

The Preface and the Purpose

Bible Study Lessons on Leviticus and Hebrews

Vol II
Hebrews
The Purpose

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

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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 proclaims 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 number 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.

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 Septua-

gint (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 He-

brews 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 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 vi-

sions 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 Sovereign. 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 authority). 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 under-

stood 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 wonderful 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 discernor 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. not fool ourselves. One day we are all
 If we cannot fool God, we better 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 “unde-

served 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 ig-

norant 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 attitude 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 Fa-

ther.” That is, the righteousness that God receives is Christ.

John Bunyan in *Grace Abounding* 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 forever 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 conclusion 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 descendants 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-atoning 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 anchor 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 chil-

dren'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 ac-

cept 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 qual-

ify 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 regular 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 Passover 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 justification 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 Jesus.” 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 transformation 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. Dispensations 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 Abra-

ham's faith. The command is recorded 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 blessings 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 government, 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, becoming 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 Macabees 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 re-

vealed the Father perfectly, has accomplished 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 hesitance, “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 salvation 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 hang-

ing 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 Judaism.

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 ap-

preciation 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 preoccupation 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 ac-

cepted 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 as-

sociates?). 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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