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**Our Man In
Heaven: An
Exposition of the
Epistle to the
Hebrews**

Edward Fudge





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Our Man In Heaven: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews

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Our Man In Heaven

by

Edward Fudge

An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Foreword by F.F. Bruce

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by

Edward Fudge

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Benjamin Lee Fudge

**DEDICATED
TO
THE MEMORY OF
BENJAMIN LEE FUDGE**

*father in the flesh
brother in the faith
esteemed teacher
dear friend*

"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.... Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

FOREWORD

"OUR MAN IN HEAVEN" sums up very aptly the central emphasis of the Letter to the Hebrews. The human family has in the presence of God an acceptable Representative -- acceptable because He is most authentically one with ourselves, partaker of our flesh and blood, and acceptable too because He is *persona gratissima* with God, being the Son through whom God has spoken His final and perfect word to mankind.

Our Lord's present ministry on His people's behalf "in matters for which they are responsible to God" guarantees for them an inexhaustible supply of grace and power to cope with all the troubles and temptations that are inseparable from present life on earth. Provision to match the need of the moment comes the more opportunely from One who, when on earth, was spared none of these troubles and temptations, but endured them all and triumphed over them.

Next, our Lord's presence before God on our behalf guarantees for us also free access before God. Since God welcomes Him as our Representative, He welcomes by the same token those whom our Lord represents. Both now and hereafter the way into the heavenly sanctuary stands open through Him for those who are united with Him by faith. He who is the source of our present help is also the ground of our eternal hope.

Again, our Lord now ministers as our Representative in the presence of God because He has blazed a trail thither along which He now calls us to follow Him.

The first readers of this Letter were reluctant to leave the familiar securities of their ancestral pattern of religious life for the hazardous adventure of following One who set such little store by His own personal security. But if men and women in the first century A. D. had not been willing to do this very thing - to obey the injunction "Let us go forth" -- there would have been no future for the Christian cause on earth. It is equally necessary for us 1900 years later to be ready to leave our familiar securities and follow Him who is still calling His people along the unpredictable trail of faith. To know this by experience is also involved in understanding what is meant by having "our Man in heaven."

It is a pleasure to commend Mr. Fudge's exposition of the Letter to the Hebrews. A superficial perusal of the Letter may suggest that it has little relevance to readers today. A more careful study reveals that its message is astonishingly up-to-date, speaking directly to the conditions of Christian existence in this uncertain world. I hope that, with the help of Mr. Fudge's study, many readers will grasp the message of the Letter and learn to live by it.

F.F. BRUCE
Manchester, England
November 1972

INTRODUCTION

Authorship

At the end of the second century, opinion was divided regarding the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Clement of Alexandria believed that Paul wrote the epistle in Hebrew and that Luke translated it into Greek. Origen thought that someone familiar with Paul's teachings wrote Hebrews, but he added his now-famous remark that "who really wrote the letter is known to God alone." At Carthage, Tertullian suggested the name of Barnabas. Christians in Rome and in the West generally confessed that they did not know who wrote Hebrews. Archer points out that "none of the ancient authorities... entertained any doubt as to the *canonicity* (i.e. the divine inspiration) of the Epistle," however, and that "in any event the primary author... is God Himself, no matter which human instrument He used." In the days of the Reformation, Luther favored Apollos as the author and Calvin looked to Clement of Rome or possibly Luke.

Date of writing

The date of this epistle is also uncertain. References to the Jewish order and the priestly functions seem clearly to involve the Levitical service of the Old Testament, not the distorted institutions of the first century after Christ. Nor can it be ascertained whether the calamity of A.D. 70 had befallen Jerusalem and Herod's Temple when our author wrote. Internal evidence is claimed for both positions. We must set a latest possible date before A.D. 96, for Clement of Rome wrote then and he quotes from the epistle quite freely. We can not have too early a date, for a few remarks in the epistle indicate that its first recipients were second-generation Christians (2:3-4; 13:7) and apparently not new converts themselves (5:12; 10:32-35).

Recipients

Beyond what has been stated we can know little of the recipients or their precise historical situation. So far as a general statement of affairs, most scholars would probably agree with Bernard that the epistle

... evidently belongs to the last hour of translation and decision, when a large number of men, who were at once Jews and Christians, stood perplexed, agitated, and almost distracted, as they seemed to feel the ground parting beneath their feet, and hardly knew whether to throw themselves back on that which was receding, or forward on that to which they were called to cling. [In an intense sympathy with this perplexity, and even anguish, prevailing in the Hebrew-Christian mind, and in an intense anxiety as to its issue, the Epistle was written; a living voice of power in a time of change and fear, yet a comprehensive exposition of the advancing course of revelation, and of the relation between its two great stages (pages 161-162).

Just what was involved in this crisis-time is not so clear, and regarding that there is a wide divergence of views. In an article in *The Expository Times*, Bruce sums up recent views regarding the epistle's recipients. Candidates include the Christians of the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Laodicea), Jewish Christians in Ephesus, Hebrew converts in Rome who hesitated to declare themselves a part of the "illicit religion" of Christ rather than the "licit religion" (in the eyes of official Rome) of the Jews, Jewish Christians of Corinth, Jewish convert hot-heads who had fled to Alexandria after the fall of Jerusalem, Hebrew Christians on Cyprus, and Palestinian Jewish Christians either before or after the destruction of A.D. 70. The Dead Sea Scrolls evidence certain parallel interests between their authors and the recipients of Hebrews. Both are concerned with the position and role of angels, with Old Testament passages, with the priesthood and even with Melchizedek. This has led some scholars to posit a connection between the readers of our epistle and the Qumran community of the Scrolls, or, at least, between this epistle and converted Jewish priests.

In the midst of all this uncertainty, and with no real prospects of additional light on the subject, Filson believes "it is unfortunate that so much attention has been paid to questions of authorship, destination, place of writing and date," and that "the frustratingly inconclusive study of Hebrews should make it clear that we cannot find certain answers to the questions: Who? To whom? From where? When?" (page 12). But we are not left with nothing. For, as Filson also points out, the author of Hebrews is to us what he has written. And that is a great deal to know and to have. It can spur modern Christians to renewed and increased awareness of what their faith can mean to them and what their faithfulness can mean to others (page 84). Numerous outlines of the epistle have been set forward. One fascinating suggestion is made by Kistemaker who regards the epistle as a kind of sermon. He has a four-point outline in the text itself at 2:17, and he suggests that the author develops each point on the basis of a quotation from the Psalms. His four points and their "texts" are:

- 1 Christ's humanity and unity with His brethren ([Psalm 8:4-6](#); quoted in [2:6-8](#)).
- 2 Christ's faith and faithfulness ([Psalm 95:7-11](#); quoted in [3:7-11](#)).
- 3 Christ's priesthood ([Psalm 110:4](#); quoted first for discussion at [5:6](#)).
- 4 Christ's offering of Himself ([Psalm 40:6-8](#); quoted in [10:5-7](#)).

Whether or not one should follow Kistemaker all the way, it is apparent - that the Epistle to the Hebrews is thoroughly grounded in the Old Testament Scriptures in general and in the Psalms in particular.

Acknowledgements

A special acknowledgement of debt is due Dr. F. F. Bruce, the late Dr. Franz Delitzsch and the late Professor Robert Milligan, from whose commentaries I have drawn heavily and

on which I have leaned with great profit. (All quotations from Bruce in the comments which follow are from his commentary unless otherwise stated.) Other commentaries and books have been used to advantage, but these have been my favorites. Delitzsch represents conservative scholarship of the past century; Bruce is unsurpassed in that role today. Milligan was of my own Restoration Movement background and, in my opinion, is not given the esteem as a scholar today which he certainly is due.

A note of thanks is also due Professor Homer Hailey, whose college lectures on the Scriptures led me in due course through the Epistle to the Hebrews, and whose biblical insight I will always remember with appreciation and respect. I should also like to thank Drs. Paul Southern, J. W. Roberts and Thomas H. Olbricht, who gave me valuable experience in the exegetical method of study.

To these all and many others my sincere appreciation for insights into this marvelous epistle. Any mistakes and misunderstandings in this commentary are my own. They only are original

EDWARD FUDGE

CHAPTER ONE

In chapter one our author seems to have two points in mind. First, by showing Christ's superior position to angels, he sets forth also the superiority of the new covenant which Christ mediates and certifies over the old covenant which was mediated by angels. Second, he prepares the way for chapter two, in which he explains how and why the Son became lower than the angels for a brief period of time. A third consideration not specified by the writer of Hebrews but in accord with his epistle and perhaps also in his mind is that any revelation which claims angelic origin or authority must be measured in terms of that revelation which God has given through the Son - the Son who is better and higher than all angels.

