones be carried to Canaan. They would be a continuous witness to Joseph's faith and a powerful reminder of Israel's inheritance hope.

Close to the passage on Abraham and Sarah in importance and spiritual power is the presentation of Moses' faith.

11:23. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

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

11:25. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

11:26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

11:27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

11:28. Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

11:29. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

Moses' faith began with his parents. Faith, of course, cannot be exercised vicariously; but honest, active parental faith gives children a rich spiritual heritage. To be able to say, "I know Christian faith is real; I have seen it in my home," gives a solid bulwark against the tide of the world even in these days.

In relation to a godless govern-

ment, Moses' parents hid the child by faith, seeing God and His purposes for His people as vastly higher than the immediate governmental order.

But are we not to obey government? The early church resolved the dilemma this way: "We ought to (must) obey God" (Acts 5:29). They obeyed the government by quietly undergoing the penalty it imposed.

In a sense this is what Moses' parents did. With faith encouraged by the attractiveness of the babe, which they took as a sign from God, they put Moses in the Nile, the appointed place of the penalty, committing him to God for His working. God arranged the transfer to the palace.

So it is spiritually. Faith puts the soul into the place of judgment, trusting God to do His saving work and bring us into the palace of the true King.

The faith of Moses' parents proved not to be barren. When their son was grown, he showed the same strong faith in Jehovah. By that faith he "refused" the high personal advantage belonging to a prince of Egypt who was "the son of Pharaoh's daughter" and possibly heir to the throne.

Some may have said at the time, as many would say under similar circumstances today: "How much he could have done for his people!" He might have become their patron by preserving his own status and wealth, but every advantage gained would have bound them and himself tighter to Egypt.

By faith Moses "chose" to suffer affliction rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of Egypt which offered pleasures, as the world does today "for a short time." The ill treatment, too,

would be "for a short time;" but it would be "with the people of God," where a believer belongs. The choice was by the faith that makes the unseen things of God's promise real and glorious to our hearts.

Moses came to a conclusion that seems utter nonsense to the world, regarding "reproach for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt." Faith had directed the eyes of his heart to both the eternal reward Messiah will give to those who suffer for His sake as well as to the present joy of being in the center of God's will.

So Moses "left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king." As he went out into the Sinai desert for the years of training, "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Faith enables the critical choice and provides endurance for the long years of discipline.

"Through faith he kept the Passover... ." The faith that enabled Israel to fulfill its part in the Passover came, of course, from God, but largely in response to Moses' own faith. He fully realized the judgment pronounced on the firstborn and accepted God's way of salvation—the death of the lamb—as the substitute.

The writer of Hebrews picks out the sprinkling of blood for special emphasis in accord with his deep concern for the personal appropriation of "Christ our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7) by each of his readers.

Passing through the Red Sea is left as the climax of Moses' faith. The Red Sea was the line of demarcation between slavery and freedom. It was also a barrier walling them in. So it is spiritually. The way out of bondage to sin and self is death to it, but who

can die and rise a new man by his own power?

The message of Exodus and the New Testament is: By faith go forward; God has made a way. For just as Israel walked dry shod through the opened sea, we have walked through "the Red Sea of Calvary" in which we have died with Christ and have risen to walk in newness of life.

The conquest of Jericho and the preservation of a woman and her family occupy the next two verses.

11:30. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

11:31. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

Faith that enables God's people to obey God's commands even when they seem foolish is clearly seen at Jericho. Israel, led by Joshua, marched thirteen times around the great double walls because they trusted God. He responded to that obedience of faith and brought down the walls.

The inspired application to us today is 2 Corinthians 10:4, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds."

In Rahab there is an even more important work of faith demonstrated. A prostitute in the city, she hears of the work of God for His people and her heart responds in faith, making her God's own, transforming her life and uniting her to God's people as a valuable aid. With her immediate family she is spared in the overthrow of Jericho. She later marries Salmon of the line of Christ, be-

coming David's great-great-grandmother.

Now comes a very rapid survey of other heroes of faith, some who witnessed in splendid success and others who witnessed equally well in deep suffering and death.

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

11:33. Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

11:34. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

First, there is a selection of Judges: Gideon (whose faith rose to God's challenge), Barak (whose faith rose as he recognized Deborah's faith), Samson (whose faith returned mightily after he suffered), and Jephthah (whose faith overcame resentment as he gained deliverance for Israel).

Then comes a quick survey of David, Samuel and the prophets who through faith subdued kingdoms (David), wrought righteousness (Samuel, David, prophets), obtained promises (David, Solomon), stopped the mouths of lions (Daniel), quenched the violence of fire (Daniel's three friends), escaped the edge of the sword (Elijah), out of weakness were made valiant (various judges, perhaps the Maccabees). "Women had their dead raised to life" (widow's son by Elijah, Shunammite's son by Elisha).