1:1. The basic sentence in this verse and the next is "God hath spoken." **At sundry times** is from a single adverb in the original which meant "in many portions." Because God revealed His will in segments, revelation came from time to time as needed. It was the nature of the prophet that he spoke what God gave him to speak, and that was always "in part." **In divers manners** is also from a single adverb meaning "in many varied ways."

The adverbs modify the verb. God **spoke** (by prophets) to the fathers in many portions and in various ways. Amos gave God's message by oracles and direct statements from God; Hosea by "typical" experiences in his own life; Habakkuk by arguments and discussion. Malachi spoke God's word by questions and answers; Ezekiel by strange and symbolic acts; Haggai by sermons and Zechariah by mystical signs.

God addressed His people in parables and in illustrations; by warnings and exhortations; by encouragements and promises. By every possible method He spoke through the prophets to the fathers. Yet the word was always fragmentary and usually soon forgotten. When the Old Testament closed, revelation was still incomplete. God was to speak again, more fully and more effectively than He ever had spoken in the prophets.

In time past is literally "of old," and refers to previous ages of the world. **The fathers** were the Jewish forefathers of the Hebrew Christians. The prophets included both the writing prophets (such as those whose work Scripture preserves) and the non-writing prophets (such as Nathan, Elijah, Elisha and others). The prophets were "mouths" for God ([Exodus 4:16; 7:1](#)). They spoke His word, though at times even they did not understand it ([I Peter 1:10-12](#); see [Daniel 7:28; 12:8-10](#)).

1:2. The phrase **these last days** refers to the Messianic era, the age of fulfillment, and is literally "the last of these days." The Jews divided time into the Present Age, of anticipation, and the Coming Age, of the Messiah. They expected the Messiah to come at the end of their Present Age. When Christ came, however, the Coming Age crashed into history and the Messianic era of fulfillment became a reality ([Hebrews 9:26-28](#)). Peter's sermon on Pentecost formally announced the beginning of these "last days" ([Acts 2:14-36](#)).

Here was one of the more puzzling elements of the apostolic preaching for the Jews (and for people in general, then and now). The Messianic era of fulfillment has now begun with the resurrection of Christ and His ascension into heaven, yet the temporal world continues even as it decays. Men might expect the Present Age and the Coming Age to meet at a given point, but certainly they do not expect them to overlap! Yet this is exactly what the New Testament declares, and it is this overlapping of Ages which creates the spiritual war for the Christian.

But while the "last days" have begun - one Man is already in heaven! - the consummation remains in the future and the old order continues to exist ([II Peter 3:3-10](#)). It is God's plan that the church use this interim to announce to the world that history has been given significance in Jesus of Nazareth, and that man can now ask God for reconciliation and have the assurance that He will give it through Christ. (On this age of the world in God's plan see also the Introduction to chapters 9-11 in my **Helps on Romans**.)

God has **spoken unto us**, that is, to those living in this age, "to whom has come the very anticipated goal of the ages" ([I Corinthians 10:11](#), my translation; see [Mark 1:15](#); [Luke 1:68-79](#); [Luke 4:19](#)/[II Corinthians 6:2](#); [Acts 3:24](#)). **By His son** is literally "in a son" or "in one who is a son." Here is no mere prophet, but one who is Himself a Son and by nature the same as the Father.

Christ's very life and person expressed God ([John 1:18](#)). God has now revealed Himself fully, not partially. He has spoken grace and truth, a revelation superior to any given before ([John 1:17](#)). In Christ, God has spoken salvation, not only spoken it but accomplished it - in the unique life and sacrifice of the Son. The rest of chapter one exalts the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, by showing His many-faceted ministry and position or "name."

God the Father has **appointed** or set or ordained Christ as **heir of all things**. **Heir** speaks of an inheritance and brings to mind the words of Psalm two, where the Son is given the nations for an inheritance. The same imagery occurs in [Psalm 110](#), and our author will discuss that psalm several times, though usually with emphasis on Christ's priestly ministry.

By Christ God made the worlds. Christ is both originator and heir of all things. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the author and finisher of creation as well as of faith. **The worlds** might mean the created universe (as in [11:3](#); see also [John 1:3](#); [Colossians 1:16-17](#)) or literally "the ages" of time in which God's saving purpose is worked out. Both interpretations state what Scripture elsewhere affirms.

1:3. Christ is the **brightness of the Father's glory**. Literally "effulgence," this word means either that which radiates out from a light or the reflection which comes back. The former meaning is probably intended here. If we speak of God's glory, Christ is its very emanation and radiance. He is to the Father what rays are to a light, or flames to a fire, or beams to the sun. Without this Son, man is in the dark concerning God and salvation. God's magnificence as deity is fully seen in Jesus Christ who was God in human flesh (see [John 14:9](#)).

Christ is the **express image** of the Father's **person**. The word here translated **image** originally meant a stamp or seal, then the impression left by it. In the early centuries, the church engaged in great debates over the precise philosophical meanings of some of these terms. It is enough for us to know that Christ is an exact and complete representation of God because He is the Son, and that in that capacity He is perfectly sufficient to reveal God and to save man.

Christ is **upholding** all things; by Him all things consist or hold together ([Colossians 1:17](#)). **All things** may be translated "the universe." Christ's protectorate is all-inclusive. **The word of His power** is specifically a "spoken word," and the phrase might be translated "by His powerful spoken word." This is an active and powerful word which upholds the universe.

Christ accomplished man's redemption **by Himself**, through His own work of obedience. Our author elaborates on this statement in chapters eight through ten (see also [Romans 5:12, 15-21](#)). That **Jesus purged our sins** means that He "made a cleansing" or "accomplished a purification." The form of the verb indicates the words **by Himself**, and suggests a one-time action (see [Hebrews 9:12-14, 26-28](#)).

Because His work of redemption had been completed ([2:9](#); [6:20](#); [7:26-27](#); [9:24-28](#); [10:12-14](#); [12:2](#)), Christ **sat down**. Unlike the Levitical priests who stood daily in an imperfect and temporary service, Christ made atonement for all men and then took His seat forever ([10:11-12](#)). **The right hand** signifies authority; see [notes on verse 13](#). **The Majesty** refers to God the Father. Our author follows a Jewish custom of referring to Jehovah by a euphemism, out of respect for the sacred name.

[1:4](#). Christ has been **made so much better than the angels**, which fit will be our writer's business to explain in the remainder of chapter one. This verse contains two Greek words which express comparison (see also [7:20-22](#); [8:6](#) and [10:25](#)). Christ is as much better than angels as His name is more excellent than theirs. The author will show how much **more excellent name** Christ possesses **than they**, and to that same extent he will show Christ to be higher in rank than the angels themselves.

The writer has introduced his first point: Christ is a spokesman superior to prophets or angels - because He is the Son. He was active in creation. He is God's very substance and image. He has accomplished a perfect work of complete redemption, and He has now taken His inherited seat as universal heir and Lord at God's right hand in heaven. He is Prophet (verse two), Priest (verse three) and King (verse three).

Christ's name is far higher than those of the heavenly emissaries, but why would our author need to make this point? It has already been mentioned that many in the ancient world thought of angels as lords over the present world system. Others worshipped angels. Still others regarded Christ as simply one in an ascending order of angels. The former overrated angels by giving them what belongs to the Son; the latter underrated the Son by

considering Him an angel (an error propagated today by the so-called Jehovah's Witness cult). The following verses put angels and the Son in proper perspective.

1:5a. To no angel did God ever say, **Thou are my son, this day have I begotten thee;** but He said it to the Son in [Psalm 2:7](#). This Messianic psalm describes man's rejection of Christ and God (verses 1-3; see [Acts 4:25-28](#)). It also foretells God's triumph through His Christ ("Anointed," verses 4-9; see [Revelation 12:5; 19:15](#)). And it gives a double pronouncement in view of the Messianic judgment to come (verses 10-12). The same psalm is quoted also at [Acts 13:33](#) of the resurrection of Christ, and at [Hebrews 5:5](#) of Christ's divine installment as high priest. It seems to underlie the heavenly voice at Christ's baptism (along with [Isaiah 42:1](#)) and at His transfiguration (with [Isaiah 42:1](#) and possibly [Deuteronomy 18:15ff](#)).

Emphasis here is on **Son**, stressing Christ's nature and position, and on the first person pronoun "I," emphasizing the divine origin of His appointment. Christ is God's own Son in essence by eternal nature. He was God in the flesh through a miraculous conception. He is ranking Son and Man in glory through His resurrection and a divine decree.

Of course the psalmist did not understand all of this, and his words may have been partially appreciated through a lesser fulfillment in his own day. But their full meaning is seen only in the light of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. The same Holy Spirit which guided the prophets (H Peter 1:21) also led the apostles into the meaning of their writings ([I Peter 1:10-12](#)), as well as the significance of the gospel events involving Jesus the Christ ([John 14:26; 15:26; 16:12-14](#); see also [John 2:19-22; 12:12-16; 13:6-7; Luke 24:31-32, 44-45](#)).

1:5b. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. These words are quoted from H Samuel 7:14, an oracle of Nathan concerning David's royal son. The promise referred partially to Solomon ([I Kings 2:23-24; I Chronicles 28:5-7](#)) but, as many other Old Testament statements, found perfect fulfillment only in Christ. Both "I" and "He" are emphatic, stressing the personal relationship between the speaker and the one of whom He speaks. **To him** and **to me** reflect Hebrew style; the statement means simply "I shall be his father; he shall be my son." The Son of God was the prophetic son of David (Matthew's gospel emphasizes this: see 1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9; 21:15; also 12:3; 22:41ff). The statements quoted in verse five describe a Son, not mere angels.

1:6. Again could be placed at the beginning this verse, as In the King James and Revised Standard versions, introducing another Old Testament citation; or with the verb, as in the American Standard and New American Standard versions. The phrase has been regarded as referring to the incarnation, the resurrection and the second advent. Angels are associated with all three events in Scripture. The point is that they worship Him . **All the angels of God**, of every rank and order, are commanded to **worship him**, a fact which points to His

superiority over them. The quotation might be from a Greek version of [Deuteronomy 32:43](#) or of [Psalm 97:7](#). No doubt the first readers of the epistle recognized it.

1:7. In this verse and the next, two words are used which together mean "on the one hand" and "on the other hand." A contrast is intended here between angels, who are **ministers** or servants, and the Son who is so much more. The quotation is from [Psalm 104:4](#).

1:8. [Psalm 45:6-7](#) is applied to Christ, identifying Him as eternal **God** whose **throne is for ever and ever**, and as **righteous King**. His kingdom is one of **righteousness** ([Hebrews 7:2-3](#); [Isaiah 9:7](#); [11:4-5](#)).

1:9. In the flesh, Christ **loved righteousness and hated iniquity** (see [10:5-10](#); [Isaiah 53:11-12](#)). Because of His perfect obedience, Jesus was anointed ("Christ-ed") by God and exalted above every creature (see [Philippians 2:8-11](#)). The **oil of gladness** probably represents an occasion of festivity as well as that of coronation. [Psalm 45](#) seems to have originally celebrated the marriage of the king, though again its deepest meaning is understood only in the light of the Son. Along this line, compare [Hebrews 12:22-24](#) (see notes on "general assembly") with [Revelation 19:1-10](#). The chief point of the verse ought not to be overlooked in the midst of details.

1:10-12. These three verses are quoted from [Psalm 102:25-27](#). In the passage the psalmist calls on Jehovah to come to his rescue, and appeals to God's eternal nature in pleading for the deliverance of his own life. This is only one of many passages addressed to or regarding Jehovah in the Old Testament which are applied to Christ in the New Testament.

Because Christ is creator, He is also eternal - though all His creation will change with age and finally pass away. He **laid the foundation of the earth** and His **hands arranged the heavens**, but when these things **perish** (see [12:26-28](#)) His **years will not fail** ([7:24-25](#)). When they are all **changed** He will remain **the same** ([13:8](#)).

Again the contrast is between the Son and the angels (verse seven), who have no such traits or legitimate claims. They are rather part of that creation which He has made and have life only through His will.

1:13. This is a quotation of [Psalm 110:1](#), the Old Testament passage most quoted or referred to in the New Testament Scriptures. It is quoted in [Acts 2:34-35](#); [Mark 12:36](#); [Hebrews 1:13](#), and seems to be in mind in [Mark 14:62](#); [Acts 7:55](#); [Romans 8:34](#); [Ephesians 1:20](#); [Colossians 3:1](#); [Hebrews 1:3](#); [8:1](#); [10:12](#); [12:2](#) and [I Peter 3:22](#). As noted already at verse five, many psalms which had partial fulfillment or significance in their original historical settings are fully understood in the New Testament writings through the life, death, resurrection and coronation of Christ.

The figure of the **right hand** is common in the Psalms, sometimes referring to a place of honor as here (see [Psalm 16:11](#); [45:9](#); [80:17](#)). Most of the time the term refers to strength or security from God given to the one of whom it is used. The resurrected Jesus, now made

Christ, was given a position equaled only by that of God Himself ([I Corinthians 15:27](#)). He is God's Right-Hand Man.

In the Old Testament we see the custom of the conquered king prostrating himself to kiss the conqueror's feet ([Psalm 2:12](#)), or the victor putting his feet on his captive's neck ([Joshua 10:24](#)) so that the captive is made his **footstool**. One day every knee will bow before Christ and every tongue will confess His lordship ([Philippians 2:10-11](#); [I Corinthians 15:24-25](#)). The angels will be in that number; the Son is made so much better than them all ([verse four](#)).

[1:14](#). This question is worded in the Greek to indicate that the author expects an affirmative answer. Angels **all**, regardless of rank, are **ministering spirits**. But Christ is so much more. They are **sent forth** by a higher authority, perhaps even by the Son at God's right hand. Their work is to serve, **to minister for** Christians, **who shall be heirs of salvation**. Our writer says literally that they are "sent for service on behalf of those who are about to receive salvation as an inheritance." If angels serve the saints, how much more do they serve the Son! And how greatly superior is His position and name to theirs.

Christ is Prophet of prophets - God has spoken in Him for these last days. He is Priest of priests - by Himself He made atonement for sins. He is King of kings - seated at God's right hand, reigning over a kingdom of righteousness. Old Testament Scripture shows Him to be God's divine Son, David's prophetic descendant, and worthy of worship. Whereas angels are messengers, Christ is eternally Lord and divine King. As everlasting Creator of all things, He is also now victorious Vicegerent at God's right hand. The voice from heaven at Christ's transfiguration aptly sums up our author's argument in this first chapter: "Hear ye Him!"

CHAPTER TWO

Having demonstrated in chapter one the superiority of Christ the Son over the serving angels, our writer concludes in 2:1-4 (which would have been placed more appropriately as the ending of the first chapter) with an exhortation and a warning.

His arguments is of a type commonly employed by the Jewish teachers of the time, and was called by them an argument **qal wahomer** - "from the light to the weighty." A statement is made concerning a "lighter" matter, which then is inferred to be even more certainly true of a matter of greater or "heavier" importance.

Jesus' statements concerning the Father's benevolence follow this kind of reasoning (Matthew 6:25-31; 7:9-11), as do His remarks about working on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10-12). Paul uses the same type of reasoning to show the security of the true believer (Romans 5:8-10) and the abundant provisions of divine grace (Romans 5:15-21). The author of Hebrews later reasons the same way regarding Christ's unique priesthood (chapter seven) and all-sufficient sacrifice for sin (9:13-14), Christian discipline (12:9-10), and the reverence which should accompany those who are heirs of the unshakeable kingdom (12:25-29).

In these verses he speaks of two agents by whom God's word has come, and of the consequences of failing to heed that word -- especially as spoken by the Son. If Christ's position is far greater than that given the angels (as has been shown in chapter one), punishment for ignoring or rejecting His message must be far greater than that given for irreverence of the angelic word.

2:1. **Therefore** is literally "on account of this"; that is, because of the greatness of the Son and in view of the point to follow. **Ought** is not the simple word for an obligation but the stronger word which means "it is imperative" or "it is necessary." **To give the more, earnest heed** translates a verb meaning "to pay careful attention" and an adverb (based on an adjective in the comparative degree) meaning "even more extremely." The result is an exceptionally strong exhortation. "Because of these things," he is saying, "it is absolutely necessary for us to be extremely careful to pay attention."

His readers are to hold to **the things which they have heard** from the Son by means of His apostles. **Lest we let them slip** is better translated "lest we drift away (from them)," as in the later versions. The word translated **slip** was used by Greek writers of an arrow slipping out of the quiver, of snow sliding, of foul language slipping into a conversation or, in medical contexts, of food slipping down the windpipe instead of the esophagus. The writer urges extreme care lest his readers **slip** from steadfast obedience and trust in the Son.

Their danger, and that of many other New Testament readers then and now, was that of slipping from trust in the Son's finished work of salvation by His own perfect-life obedience and sacrifice to a reliance on their own performance based on a meritorious view of salvation. The same caution applies equally well to slipping from active obedience to careless disobedience or disregard.

2:2. **For** indicates the basis of the warning. **The word spoken by angels** would include every divine message delivered by angels, but has special reference to the Law of Moses which was delivered by means of angels and was highly esteemed by the Jews for that reason (Psalm 68:17; Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19). **Steadfast** here means reliable, dependable or strong. God's word by angels was always a sure word which came to pass.