11:35. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

11:36. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

11:37. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

11:38. (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

In verses 35b-38 still others witnessed in suffering and death: “tortured, not accepting deliverance (that is by compromise, as Jeremiah) to obtain a full reward; mockings, scourging, imprisonment (Micaiah); stoned (Naboth, Zechariah); sawed in two (one tradition says Isaiah was); destitute, afflicted ... in dens and caves” (David and his men; the Maccabees were pursued to caves and attacked on the Sabbath). Of all these “the world was not worthy.”

The last two verses summarize the message of the chapter and show the limitation of the Old Testament saints.

11:39. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

11:40. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

These Old Testament heroes differed widely in character and situation but were the same in that they all gained God’s approval, the “Well done” of God through faith. By faith they saw God. They saw the future glory as real. They laid hold of God’s power to go forward in His pathway.

They were also the same in another way: Not one of them “received the promise” in the sense of receiving Messiah’s accomplished work, the Spirit given to abide and the kingdom blessings. Of even John the Baptist, who introduced the Savior to Israel, Christ said, “There is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28).

Verse 40 brings it to the point: God has provided the “better thing” for us—the fullness of the promise in Christ. In the end the Old Testament saints will be “made perfect,” but not apart from us.

Today, this “better thing” is ours. How fully are we enjoying it?

Questions for Hebrews 12

1. Who are these witnesses in verse 1?
2. What was “the joy set before Christ?”
3. How has Christ brought faith “to completeness” (verse 2)?
4. What reasons for encouragement in suffering are given in verses 3-11?
5. Does verse 9 imply that breakdown in respect for parents makes subjection to God more unlikely or difficult?
6. In verse 13, what are “straight paths” and why are they needed?

7. What is this "holiness" (sanctification) in verse 14?
8. How is Esau a warning to us?
9. To what event are verses 18-21 referring and what is the writer inferring from it?
10. What does Mt. Zion in v. 22 symbolize in view of all that follows through verse 24?
11. What are the essential ideas of the brief warning in verses 25-27? Who "warned them on earth?"

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 12

Despite the frequent feeling people have that the important part of Hebrews ends with 12:2, the rest of the epistle is far from a letdown.

Chapter 12 verse 3 and following shows how by our Father's discipline we may successfully run the Christian "race." The section powerfully describes the difference between the legal order of Sinai and the new order of grace in Christ. It concludes with a brief, sharp warning and exhortation.

However, the first two verses of the chapter are among the greatest in the epistle, a striking application to our lives of the heroic testimony of chapter 11.

12:1. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

12:2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In the strongest words the writer urges us to realize that this "cloud" of witnesses, described in the previous chapter, throngs around us to tell us there is a way to live triumphantly and to win the garland of God's "Well done." We are in a race. If the witnesses are seen as in an amphitheater, they are there not as spectators, but as those who have completed their "events" and who testify that victory can be won by faith.

And this is no leisurely, pleasant

pastime; the word translated "race" in verse 1 means a grueling contest, most frequently used of a wrestling match. It is the word from which we get the word "agony."

So, as the athlete at the track discards all heavy or unnecessary clothing, we are not to let ourselves be weighed down with "encumbrances"—things not necessarily bad in themselves but hindrances like excess social, athletic or recreational activities and overuse of proper things like food or relaxation.

And more importantly, we need to "throw off the sin that so easily entangles us" or "fits (around) us so well." In a sense, any sin "easily entangles us" or "fits us so well" since it is an assertion of our own will against God's. But this verse seems more specific.

For the readers at the time, this would seem to center on conformity to Judaism. (It would "fit them well" as Jews racially and "easily entangle them"). For us today, there is the equally perilous tendency to conform to the world. It "fits us so well," entangles us so easily. But the Word calls conformity "sin," sin that breaks our fellowship with God and blocks our spiritual progress.

Peer pressure may add its force to this sin, and peer pressure doesn't

cease with graduation from high school or college. So then, we are to run this race and press forward in this contest with sin, self and Satan "with patient endurance" (or "perseverance") by the strength that faith knows is in Christ.

We can find real help, too, in the truth given in the phrase "set before us" or "laid out for us." He who is "too wise to make a mistake and too loving to be unkind" is the one who has marked out the course. The provision in Christ will be adequate to the need.

In verse 2 the source of our strength and inspiration is directly stated. "Looking away" from all that would distract, discourage or intimidate us, we are to "fix our eyes on Jesus," running His race in the pathway of man in dependence on Him.

As such, He is the "Author and Perfecter of faith." "Author" is the word translated "captain" or "leader" in 2:10. It has the same basic idea of "trailblazer" or (in military usage) "point man."

Christ has opened the path of faith in such clarity and fullness that, both as to moving in dependence on the Father and accomplishing the chief content of faith, He is its Author.