Transgression refers to a violation of an express command and **disobedience** refers to a refusal or neglect to obey. The former stresses the act of disobedience; the latter stresses the careless or rebellious attitude which prompts it. punishment was certain in either case under the Law.

God's punishment of sin was always the **just** or fair **reward** of sin. It was never arbitrary, but always in keeping with divine justice and holiness. **Recompense** indicates a payment of wages earned. The wages of sin is death -- that is the fair payment earned by sin. The man who gets "what he has coming to him" will never be saved.

2:3. **We** are those to whom the Son has spoken in these last days, and the pronoun is here emphasized. To neglect salvation is to fail to show concern and care for it. Neglect is a positive wrong consisting of a lack of action. By doing nothing one does wrong. The tense of the verb here views life as a whole -- this is more an attitude governing all of life than it is a single or specific act (see 6:7-12; 10:28-29). Generalities, of course, are always manifested in specifics. A single act of neglect suggests an attitude of the same and should be cause for repentance and diligence.

We have a **salvation** which is **so great** for a number of reasons. It comes from a great spokesman (chapter one). It involves a great work of redemption (1:3; 2:9, 14). This great work brought great results (2:10, 15, 17). So great a salvation carries a judgment equally great for those who reject it (see 6:4-8; 10:28-31; also Mark 16:16; Romans 1:17-18; II Corinthians 2:15-16). This salvation was **spoken** first **by the Lord** Jesus Christ Himself. It was repeated and **confirmed** to the recipients of this epistle by chosen apostles who had **heard him** speak. The verb translated "confirm" is a form of the same word "steadfast" in verse two. Christ's word is a sure word.

2:4. Freely translated, our author says that **God** added **witness** upon witness, piling testimony together. He did this by **signs** (stressing the spiritual meaning of the acts) **and wonders** (stressing the effect on those who saw), various kinds of **miracles** (stressing the might involved in accomplishing these signs and wonders; literally the word is "powers"), and spiritual **gifts** of the Holy Spirit which He gives to the church (see I Corinthians 12; Romans 12).

All this was **according to** God's **own will**. He confirmed the supernatural message of a resurrected and ascended Savior by supernatural demonstrations of power -- because He willed to do so. The absence of such signs in certain places today speaks not of God's power

but of His will. He can if He wishes. God's working is in God's sovereign hands. He gives spiritual gifts and works miracles and signs as it pleases Him.

The answer to the original question must be that there is no escape. If the lesser word of angels was sure and violations of it were strictly punished, there is absolutely no escape for one who carelessly regards the great salvation spoken by the superior Son. Let each true believer hold fast to the Son of God in constant diligence, trusting His work of salvation for total deliverance from sin and yielding to His voice in all things.

2:5. At the beginning of the remarks on chapter one the comment was made that those verses prepared the way for chapter two, in which the author would tell how the Son became lower than angels for a brief period of time, and explain why. By the end of the first chapter the original Jewish readers might very well have asked, "If the Son is so much greater than the angels, why did He become a man and die?"

Beginning with verse five the author answers this question. In the process he shows the intended creation glory and dignity of man, a position never realized fully after the Fall by any man except Jesus Christ. He demonstrates how Jesus now occupies this place of prominence, and how, by virtue of His accomplishments, all men may enjoy their intended state of glory.

There are Biblical indications that **the angels** have a hand in God's administration of the present world-order ([Daniel 10:20-21](#); [12:1](#); [Ephesians 6:12](#)). We know that various Jewish sects before and after Christ assigned such a role to angels, and the epistle to the Colossians indicates that certain gentile teachers did the same. Be that as it may, God did not plan the glorified **world to come** for the benefit of the angels, but for man. The intended glory of man is expressed in terms of all things being **put in subjection** to him (see [Romans 8:19-25](#); [11 Peter 3:7, 10, 13-14](#); [Revelation 21:lff](#)).

2:6. David is quoted from [Psalm 8:5-7](#) to establish this point. God is interested in and **mindful of man**. He **visits** him in blessing and judgment. **The son of man** in this psalm is simply a poetic expression for man.

2:7. Man was made but **a little lower than the angels**. He was **crowned** by the Creator **with glory and honor**. He was **set over the works of God's hands** (see [Genesis 1:26-28](#)). This was man's intended exalted position as first created by God for paradise glory.

2:8. God **put all things in subjection under man's feet**, according to the psalmist. Our writer reasons as follows. If God really put **all** things in subjection under him, **nothing** is excluded from man's dominion and oversight. Yet if we look about us **we** do not see **all things** under man's control -- **yet**. Man is not master of his environment and world, though he is frequently its corrupter and polluter. Man does not enjoy paradise glory and dominion. To say this is to state the obvious. But does this mean that God's purpose has been thwarted? Is there anywhere a man who is over **all things** -- in complete control?

2:9. We do not see ourselves in that position -- at least not at the present time. **But we do see Jesus**, and He is **crowned with glory and honor!** Is the mighty Son of chapter one - that Son so much better than the angels -- a **man?** Yes! For He was **made a little lower than the angels**, even to the **suffering of death**, that **by the grace of God** He could die for **every man** -- then give all who would follow Him their intended glory and dominion.

Jesus became a representative man. In Him, God found a man who gave what He had always wanted from man but which no man had ever given -- a human life fully and always dedicated to pleasing God. In Christ, man's glorified potential was fully realized. This glory was not even planned for angels. It was not intended for other heavenly beings, earthly creatures or occupants of the subterranean depths. It was the Creator's original intention for **man**. And now one **man** is in that position. One **man** has a foothold in glory! And because He is a representative man, acting on behalf of all mankind, His people will one day enjoy the same position of glory.

The expression **a little lower than the angels** is used in two senses in this passage. When it is said that man was put a little lower than the angels, the expression indicated his exalted position - it is but a little lower than the angels (and the original psalm had the general word for "God" instead of "angels"). But when it is said of Jesus that He became a little lower than the angels, the direction is **reversed**. For Jesus is the Son, far greater than the angels. To say that He became lower than angels is to say that He was humiliated, that He emptied Himself, that He condescended ([Philippians 2:5ff](#)). It is also to say that He became a **man** -- like ourselves and for our benefit.

2:10. It was becoming, fitting and proper for **him for whom are all things and by whom are all things** ([Revelation 4:11](#); [Romans 11:36](#); [I Corinthians 8:6](#); [II Corinthians 5:18](#)) to bring **many sons to glory** by making Jesus their **perfect** forerunner or **captain**, even **through suffering**.

In becoming a representative man, Jesus willingly became of the same stuff as mankind in general. He became a brother to man, of the seed of David according to the flesh. In becoming a man, Jesus also took on suffering and death, both inevitable characteristics of mankind. Yet because of His sinless life, His death was able to count as our death. And by suffering death, Christ was able to bring many sons to glory - going ahead of them Himself as Captain, experiencing first the suffering of death but then the glory of resurrection and installment at God's right hand the same kind of glory they, too, will one day enjoy because of Him.

2:11. **He that sanctifieth** is Christ and **they who sanctified** are saints or Christians. Both they and Christ are **all of one** Father -- God. For this reason Christ is **not ashamed** or embarrassed to **call them brethren**. Christ did not call us His brethren because He approved of our live or agreed with all our ideas. Brotherhood is not dependent on such things, though endorsement involves them. Christ did not endorse the thoughts and behavior of all his

brethren; He simply called them brothers. The basis of brotherhood is a common fatherhood. Those who have the same father should not be embarrassed to call one another brethren.

2:12. The words of [Psalm 22:22](#) are quoted in the mouth of Jesus. The psalmist calls on God for deliverance from enemies. He hopefully affirms that he will yet **declare** God's **name** among his **brethren** in the congregation of God's people. The word usually translated **church** refers numerous times in the Greek Old Testament to the Jews in solemn assembly. [Psalm 22](#) is quite descriptive of Jesus, and the entire psalm was generally understood by Christ and His apostles as predictive of the suffering of the Messiah and the glory which would follow. Jesus suffered personally, was delivered by God, and now lives to declare God's salvation among His brethren.

2:13. Words similar to **I will put my trust in him** are found in the Greek Old Testament at [II Samuel 22:3](#); [Psalm 18:2](#) and [Isaiah 8:17](#). The point of the quotation here is that Jesus, like His human brothers, had to depend on God and trust in Him (see [Mark 14:32-36](#)). Luke only of the Evangelists records the dying words of Christ: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (23:46) -- and Luke's Gospel highlights the humanity of Jesus and His identification with mankind throughout. The particular verb form given in Jesus' statement in the verse just mentioned stresses the extreme personal trust Jesus felt in committing His life to the Father's care (see also [I Peter 2:23](#); [4:19](#)). The next quotation is certainly from [Isaiah 8:18](#) (which argues for [Isaiah 8:17](#) in the previous citation). The meaning here is that Jesus is one with His human brethren in obedience to God as Father. The words of this quotation should not be pressed too far. Jesus is brother to the saints, not their father.

2:14. Since God's other **children are** necessarily **partakers of flesh and blood**, with all that is implied in that statement, Christ **also took part of the same**. He died, as they do, but **through His death he destroyed** or nullified the strength of the **devil who had the power of death** over man because of sin. Since Jesus had no sin of His own, the devil had no power over Him. When Christ entered the grave, therefore, He was not bound. Rather He walked in free-handed, picked up the keys and came out again in triumph! (See [Revelation 1:17-18](#).)

2:15. Because Jesus rose from the dead, death can no longer hold its former terror for the man who trusts in Jesus. By His resurrection, Christ was able to **deliver** mankind from the **bondage** in which he is bound **all his lifetime**; that is, the bondage of the **fear of death**. Because one man has conquered death, Satan is immobilized and all men are potentially free of death's rule.

The same power which brought Jesus out of Hades will also bring out His saints (see [Romans 8:11](#); [II Corinthians 4:14](#); [I Thessalonians 4:14](#)). It is interesting that the ancient Greeks called their burial-ground a "necropolis" city of the dead, but that since Christ we call it a "cemetery" -- sleeping place. One man has been to the city of the dead and returned! Because He did, we will.

2:16. The word translated **took on** may mean either "to take hold of for oneself" -- the idea represented in the King James Version, or "to take hold of someone to help him" -- as probably is the case here. From this second meaning the word may mean simply "to have an interest in, show concern for, or help" someone. It is true that Jesus took on Himself the nature of man and not angel, and verses 5-15 have been given to that theme. This verse seems to speak, however, of Jesus taking hold of man to help him. Angels did not need redemption and apparently fallen angels can not be redeemed -- but man both needed it and would receive it. Jesus became a man to accomplish man's needed redemption ([1:3](#); [2:9](#); [notes on 10:1-14](#)).

Jesus was born to save His Jewish people from their sins ([Matthew 1:21](#)) and to fulfill the promises made to the fathers ([Acts 13:32-33](#); [Romans 15:8](#)). To that end He became one of **the seed of Abraham**. But by the grace of God He also tasted death for every man ([Hebrews 2:9](#)), so that gentiles as well as Jews may praise God for His mercy ([Romans 15:9](#)).

2:17. Wherefore, because Jesus took on the responsibility of saving man, **in all things** it was necessary for Him to **be made like unto his brethren**. God's design for man's salvation consisted of sending a representative man who could do for man what man had been unable to do for himself -- live an acceptable life before God. Because Jesus was this chosen and well-beloved Servant of the Father, and in order to carry out this divine mission, He became in every respect like His human brethren, though without sin.

He was divine, God in the flesh, and we must never forget that. But we should not forget either that He was fully human. Jesus was a man, with every human temptation, desire and sorrow. If His deity had precluded any of these He could not have been a truly representative man and could have become neither Savior not even a fair example. Because He did fully identify with His human brethren, yet remained faithful to God in all His life, He became a perfect **high priest**, both **merciful** to man and **faithful** or reliable in His relationship to God. As high priest He first made **reconciliation for the sins of all His people**, then became Mediator on their behalf before God.

2:18. Because **he himself hath suffered, being tempted** through every possible allurements and enticement of Satan including an undeserved death, **he** has the power and **is able to succor** or render aid and comfort to His people when they **are tempted**. He became a son of man that we might become sons of God. He took our place, died our death -- that we might enjoy His life and the blessings it made possible.

But He not only **died for us** -- He first **lived for us**. While this point is frequently overlooked, it is this which made the first possible and meaningful. It is only by His perfect life -- lived on our behalf and in our stead, then offered to the Father and accepted by Him -- that we can be made accepted, for our own imperfect lives are never perfectly acceptable to the Father. Salvation is by the grace of God from beginning to end, and it was by the grace of God that Jesus tasted death for every man.

Moses could give a law but only Jesus could live that law. Unless we see Him in this light He will mean little more to us than Moses did to the Jew. And great as Moses was, he was not in the same category with the Son who became man. This point our author develops in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

The writer has shown Jesus to be superior to the prophets as a spokesman for God. As the Son, Christ's name or position is far greater than that of any angel. Yet He became one of us, to bring us to our intended glory. Through His own suffering and temptations He was qualified to serve perfectly as priest and comforter to His suffering and tempted brethren on earth.

Now the author turns to other matters (led, of course, by the Spirit of God). Moses was the chief character of the Old Covenant, and was respected by the Hebrews as the foremost leader of their religion and life. Jesus is prophet and priest of the New Covenant, and Christians are to be faithful to Him in all things. The Hebrew Christians were being tempted to leave Christ and return to Moses. To prevent this, chapter three shows Christ's superiority over Moses. It shows the possibility of apostasy and destruction, based on the former example of God's Old Testament people under Moses. The chapter then urges extreme caution in maintaining a faithful heart lest the Christian, too, fall by disbelief.

3:1. Wherefore, or because of what has gone before specifically because of the divine appointment of Christ as perfect prophet and because of His absolute perfection as sympathetic and faithful priest -- the admonition follows. The **holy brethren** are Christians. The phrase literally means "brothers who are set apart (from the world and sin) and **are** dedicated (to the service of God through Christ)." Christians are saints or holy ones, not because of their own achievements in attaining purity of life (see [I Corinthians 1:2; 6:11](#)), though that is a necessity, but because God has called them holy, in Jesus Christ. Christ is made unto us "sanctification" or holiness ([I Corinthians 1:30](#)). We are holy in Him.

Yet we are commanded to become holy, just as God is holy ([I Peter 1:15-16](#)). We are to perfect holiness in the fear of God ([II Corinthians 7:1](#)). Without holiness no man can see God ([Hebrews 12:14](#)). In the economy of the New Testament, however, God first pronounces men to be what He desires (on the basis of the finished work of Christ and their union with Him) and then causes them to become what He has already called them.

The term "saints" is one of the most frequently used descriptions of God's people in the New Testament. The word is always in the plural; one does not read of "Saint So-and-so." All God's people are saints, as described above. It is possible that the tendency of modern Christians to neglect this term in their common vocabulary has contributed to the lack of sanctification in the church today. We will do no harm, and perhaps a great deal of good, to revive the usage of Scriptural terms and phrases.

The saints are **partakers** or partners in **the heavenly** calling. Their heavenly invitation to be God's people leads them, in response to the gospel, to become partners and sharers in a heavenly way of life. Now the writer urges them to **consider Christ Jesus**. The word translated **consider** means to look at something or someone with great care. It involves not

only looking at, but thinking about. One must spend time to fulfill this word. The object of such contemplation is here Christ Jesus.

Many times in Scripture the writer makes a point of emphasis by the order of words. Frequently the term **Christ Jesus** points to Jesus, not in His earthly ministry, but as the Christ at God's right hand -- the resurrected and glorified Jesus of Nazareth. On the other hand, the expression **Jesus Christ** sometimes (but not always) stresses the work, or ministry, or person of Jesus as a man and as one of us. Here we are to consider our heavenly Lord: in all His offices, His splendor, His rank and His glory.

We are specifically to consider Christ as **the Apostle and High Priest of our profession**. The term **apostle** means one sent or a messenger. Jesus was sent by the Father to be Savior of the world ([I John 4:14](#) and other passages). Moses also was sent by God to accomplish a typical "salvation" of God's people from bondage ([Exodus 3:10](#)), though Moses is never called an **apostle**.

Jesus is also our **High Priest**, and the writer has spoken briefly of this office in the previous chapter. Later he will develop the thought in detail. Here he entreats us to reflect on Christ Jesus: as Apostle -- sent by God's authority to man; as High Priest -- going before God on man's behalf; in all things -- superior to every previous agent of God.

Our profession or confession is first our oral acknowledgement of faith in Jesus as Christ and Lord (see [Matthew 16:16](#); [Romans 10:9-10](#); [II Corinthians 9:13](#); [I Timothy 6: 12-13](#); [Hebrews 4:14](#); [10:23](#)). Then it is our state of life based on that confession, a profession or declaration of the faith which has been confessed.

3:2. Christ **was faithful** or reliable or trustworthy with reference to God the Father, who **appointed him** apostle and **priest**. **Moses also was faithful** to God **in all his house**. The writer does not minimize the faithfulness or the function of Moses. He praises and commends Moses for faithful service. But he then shows, on the basis of the heavenly realities, that Christ is far superior to Moses by virtue of His greater person and function.