Paul has shown (Galatians 3:23,25) that the coming and work of Christ had made such an all-important change in regard to faith that he could say, "Before faith came" and "Now that faith has come."

In the same way, Christ has brought faith to completeness both in attitude (He lives in us and is our life, Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 3:4) and doctrinal content (He has revealed the Father perfectly, has ac-

complished the redemptive sacrifice once for all and has become the source of a new race in resurrection life). The faith of the Old Testament heroes was so commendable personally just because it had to anticipate, in some measure, these things.

"Looking to Jesus," we see Him here as He approached the cross. The writer does not, at this point, emphasize particularly the infinite agony of being "made sin for us" or of bearing the wrath of God. As an example to us in running our race, the bearing of the external sufferings was more than sufficient.

Crucifixion was so dreadful that it was reserved for the lowest criminals. It was too cruel, too utterly shameful, ever to be undergone by a Roman citizen whatever his crimes. (Even under Nero, Paul, as a Roman citizen, was slain by the sword.)

Christ endured it all, "despising the shame." It was not that He did not feel the shame. He was the spotless, infinitely sensitive Son of God, stripped, jeered, and left to die in utter agony as the lowest criminal. He "despised the shame" (NIV "scorning its shame") because, compared to "the joy set before Him," it was a small thing.

What, then, was this "joy set before Him?" Primarily it was the joy of accomplishing the Father's will, the providing of redemption for man, "that God might be just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus."

Ultimately it meant "bringing many sons to glory," the winning of a "bride" for himself to share His honor and fellowship forever. He loved the Father and us enough to endure even the "cup," the wrath of God against sin.

In the section that follows (3-11) the subject is still preparation for running well in the Christian race, especially emphasizing the value of God's discipline.

12:3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

12:4. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

12:5. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

12:6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

12:7. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

12:8. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Continued hostility from unbelievers leads to the danger of discouragement. The way to guard against that danger is to consider in a fresh and careful look how much Christ suffered at the hands of his opponents and to draw on His strength.

The writer reminds the Hebrew Christians that in their struggle against sin they have not yet been called on to resist to the point of death (verse 4). Neither have we.

So an active faith in Christ as the pioneer Runner will assure the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Dealing with discouragement in the Christian's race naturally leads to

the subject of God's discipline, which is now dealt with in as complete a way as anywhere in the New Testament.

First, the writer reminds them of the exhortation in Proverbs 3:11, 12 where "sons" are told not to throw aside the Lord's chastening as something worthless. Nor are they to let the experience, intended by the Lord as "reproof," throw them into the "slough of despond" as though life were hopeless and God didn't care.

Quite the contrary, He disciplines just because He loves us and, as a good father, He administers appropriate punishment on everyone He receives as a son.

The deeply comforting conclusion from this is that, if we undergo chastening, we know God is dealing with us as with sons. Beyond that, there is no son that the father does not discipline; if one were to receive no discipline—when this is something in which all sons share—he would be an illegitimate child, not a son (verse 8).

A son has a place of honor as an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ. He is God's representative here and Christ's associate on the throne for eternity. As such, he needs training now so he may conduct himself in accord with such a position.

An illegitimate child would have no such place or responsibility; he would need no training of this kind. Our undergoing discipline points to our really being sons.

12:9. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

12:10. For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

In verses 9 and 10 the writer draws on an argument from discipline by human parents. In the usual household of that day, parents maintained rather strict discipline; the writer can say without hesitation, "we respected them for it."

Today, with frequently little or no parental discipline, one can hear the complaint from college students failing courses, "Why didn't my parents make me learn to study?" Certainly Christian young people who have had consistent and loving discipline honor their parents for it and find themselves at least somewhat better prepared to honor and obey God.

The writer's argument is, of course, that if we honor earthly parents for their having disciplined us, how much more should we be in reverent subjection to God, "the father of our spirits," particularly when we consider the contrast in attitude between earthly parents and God.

Our earthly parents, in human fallibility, disciplined us as seemed best to them; but He infallibly "disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness."

The expression "Father of our spirits" (verse 9) not only designates God in contrast to human parents but also shows His more immediate relation to the spiritual part of our being. The "image of God" given in creation and "the new man" constituted in the new birth are both centered in the immaterial aspect of a person though they certainly affect our bodies.

The expression "and live" (verse 9), as the result of being "in reverent subjection to" God, covers the whole sweep of eternal life from initial sal-

vation to eternity in glory.

The holiness of which God would have us to be "partakers" (verse 10) is conformity to His character as revealed in Christ (compare Romans 8:28, 29). In Romans, God uses the "all things working together for good" to conform us to Christ. In Hebrews He uses discipline. They are hardly contradictory.

12:11. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Verse 11 begins with a statement so obvious one wants to smile. "Now no discipline for the moment seems joyful but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (NIV "a harvest of righteousness and peace," nicely reflecting the biblical order: righteousness then peace).