3:3. Christ is **counted worthy of more glory than Moses**, not because Moses was unfaithful, for he was not, but because of the inherent function of both men in God's plan. The man who builds a house **hath more honor than the house**. We admire a beautiful building, but we regard more highly the architect who designed it and the superintendent who saw it rise.

3:4. So far as the work of salvation is concerned, the one who builds **all things is God**. He is the grand architect and superintendent of the entire scheme of redemption. He is its originator and its goal. The Word which became flesh was one with God the Father. Therefore Christ, who was that Word, is the builder of the house, while Moses -- though faithful -- was a part in the divine house.

3:5. Christ is superior to Moses in other points as well. Moses **verily was faithful**, but **in** God's household, **as a servant** and as a member of the household. His faithfulness to God

served as a **testimony** to the reliability and trustworthiness of the message which he spoke from God. The point here is based on [Numbers 12:6-8](#), which is quoted in part. There God testified to the faithfulness of Moses and rewarded that faithfulness by speaking directly with Moses in revealing His will. Moses' personal faithfulness as a worker in God's house served as a witness to the word which he revealed from God.

3:6. But Christ is a son (not a servant) **over** (not in and part of) **his own house** (not that of someone else). Now we learn what is meant by the **house** so far as Christ is concerned. **We**, the church, God's people under Christ **are the house** of God ([I Timothy 3:15](#)). Christ promised to "build" it ([Matthew 16:18](#)), and He began that work on Pentecost. The church is composed of "living stones" ([I Peter 2:5](#); [Ephesians 2:20](#)) -- those individuals who by faith and baptism have come into union with Christ, have become members of His spiritual body and, collectively, are His church. Moses was a faithful servant in the Old Testament "house" of God (and of Christ), but Christ is the faithful Son over His own house. He is far superior to Moses, though Moses was a great and faithful man of God.

But there is a divine **if**, so far as we are concerned. We are His house, **if we hold fast the confidence**, the boldness based on inner assurance, **and the rejoicing** or boasting **of the hope firm unto the end**. This is the message of the tire Bible and is particularly the theme of the book of Hebrews. The reward is of grace, but it depends on faith. And a saving faith is one which trusts and obeys until the very end. It is not enough to begin, only to fall along the way. Saving faith, true grounds of rejoicing, a genuine hope -- all these depend on steadfastness and continue trust throughout life. The Hebrew Christians urgently needed that lesson. We are no less in need of it today.

3:7-8. As an incentive to steadfastness, our author points to the example of God's people under Moses (see also [I Corinthians 10:1-13](#)). If they fell from God's favor through disbelief, the same fate could befall God's people today. **Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith in Psalm 95:7-11), To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

[Psalm 95](#) is a call to worship God. The psalmist bases his call on God's deity (verse three), His might as creator and sustainer (verses four through six) and His election of and covenant relationship with Israel (verse seven). He then warns against a hard or disobedient heart, which he says will lead only to destruction. This happened to the fathers in the wilderness, the psalmist points out, and it can happen to God's people in his day. Now the psalmist's point is made (using his own words) by the writer to the Hebrews, who applies it to the believers of his day. God's people have fallen before through unbelief and an evil heart. They can do the same again.

Today those who **hear his voice** are not to **harden their hearts**. This happened with the **Jews in the provocation** (Hebrew: Massah) **in the day of temptation** (Hebrew: Meribah) **in the wilderness**. The event mentioned here is recorded in [Exodus 17:1-7](#). The unbelief of the Jews then was essentially a lack of trust. They doubted that God, who had called them

from Egypt, would provide for them in the wilderness and see them safely to the promised land. This lack of faith led to murmuring. That murmuring was a provocation of God and was sin. Christians are exhorted not to distrust God, murmur and sin, but to have full confidence in Him. In that confident trust they are to do His will as fully and exactly as possible.

The Hebrew Christians were in danger of leaving Christ for Moses. The analogy here suggests that back of their threatened apostasy was a basic lack of trust in the work of Christ as perfect sacrifice, priest and Savior. They were not confident of their standing before God. Because their basis of salvation was the finished redemptive work of the Son, such lack of confidence reflected a fundamental lack of faith in Christ. This unbelief was sinful -- and it was the same kind of sin which led to the Jews' destruction centuries before in the wilderness.

3:9-11. Our author is still quoting from [Psalm 95](#). The **fathers** in the wilderness **tempted** God, **proved** Him in the evil sense of putting Him to the test and **saw** His **works** for **forty years** so that they should have no excuse. They **grieved** God by distrusting Him. Because of this unbelief God swore **in His wrath** that **they would not enter into His rest**. Chapter four will discuss the meaning of God's **rest**. Here the reference is made without elaboration.

3:12. Rather than **take heed**, we would say (almost literally) "look out!" **An evil heart of unbelief** is a heart, or disposition, or spirit, which does not so trust God that it accepts what He says with confidence and then walks with trust in Him and in His word. **Departing** is from a word closely related to that which gives "apostasy." The child of God can become so corrupted by a distrustful and unfaithful heart that he finally forsakes God completely.

Such distrust of Christ can lead to apostasy in two directions. Some who begin to doubt their acceptance on the basis of Christ's perfect life and blood will despair of all hope and go back into sin and the world. Others will seek to help or add to their spiritual stature by their own strict observance of rules and regulations -- which they themselves will choose as important or receive as such from someone else. When motivated by a lack of trust in the standing Christ makes possible, this too is sinful.

It was this error in part which led to the writing of Galatians (against Judaizing tendencies), Colossians (against an apparently gentile heresy which had adopted rituals and philosophies from many sources), I John (against a budding philosophical heresy later known as gnosticism) and even Hebrews. Christ is sufficient as Savior, and the man who truly has Him has enough. Steadfast faithfulness to Christ is an evidence of this inward faith, and is a necessity if one is to be saved in the end. That is the point of this chapter.

3:13. So that Christians will not fall through unbelief, they are admonished to **exhort** or encourage or comfort **one another**. This is to be done **daily, while it is called today**. Such refreshing of the spirit, such rededication to God and to Christ, will prevent one's being **hardened** or calloused **through the deceitfulness** or error of sin.

This exhorting is the duty of every Christian. Barnes asks:

How often do church-members see a fellow-member go astray without any exhortation or admonition. ...Belonging to the same family; having the same interests in religion; and all suffering when one suffers, why should they not be allowed tenderly and kindly to exhort one another to a holy life?

In a special sense, this exhorting is to be done by the elders or shepherds of the flock, whose chief duty before God is to watch for souls ([Hebrews 13:17](#); see [Ezekiel 33: 7-9](#)). Milligan's comments are still appropriate:

Do not procrastinate, or put off till tomorrow what should be done today.... If the members of every congregation of disciples would all watch over one another, not as censors, but as members of the body of Christ, how many errors might be corrected in their incipiency. But... how many delinquent Christians are allowed to become hardened in sin, before even the Elders of the Church call on them and admonish them! How very unlike these Elders are to the Good Shepherd that careth for the sheep.

While such exhorting is to be done daily, it is one purpose of the Lord's Day assembly as well. Those who are absent from the gatherings of the saints fail both to receive needful exhortation and to contribute their encouragement to others ([Hebrews 10:24-25](#)).

The neglect of Christian exhortation is surely among the greatest failings of God's people today. The mad rush for the world's goods, the excessive drive for material prosperity, the disproportionate love of pleasure, the self-centered living of a modern age -- these all have practically extinguished the selfless and obedient concern of saints in too many places for one another, and the careful exhortation which should grow out of that concern has died before it was born. Any congregation that ignores this divine obligation has no right to parade itself as a faithful church of Christ Jesus, regardless of its other qualities or so-called distinctive marks.

3:14. We are made partakers or partners **of Christ** only **if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence** or grounds of hope **steadfast unto the end** or conclusion or goal. Our author addresses his readers in verse one as partakers of the heavenly calling. But while the call has been issued and the journey begun, the trip is not completed until its destination is reached. As the Israelites under Moses fell after they had begun, so Christians will be Christ's partners in glory only if they are faithful until the conclusion of life and the attaining of the goal.

3:15. He repeats the admonition from the psalm, this time with emphasis on the word **provocation**.

3:16. Some, after **they had heard, did provoke** God. This is probably best translated as a question. Who did provoke? The answer is: **all that came out of Egypt by Moses**.

3:17. With whom was he grieved forty years? A few reprobates? No, it was **with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness**, and that number included the entire company of adults who left Egypt, with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb. The danger of leaving faith in Christ is grave because the possibility is both real and widespread.

3:18. To whom did God swear that they should not enter into his rest? It was **to them that believed not**. In this case they had stopped believing although they had begun their journey in faith.

3:19. So we see, he concludes, **that they could not enter in because of disbelief**. Their death in the wilderness was not due to Moses' unfaithfulness -- he was faithful in all God's house. It was not because God was unable to save them -- He showed His works forty years in the wilderness. The reason they fell was simple and single: they stopped believing and trusting God. The next verse of exhortation should be included in chapter three: **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**. It happened once before. It can happen again.

CHAPTER FOUR

The author continues his line of reasoning begun in chapter three. There is no break of thought at this chapter division.

4:1. Let God's people today **fear** and not fall. This is a real possibility now and was then for the Hebrew Christians or there would be no warning. In the midst of the various and passing issues of each generation, God's people would do well to remember that the fundamental and eternal issue has always been belief versus unbelief and that God (and God alone) will test each individual (as an individual) on that issue. This point should never be forgotten.

The exhortations in Hebrews are rich in edification, and the "let us" admonitions are translated from a verb form called the "hortatory subjunctive" (see [4:11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22-24; 12:1, 28; 13:13, 15](#)).

A **promise** has been **left** for us, although the Old Testament saints and apostates have died. That promise concerns **entering into** God's **rest**. The same offer was made the Jews, as our writer explains, but because of disbelief they did not receive the promised blessing. The same offer is now given to believers in Christ. Christians are to fear, however, lest any of them **should seem to come short of it**.

To **come short** might mean to fall short of attaining the promised **rest**, and that point is well taken in this context. But it may also mean to come short of being offered the promise of God in the first place, and the next verses, as well as the verb **should seem**, appear to support this interpretation.

Some of the Hebrew saints appear to have been disappointed in their immediate expectations as Christians. They had given up their ancient religion, they had suffered persecution for their faith, they had endured afflictions for Christ's sake. It seemed to some that all their sacrifices had been in vain. They had not entered into rest but into distress. It seemed to some that the promise of a rest surely did not apply in their case, for they had not found it. The writer shows that the promise not only does apply to the Christian, but that since it was not fulfilled in the past it must apply to God's people in Christ.

4:2. God preached a gospel (good news) to the Jews concerning a promised land. **Unto us** Christians is given good news of present deliverance in Christ and a part in the world to come. The believer is therefore to fear, for the mere fact that he has heard good news does not mean that he will enter into the promise. The Jews also heard good news, yet they died in the wilderness.

The word preached by Moses **did not profit them**, because it was **not mixed with faith in them that heard it**. The figure here is taken from the physical body and the digestive system. The Greek word translated **mixed** was used both of the digestion of food in the stomach and the assimilation of nutrients throughout the body. Regardless of the beauty, taste or value of food, it is of no use to the body unless it is properly digested and assimilated.

The same is true spiritually. Israel heard the word of God but failed to "digest" it through faith and assimilate it to their profit. Food improperly digested will actually do harm. So also the word of God, which is given to save, will be a testimony and assurance of destruction unless it is mixed with faith ([II Corinthians 2:15-16](#)). It is not enough to hear God's word. It must be received in faith and held to in patience.

4:3. We who have believed are the ones who **enter into rest**. Faith is a necessity, as demonstrated by the experience both of those who fell and those who attained. The **rest** into which believers enter (in promise now and in actuality if they persevere) is the same rest of which God spoke in [Psalm 95:11](#), as mentioned already in [Hebrews 3:11](#).

Because God swore **in His wrath** that Israel would not enter into His rest, it is evident that (1) He had a rest Himself, and (2) He had planned from the beginning for man to share in it. The quotation is translated correctly in [3:11](#), and should be so worded here. God's **works were finished from the foundation of the world**. Since then He has been in His own rest, and has sought faithful men who would enjoy it with Him.

4:4-5. This is proved by two quotations from Scripture. **God did rest the seventh day from all his works**, according to [Genesis 2:2](#). And then He swore in [Psalm 95:11](#) concerning His rest, **saying if they shall enter** (correctly translated, "they shall surely not enter") **into my** (the pronoun is emphatic) **rest**.

4:6-7. Since it has always been God's intention that **some must enter** into His rest, and since the **Jews to whom it was first preached** did not enter **because of unbelief**, God offered the rest again to those living in the time of David. They were admonished like the Jews in the wilderness to **hear his voice** and **harden not their hearts** ([Psalm 95:7-8](#)). God's saving time is **today**, whenever that may be. Any day is a day of salvation in which God's word comes to man and is received in faith.

4:8. The fact that the rest was offered to men in the time of David proves that the rest involved was not that found in the land of Canaan. **If Joshua** (Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua) **had given them rest** in the land, God **would not afterward have spoken of another day**. Yet He did as we have just seen.

4:9. The conclusion must be that **a rest** remains, even today, for **the people of God** who will trust in Christ.

4:10. He has not been speaking concerning an ordinary human rest, which is brief and is followed by more labor. The man who **is entered into God's rest** has **ceased from his works** forever, just as **God did from his** at the end of creation week. This is a rest of accomplished purpose, of fulfilled action, of completed labor. It is another way of describing the salvation of [1:14](#) and [2:3](#), or the world to come of [2:5](#). Because this is the nature of the promised rest, it is also apparent that the Sabbath rest of the Jews is not meant, for that was followed by six days of more labor and had to be repeated every week. In addition, the Sabbath

rest was commanded but this rest of God was always promised (see also [Matthew 11:28-30](#); [Revelation 14:13](#)).

4:11. This being the case, all effort is in order to **enter into that rest**. Diligence is necessary, because Christians can **fall after the same example of unbelief** seen in the Jews under Moses.

4:12. Diligence is necessary also because of the nature **of the word of God**. It is living or **quick** and energetic or **powerful**. It is **sharper than any two-edged sword**. The figure continues in saying that the word's fine edge can cut between **soul and spirit**, or to the dividing of **joints and marrow**. The author is not intending to give a scientific or spiritual analysis of the nature and composition of man. He is stressing the power and piercing energy of the word of God. God's word is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart**. Therefore all unbelief will be apparent to God. It is of the utmost importance that His word be received in faith -- it is an instrument too dangerous for trifling (see verse two).

4:13. He who knows the heart will not be misled by duplicity or hypocrisy. Nor will He overlook the good and honest heart, though sometimes men do (see [John 2:24-25](#)). **All things are naked and opened** before God's eyes. These words may come from either of two sources.

The priest would inspect a sacrifice with care, lest it be blemished; God's scrutiny of the heart is no less meticulous. It is said also that criminals of the first century would sometimes have their head pulled backward on public display, exposing the face to the contempt of general gaze. Nothing in man's heart or life can escape the certain gaze of God -- a gaze of disapproval and severity if what He sees is not holy and faithful. But for some there is also a gaze of sympathy and tenderness, as the next verse will show.

4:14. The writer changes his tone from severe warning to gentle appeal. Our high priest carefully searches the heart in total justice, but He is sympathetic to the human condition of His faithful ones when they stumble. **We have a great high priest**, not on earth, but **passed into the heavens**. He is **Jesus the Son of God** -- that same Son exalted in chapter one. Because He is our high priest, we are to **hold fast our profession** (see [notes at 3:1](#)).

4:15. Christ can **be touched** or, literally, can sympathize, **with** our weaknesses or **the feeling of our infirmities**. He has been **tempted** or put to the test, **in all points like as we are yet without sin**. Because He was without sin, Christ both saves and judges man. He judges man in presenting His perfect life when man's is so sinful. At the same time He saves man by that perfect life, because He gave His for man's sin, presenting it to the Father in the place of man's. Christ appeared once before God and presented His perfect life as atonement for our sins and as justification for our forgiveness. He will appear a second time to men, without sin, bringing salvation to those who look for Him ([9:26, 28](#); [10:4-18](#)).

4:16. Because we have a sympathetic high priest, one who measures His feelings on the basis of His own experiences as a man, we are exhorted and tenderly encouraged to **come**

boldly unto His **throne of grace**. There **we may obtain mercy**, and there we may **find grace to help** in the **time of our need**.

Mercy in this verse stands for a Greek word which in the Greek Old Testament represented the Hebrew word for Jehovah's "covenant mercy" or "lovingkindness." Throughout the Old Testament, God demonstrated this lovingkindness in acts of deliverance and grace. The same word described the mercy the people of the covenant were to show each other as joint recipients of Jehovah's covenant-mercy.

[Psalm 136](#) is a psalm of praise for God's covenant-mercy, and it illustrates the many forms it might take. A complete concordance or book of word studies will give many wonderful insights into this concept from the Old Testament. Christians receive the same kind of covenant kindness, mercy, and steadfast love through their union with Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER FIVE

The author has spoken several times already in this epistle concerning Christ as a priest. Christ is our priest because He has purged our sins -- that is part of His more excellent name (1:3). In this He was the sin-offering as well as the administrating officer (2:9). His identification with His people is seen not only in His tasting death for all men but also in His being made like them in all respects. Because Christ has suffered and been tempted, He is a merciful and faithful high priest, able to help those who are tempted (2:17-18).