The final phrase brings the whole to its crucial point: *the tragedy of wasted suffering*. If we are not "trained by it," as God intended, we have suffered totally in vain.

Verses 12 and 13 form, in somewhat symbolic language, a brief, practical exhortation.

12:12. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;

12:13. And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

"Wherefore" recalls the high value of the Lord's discipline in responsible hearts. So the appeal is made, "Lift up (in strong service for God) the hands that have been hanging limp (in disuse) and strengthen the knees that have grown feeble (by avoiding real climbing)."

And for the sake of those who are

“lame,” see that the paths you make are straight and smooth. We don’t want the lame to trip and be thrown and so be disabled. We want them to enjoy safe exercise on those paths and be healed. God grant that the paths we make in our walk meet the challenge of this appeal.

The next group of verses (14-17) unites exhortation concerning the godly pathway with the warning example of Esau.

12:14. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

12:15. Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

12:16. Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

12:17. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

The word translated “follow” actually means “pursue.” We are to make every effort possible to be at peace with all people. But the writer immediately adds “and holiness” because compromise with evil or any other unholy method in the pursuit of peace ruins the whole thing and is a blot on the testimony of Christ.

Beyond that, the pursuit of holiness is essential to our being children of God. Being set apart for God with Christ as our sanctification, our holiness (1 Corinthians 1:30) is an integral part of salvation. Without a growing conformity to Christ, our Christian life is barren if not open to question as to its reality.

Verse 15 follows up the question of reality of salvation by exhorting all to “see to it that no one fails (‘comes

short’ as in Romans 3:23) of the grace of God.”

Every Christian is put on alert both in this matter and in regard to any break in holiness among brethren whether it be the “bitterness” of angry conflict or any other “bitter root” of sin, which springing up, causes trouble and deeply mars Christ’s testimony, “defiling many.”

Speaking of defilement prompts the writer of Hebrews to warn against tolerating immorality among professed members of the body of Christ. Though discipline in this matter may be painful and especially difficult in our day, it is just so much the more an absolute necessity. The breakdown of moral standards in the world puts every Christian on the alert; our standard is purity in thought, word and action.

From this the writer turns to warn, with real emphasis, against the rise of the “profane (godless) man like Esau” (verse 16) among the believers. He is not thinking, at least not primarily, of the use of godless language.

His warning is against disdain for spiritual values, “godless” not in the sense of being an atheist or agnostic, but in accord with the character of the man of the flesh (of which Esau was a type) who is totally unconcerned about spiritual things.

To him, for instance, the deity of Christ, the meaning of the cross, and the spiritual nature of the church are simply of no importance. Like Esau, who sold his spiritual privileges as the firstborn for “a single meal” of red stew, these godless ones, without a moment’s hesitancy, throw away the message of life eternal in Christ.

Verse 17 warns the readers that

there is a point at which it becomes too late. Should they (like Esau) then want the blessing and seek it with tears, they (again like Esau) are rejected; they have eliminated all that might lead them to true repentance and saving faith.

In the next section (verses 18-24) the writer pictures mount Sinai, emblem of the covenant of law, in overwhelming contrast to Mount Zion, emblem of the new covenant of grace (compare Galatians 4:24 and following verses), in order to dissuade any reader from turning back to Judaismism.

12:18. For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

12:19. And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more;

12:20. (For they could not endure that which was commanded; And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:

12:21. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

12:22. But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

12:23. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

12:24. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

In a burst of eloquence the writer pictures Sinai at the giving of the law and the establishing of the old covenant. The scene reflects the nature of the covenant. Its emphasis was on the external, its law was on tables of stone and its mountain could not be "touched."

At Sinai's top, fire flamed up, emblem of the righteous judgment of the Holy One; darkness and gloom spread over all below as the result of the fire.

Now a "tempest," a whirlwind, enters the scene in readiness to sweep away the condemned.

A trumpet calls Israel to this mighty encounter at Sinai; but, when the people heard the voice of God, it was so awesome they asked that it not speak any further. They could not endure what was commanded. Even if an animal touched the mountain, it must be put to death.

The whole scene with its significance was so terrifying that even Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling" (verse 21).

This, with all its fearful gloom, is what Judaism actually offered; and the same is true of any religious system today that bases acceptance with God on a man's efforts to keep His law.

Our mountain is Zion (verse 22), mount of the God of grace revealed to David who built his house there. It is not unto the desert of Sinai but unto "the city of the living God," the heavenly Jerusalem, the city for which the patriarchs looked (11:16), that they and we shall yet come to as seen in Revelation 21. From that city the unbelieving follower of Judaism is excluded; his choice limits him to the earthly city. But connected with the city to which we have come in our spiritual position are "myriads of angels in festal assembly" celebrating, we are sure, the victory of "David's Greater Son."

And we have come "to the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (verse 23), sharing a place of

honor with “the Firstborn” as “firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb” (Revelation 14:4 and compare James 1:18). We have come “to God, the Judge of all” as being fully accepted by Him in the perfect righteousness of the Savior.

In the same way we have come to “the spirits of righteous men made perfect” (verse 23), that is, made righteous in Christ, “the Lord our Righteousness,” and now made perfect in His presence.

The climax of these glorious associations of Mount Zion is, of course, “Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant” (verse 24). It is He, primarily, who gives the glory to this covenant—its infinite superiority to the old in every way. Chief of these ways is the value of the atoning blood which “sprinkled” on the hearts of men, brings them into all the benefits of this new and final covenant of God with man.

In describing this blood, the writer uses a phrase worthy of its place as the conclusion of this section of inspired eloquence. He designates it “blood that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

Abel’s blood cried to God for vengeance; the blood of Jesus speaks of pardon, acceptance and perfect peace for the believer.

The final warning of the epistle sets the tone and suggests the movement of thought of the chapter’s final section.

12:25. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

12:26. Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

12:27. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken remain.

12:28. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

12:29. For our God is a consuming fire.

The form of the opening appeal suggests that behind the voice of both Abel’s blood calling for judgment and Christ’s blood sprinkled for pardon and peace is the voice of God calling to man in his need.

So the writer’s appeal, “See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks,” introduces the warning: “If those did not escape who refused the One speaking on Sinai, how much more certainly shall we not escape if we turn away from the one who now speaks from Heaven?” (verse 25). Christ ministers all blessing to the person who hears, in faith, that divine Speaker.

God’s voice from Sinai then shook the earth (verse 26); but now He has said in effect, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens” (heaven of the planets and stars, Haggai 2:6).

And God’s saying “Yet once more” shows He is speaking of the consummation judgment in which He will remove the shakable in order that the unshakable (spiritual) may manifestly remain. And note well: The kingdom we receive (with blessings beyond measure) is unshakable.

“Therefore, (literally) let us have grace” (verse 28). It certainly means more than just “hold to the doctrine of the grace of God.” NASB translates

it “show gratitude,” which fits the context.

The expression may, however, have the fuller, stronger idea: “Responding deeply to God’s grace, let us give to that grace the central place in our lives.”

The text continues, “by which we may offer to God well-pleasing service with reverence and awe.” A true appreciation of God’s grace is a mighty incentive to give one’s life in service to Him and in no way lessens the

healthy sense of reverence and awe.

That “godly fear” has its basis in the final word of the chapter, “Our God is a consuming fire.” Before him all sham goes up in smoke; all “wood, hay and stubble” is reduced to ashes; and the dross is steadily eliminated from the precious metal of real Christian character.

May we be open continuously in mind and heart to that Great Refiner’s work.

Questions for Hebrews 13

1. Suggest two who did entertain angels unknowingly and describe the results (v. 2).
2. The “but” of the KJV (in v. 4) is really “for.” How does this affect the translation of the first two clauses? (Compare a recent version.)
3. Why is covetousness forbidden in the law and warned against in the New Testament when it doesn’t seem to harm anyone?
4. The “leaders” in verse 7 seem to have finished their course. They “*have* spoken the word” and the “issue of their manner of life” is before the readers. Is verse 8 brought in to show one who does not pass on but is always available for counsel, encouragement or any other need?
5. What does it mean in verse 9 to have one’s “heart established by grace” in contrast to being occupied with foods?
6. To what does the “right to eat of an altar” (v. 10) refer? What does it picture today?
7. What does it mean in verse 13 to “go forth unto Christ outside the camp?”
8. What is the basic sacrifice we may offer to God (see Romans 12:1-2).
9. In verses 15-16, what are two types of sacrifices we may offer to God
10. Using the data of verse 17, describe a proper elder and the believer’s relation to him.
11. Verses 20 and 21: What doctrines of the Christian faith are referred to in this great benediction?

Let's Dine with Him on Hebrews 13

As we come to the final chapter of Hebrews, we see the full evidence that we have been dealing with an epistle despite all its similarities to the essay or sermon.

Not only do we have the typical personal notes and greetings characteristic of the end of a New Testament epistle here in chapter 13, but we have a well-ordered section of practical instructions (as in a typical Pauline letter) and a brief summary of the epistle's message. The author also exhorts his readers to take action appropriate to the truth declared.

The first group of practical exhortations calls for the active exercise of Christian love.

13:1. Let brotherly love continue.

13:2. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

13:3. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

The basic exhortation takes up Christ's "new commandment" that His disciples "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). How closely their love approximated the standard that Christ set we do not know. But the writer does imply that they already have this love; his word is "Let brotherly love continue."

This is often the real test; does it continue *whatever* the circumstances? It was those (about whom second-century Romans remarked, "How these Christians love each

other!") whose testimony conquered the Roman world. (It might have surprising results if tried today!)

The next command reaches beyond the local group. "Do not forget to show love to strangers." Those in mind may well have been traveling Christians, but the author makes no such restriction. The motivation given is striking to say the least: "For thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

The two well-known Old Testament examples are Abraham's welcome for the three "men" at his tent in Mamre and Lot's hospitality to two of the three that same evening.

Lot's guests, after an experience that revealed the moral state of Sodom, brought Lot and his family out of the city before destroying it.

The third guest of Abraham's was the Lord Himself. Despite Sarah's unbelief, He gave Abraham absolute assurance regarding the promised son; and He taught him a strong lesson about persevering prayer. (Does Hebrews not speak of entertaining the Lord unawares because He now dwells in our hearts?)

The third call to exercise love in a practical way is to keep in mind those who are unjustly imprisoned, visiting them and caring for their needs with a heart that fully shares

their anguish. Christ describes exactly this in Matthew 25:36, in his commendation of the “sheep ... on his right hand” when He said, “I was in prison, and you came unto—me.” That should be incentive enough for any Christian.

The same course of action is commanded for those suffering ill-treatment, and the motivation is “as being also yourselves in the body.” It would be very attractive to interpret this to mean our being fellow-members in the body of Christ, but probably the true understanding is the more mundane “as being also ourselves still in the physical body” (and subject to the same treatment).

The subject of marriage quite naturally follows and is briefly dealt with in verse 4.

13:4. Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

The King James Version renders the first two clauses as declarative statements: “Marriage is honorable and the bed is undefiled.” But the rest of the passage is more of an exhortation.

The word introducing the second half of the verse is definitely “for” instead of “but.” Prominent modern versions have recognized this and rendered the verse, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Marriage was ordained by God before the fall in order that man might have “a help suitable to him” and experience the loving fellowship that pictures Christ and His bride spiritually. Even today, the family is the primary strength of the social fabric.

“And let the marriage relation be undefiled” by impurity before marriage and unfaithfulness after. The restraining factor here is most solemn: the awesome judgment of God on fornication and adultery. Revelation 21:8 declares the “immoral” have their part with murderers and idolators in “the lake of fire.”

The exhortations continue with an injunction against covetousness. God’s remedy is found in verses 5 and 6.

13:5. Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

13:6. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

From discussing sexual self-indulgence, the writer turns to the selfish desire for money. We may properly translate it, “Let your way of life be free from the love of money.” This love is “the root of all sorts of evil” according to 1 Timothy 6:10 and is itself a manifestation of the “self” we are to “reckon dead” in Romans 6:11.

Thus we are to “be content with what we have” in view of the surpassing treasure of God’s abiding presence and blessing. As the fact of His presence becomes real to us and we appropriate His blessings, we will be able to say: “I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me? Men may take my money, but they can’t take away one single spiritual gift or any part of the comfort of His presence.”

Verses 7-9 show the reader’s proper relation to spiritual leaders and to the faith they have taught. The writer reminds us of the one who

is ever available as Leader, Counselor and Enabler.

13:7. Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

13:8. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.

13:9. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you.” These may have included some of the apostles and their associates, as well as other leaders who had heard the message directly from them. Their service to Christ calls for our giving them high honor and a place of influence in our memory.

So, we are to “consider the outcome of their way of life” and “imitate their faith.” The outcome of their way of life was that the gospel spread throughout the Roman world. And though these leaders’ lives may not have been perfect, their faith was right, and they were to be imitated consistently. To the readers of the epistle, these leaders had ministered God’s Word.

Now their course is being completed. “The issue of their way of life” is fully manifest and they are slipping away, no longer available to counsel or comfort. But there is One—the Author and object of our faith—whom we are to imitate. He will never slip away or become unavailable: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever.”

Christ is “the same” in all divine unchangeableness, yet in His humanity He came to know, by per-

sonal experience, man’s changes from birth to death. (Does John 8:57 indicate He experienced signs of aging—so much so that the Jews should think He might be approaching 50 years when He was actually 32?) Now in resurrection—even to His humanity—He is “the same.”

“Yesterday” He came to earth in infinite grace and perfectly revealed the Father’s heart. He made the atoning sacrifice on Calvary and rose in triumph over sin and death. He will remain the same mighty Savior to the end.

“Today” He is seated in honor and authority at God’s right hand. He intercedes for us and causes all things to work together for good that we should be conformed to His image.

“Forever” He will continue to be a Man in the glory, united to us and sharing His place, His fellowship and his reign. Through it all, He remains unchangingly available as the Counselor and Lord who gave Himself for us.

Realizing the danger of being led astray by cleverly presented false doctrine (then and now), the writer warns against being “carried away by varied and strange teachings.” However attractive or fine a teaching sounded, the readers were to check it by the Word given through the apostles and their associates.

Logically, the writer’s mind turns to the principle that most clearly distinguishes the revelation of God from man’s various religious philosophies—the principle of God’s grace in Christ.

It is this that establishes and strengthens the believer and calls out his love and loyalty, not preoccupa-

tion with legalistic regulations such as the dietary laws of Judaism (or the stranger theories of the Gnostic heresy that were beginning to appear). Being occupied with dietary law is “unprofitable” (but playing with heresy is perilous).

A new and striking picture of Christ's relation to Judaism and the consequent call to the Christians is presented in verses 10-14.

13:10. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

13:11. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

13:12. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13:13. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

13:14. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

The priests of Israel were given the right to use certain sacrifices for food after the blood had been poured out for God and the inward fat burned on the altar. Every Christian is a priest and has an altar of the highest spiritual significance, from which he draws his spiritual nourishment—feeding spiritually on Christ, his Sacrifice. From this altar, the follower of Judaism is necessarily excluded; he has rejected the Sacrifice Himself.

A parallel between Christ's death and the major sin offering of the Old Testament ritual is now pointed out. When the bullock for a major sin offering (sin of a priest or all the people) was slain, its blood was taken into the tabernacle for sprinkling and its fat was burned on the altar. Then the rest of the sacrifice was taken outside the city gates “to a clean

place where the ashes were poured out” and burned completely.

So Christ, the true and infinite sin offering—“that He might sanctify the people with His own blood”—was taken out of Jerusalem and was crucified outside the gate.

“Let us,” urges the writer, “go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” In Him we have “a Messiah crucified,” suffering death under the wrath of God against our sin. He was “to the Jew a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). That “offense of the cross” is just as strong in the unregenerate mind and self-righteous spirit today as when Paul wrote those words to the Corinthians.

It is our part to honor our Savior by taking our place with Him outside Christ-rejecting Judaism or any religious fellowship that does not sincerely honor Him as God manifest in flesh, slain for our sins and raised again by God the Father. We are to bear gladly whatever reproach may come because of our loyalty to Him. But we are to be very sure it is *His* reproach and not due to our own ignorance, ungraciousness or inconsistency of life.

Part of that “reproach” is that here on earth we do not have “any continuing city,” any established material center like Jerusalem with its magnificent temple commanding the world's respect and admiration. Our city is the one coming with Christ at His return “in power and great glory.” In the meantime, we are pilgrims, moving on to meet the Lord of that city and to be with Him forever.

If we, as believer-priests are accepted in the sacrifice of God's Son and have an “altar for worship,” there

are offerings for us to bring that are suggested in verses 15 and 16.

13:15. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

13:16. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

The apostle Paul in Romans 12:1, 2 mentioned the primary one of these sacrifices as our spiritual service of worship. He calls us to “present our bodies”—our whole selves in the most practical aspects of daily life—as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.” We are told to “be not conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of your minds.” This must be our heart attitude before we are ready to consider the repeated or continuous spiritual sacrifices.

The first of these is praise to God, a sacrifice fully for Him and well-pleasing, offered through Christ—that is, His merit—and presented to the Father by Him. The author describes it as “the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.” This could be in song or prayer of worship and thanksgiving.

If it is in song, we should not be mindlessly caught up in rhythm and tune; the words should help lift our hearts in thanks for what Christ has done and in adoration of who He is. (“His name” emphasizes what He is in revelation.)

In prayer, the devotional aspect seems to run the danger of becoming a repetition of suitable or even grand phrases, without our being even conscious of their meaning. In worship, we must decidedly “pray with understanding.”

The other “continuing sacrifice

well-pleasing to God” benefits others and is not to be ignored. Offering other sacrifices does not excuse us from this one. “To do good and to share” is as practical as words can make it.

Although this “sharing” refers primarily to financial help, it would also include sharing our time with the lonely and our spiritual strength and love with the weak and needy. This is especially true of those who have given their lives to the Lord’s service at real cost to themselves and their families.

13:17. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

The call to “obey your leaders and submit to them” may sound strange and overly authoritarian to the modern ear. But if our “leaders” were fully characterized by the description in this verse, most of the tensions would be relieved.

When a spiritual leader “keeps watch over” a soul in really loving concern, free from any motive of gain for himself (even in ego-satisfaction), real believers respond. The leader’s joy will be shared by the member himself and by the entire fellowship. If, however, a leader has to “give account with grief,” the consequences are understated here: “That would be unprofitable for you.”

In verses 18 and 19 the writer makes an urgent request for prayer for himself.

13:18. Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

13:19. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

The writer seems to be closely associated with his readers. This is seen throughout the epistle not only by his knowledge of their past experiences and present spiritual condition, but also in verse 19. He requests prayer, mentioning his “good conscience” and “honorable” life. He also desires to “be restored” to his readers.

If his assertion of personal integrity indicates some past criticism from the Hebrew Christians, it must be minor. He shows confidence in his welcome among them, urging as the special reason for prayer “that I may be restored to you the sooner.” The writer obviously believes in the power of prayer. May this speak deeply to our own hearts.

Approaching the end of the epistle, we have a great benediction—perhaps the greatest in the Bible and certainly the fullest in doctrinal content.

13:20. Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

13:21. Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

It begins with the Source and Giver of the blessing being pronounced. He is “the God of Peace,” a beautiful Pauline expression embodying the Semitic greeting, “Peace.” (This is one of the few things upon which Arabs and Jews agree!) Poured into this title is all the meaning of the following phrases: “He (Christ) is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14); “having made peace through the blood of his

cross” (Colossians 1:20); “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

This God of Peace is also the One “who brought (Christ) again from the dead.” He is the God of resurrection, as Abraham came to realize when sacrificing his son Isaac, as Job declared he knew when his faith was able to rise above his problems and as God Himself definitely demonstrated in the open tomb. The God of Christian faith gives to us, through new birth, the life we need—the life of His risen Son.

The One whom God “brought again from the dead” is the “Great Shepherd of the sheep.” This original order of the phrases is followed by several modern versions. Christ’s ministry as “the Great Shepherd” is exercised as risen from the dead. So, as the Good Shepherd, in contrast to the “hireling,” He “gives His life for the sheep;” He cares *about* them “even to death on a cross.”

As “the Great Shepherd” He cares for His sheep and, in the power of an endless life, “makes them lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2). He “leads them beside quiet waters” that they might have life “more abundantly” (John 10:10). And as “the Chief Shepherd,” He will return and will reward His faithful undershepherds.

None of God’s work was haphazard or a last minute expedient; it was “through the blood of the eternal covenant.” It was the outworking of the new covenant foreseen by Jeremiah, the final and therefore “eternal covenant” announced by Christ as established in His blood.

A benedictory request is given at this point: “Now the God of peace ...

make you perfect in every good work to do His will.” More literally it is “to equip you in every good thing,” giving you all you need of ability, wisdom and strength to accomplish God’s will.

To a Christian, the one overall aim of life is “to do His will.” The question often left unanswered is: “How is this to be done?” The God of peace Himself works “in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.” (The change from “you” to “us” seems to indicate the introduction of a general principle for all Christians.)

Paul in Philippians 2:13 expresses it in somewhat greater detail: “It is God who worketh in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure.” The sovereign, omnipotent God so moves in our hearts that we “will and do” what is in accord with His will.

The writer has, up to this point, held back the name of this risen Shepherd and Mediator of the eternal covenant. He presents it now as the central climax of his benediction. Like a wave rising as it moves forward to crest and crash on the shore, so the thought has risen to its climactic point.

The name that is central to all spiritual blessing cannot be mistaken. It is “Jesus, our Lord.” United to us in His humanity by the incarnation, He is “Jesus” and at the same time “the Lord,” the “I Am” of God’s Old Testament self-revelation. Christ is the object of our trust and worship; He is the Sovereign of our lives.

God works out the willing and the doing for His good pleasure through Jesus Christ. He is God’s “Anointed,” the divine-human Savior and Ambassador plenipotentiary. He dwells in us as “living in His own home”—this is the

force of the word in Ephesians 3:17—and He lives out His life in us.

The benediction ends with a “sacrifice of praise” (as recommended in verse 15), offered to our Savior, Lord and Life, “to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

The final verses cover a variety of personal items and greetings confirming it as an epistle, despite its uncharacteristic beginning.

13:22. And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.

13:23. Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you.

13:24. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.

13:25. Grace be with you all. Amen.

In verse 22, the writer shows himself as a gentle, sensitive Christian, designating his epistle as a “word of exhortation” with which he hopes his readers will bear. (They evidently did better than that; they preserved it, copied it and started it to recognition as a part of God’s Word. How well do we receive it?) The writer’s use of “in few words” would seem to reflect his feeling there was more he would have liked to write to them.

Noting Timothy’s release strongly implies that the writer was one of Paul’s company. “Brother Timothy” is not characteristic of Paul himself, who regularly called him “son” (literally “child”). The writer lets the Hebrew Christians know that if Timothy is going to visit them soon, he will accompany him and meet with them, too.

Greetings are sent both to the church generally and the leaders

with whom the author had undoubtedly labored. He includes greetings from a number of Christians (his associates?). We might have called them “our Italian friends.”

The benediction, the same as Titus 3:15, leaves us with the very core of Christianity—the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The family of the late Marchant A. King, D. D.,
and the editor of this book would love to know
how this teaching has blessed your heart and life.
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