As high priest, Christ is faithful to God as well as sympathetic to man. In this He is like Moses, though by position He is far superior to that man of God (3:1-6). His sacrificial death has been accomplished and Christ is now in heaven. As our great high priest, He sympathizes with our plight and supplies mercy and grace to meet our needs (4:14-16). Chapter five presents Christ once more as priest, this time in terms of His divine appointment, and with a word of introduction to the particular kind of priesthood into which He has entered.

5.1. For indicates that what follows is based on the final remarks of chapter four. **Every high priest** in the Jewish order is **taken from among men** and is a man himself. The high priest's ministry involves both God and man. He is **ordained** or appointed or divinely named **for** the sake of **men**. That is, he works on their behalf and, we might even say, in their stead. He also serves **in things pertaining to God**. The high priest's central function is making offerings to God **for sins**.

Gifts and sacrifices stand for the total offerings of the high priest to God on behalf of the people (see also 8:3; 9:9). Some have explained **gifts** as non-blood offerings and **sacrifices** as blood offerings. This is not consistent, however, with other passages ([Genesis 4:3-4](#) in the Greek Old Testament, for example) where these words appear with the meanings exactly reversed. A better distinction is made in terms of purpose. **Gifts** are thank-offerings (eucharistic); **sacrifices** are sin-offerings (expiatory). If this is in the author's mind, **for sins** modifies only **sacrifices** in the sentence and not both terms.

5.2. The high priest must be able **to have compassion**. Literally he "measures his feelings" with the people. He is not excessively swayed by harsh justice, nor moved overmuch by indulgent pity. He must measure his feelings in view of the people's responsibilities on the one hand, but in view of their circumstances and weaknesses on the other. Himself a man, he is aware of human weakness. Appointed by God for divine service, he is aware of God's just and holy demands. The Levitical high priest served in a very exalted and holy position. His was a representative role: representing God among the people, and representing the people before God ([Exodus 28:29-30, 36-43](#); see [Leviticus 16](#)).

Priestly offerings were for the benefit of **the ignorant**, that is, those whose sin was unknown to them at the time they committed it, and for those who were **out of the way**, which is the literal meaning of erring. The original construction of this verse suggests that both

terms refer to the same people, those who err through ignorance. The point is that priestly service and offerings were for sins of weakness or ignorance. There was no sacrifice for presumptuous sins ([Numbers 15:30-31](#); see verses 22ff in the same chapter). The Hebrews author later gives a similar warning to those under the new covenant ([10:26-29](#)).

It was necessary for the priest to be compassionate, **for he also** was **compassed** or surrounded **with infirmity** or weakness. A play on the word may be intended here, for the same word which means "surrounded" at other times means "clothed." The priest was separated from his fellow Jews and was distinguished from them by the holy robes of his office. Yet he was one of them in weakness and sin. Here was an imperfection of the Old Testament priesthood -the priest, like every other man, was clothed in weakness. The fact that he also wore priestly robes did not change that! It remained for Christ to serve as perfect priest through His own sinlessness and to offer a perfect sacrifice which could remove sins forever.

5:3. The Levitical priest was obligated **to offer** a sacrifice **for himself** as well as one **for the people**. Though he was called by God and was appointed to a sacred office, he was still a sinner himself.

5:4. **No man** among the Jews took the priesthood to **himself**. The priests were appointed of God, as signified in the divine appointment of **Aaron** their head ([Exodus 28:1](#)).

5:5. Nor did **Christ** glorify **himself** by taking the office of **high priest** presumptuously, but He was so honored or glorified by God the Father. Two Messianic psalms are quoted here and applied to Jesus Christ as Son and priest. The first is [Psalm 2:7](#), which was used to prove Christ's Sonship in 1:5 (see the [notes there on this quotation](#)).

5:6. The second quotation is from [Psalm 110:4](#), and will figure prominently in the discussion of the next two chapters of Hebrews. As Psalm two joined the position of Son to that of King, so [Psalm 110](#) related the functions of King and Priest. By using both these passages, the writer shows Christ to be Son (which in chapter one had the significance of Prophet), Priest (which he is about to discuss) and King. Our author used the first verse of [Psalm 110](#) in 1:13 and in the verses now following he will discuss verse four of that psalm.

God said to Christ in His resurrection, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" ([Acts 13:33](#)). At the same time, according to the present passage, He constituted Hhn high priest. Here the emphasis will be on the eternal nature of Christ's priesthood ("thou art a priest forever"); [Acts 13](#) also stresses Christ's unending life (verses 34-37). Here the eternal priesthood of Christ means continual salvation for His people ([7:23-25](#)); the "therefore" of [Acts 13:38](#) shows the same consequential blessing.

Aaron was not only called of God ([Exodus 28:1](#)), he was also confirmed as God's chosen one by a miracle of new life. When Korah, Dathan and Abiram questioned Aaron's authority and office ([Numbers 16:1-3](#)), the ground opened beneath them and their families, swallowing them alive, and a fire from God consumed their followers (verses 31-35). God then confirmed

Aaron's appointment by making his rod (a piece of dead wood) come to life again, bear buds, bloom blossoms and yield almonds ([Numbers 17](#)).

Christ was called by God to be high priest. He, too, was confirmed by a miracle of new life. His dead body, wrapped in burial clothes and entombed for three days, was given life by the power of God. He now lives to make priestly intercession for His people, through the merits of His own sacrificial blood.

Woe to any person who questions Christ's divine appointment or loses confidence in His sacred work of redemption! The "gainsaying of Korah" is still a present danger ([Jude 11](#)). The first readers of Hebrews were urged to put their confidence in Christ as God's appointed high priest divinely-appointed, all-sufficient and everlasting. That exhortation is no less needful today among those claiming to follow Him.

5:7. Who refers to Christ, not Melchizedek. **In the days of his flesh** refers to the earthly life of Christ in a human body. It is the time of His flesh and blood (2:14) when He partook of the seed of Abraham (2:16). This was the time in which He was in all points tempted (4:15).

[Chapter ten](#) will detail the significance of Christ's fleshly body. Here the intent is to demonstrate what was stated in [verse five](#): Christ did not take the office of high priest to Himself but was given the position by God. It was not attained by arrogant assumption but by obedient suffering. Suffering and obedience are joined in the verses which follow and together are related to salvation, first in the life of Christ and then in the lives of those He saves.

Four terms express the intensity of Christ's suffering in the face of death. **Prayers** signify pleadings or beggings, with reference to a need. **Supplications** stress the act of imploring or asking. **Strong crying** shows the depth of these calls for help. **Tears** are not mentioned in the Gospel accounts of Gethsemane, but were certainly visible on that occasion as an external indication of the utter agony of soul within the Lord ([Matthew 26:36-44](#); [Mark 14:32-41](#); [Luke 22:39-45](#)).

These prayers were offered to **him that was able to save him from death**, that is, the Father (see [notes at 2:12-13](#)). Some commentators see two prayers here: that God would save Christ from death on the cross, or that He would save Him from death by resurrection if the first prayer was not answered. Lenski correctly notes that Jesus is nowhere pictured as praying for the resurrection. On that basis he argues strongly for the first sense only. God was able to save the Son from the cross - by twelve legions of angels, if necessary ([Matthew 26:53](#)). But it was not the Father's will to do that, nor was it in accord with the Scriptures, as Jesus Himself had pointed out to His disciples ([Matthew 26:54](#)).

The statement that Christ **was heard** in these prayers is confusing to some, but need not be when thought is given to the actual prayer of the Lord. Christ did not pray simply that the cup of suffering might pass Him by, though that was included in His request (see

references above). His primary prayer -- and this is the writer's chief point in this verse -- was for the will of God to be done! That prayer was answered -- by the death, yes, and by the resurrection of the Son who willingly submitted to the Father's sovereign will! See the references given above, also [John 12:23-33](#). Again there may be an allusion to [Psalm 22](#), where the speaker cries to God (verse two) and is heard (verse 24). See the [comments at 2:12](#) on that psalm.

Christ was heard **in that he feared**. Literally the text says, "because of (His) reverent fear" or "fearful reverence." "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," prayed the Savior, with strong crying and tears. But with the same intensity He respectfully and fearfully climaxed that prayer, "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done!"

We are dealing here with the perfect obedience of the Son of God. This is an obedience unto death, an obedience perfected only in suffering. In the face of such absolute dedication to God's will -- and that at the cost of all personal claims and human ambitions or even life -- in the face of this divine obedience angels weep, demons shudder and sinful man must cry out in abject remorse, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

How inadequate all our obedience is in this light! How meager our dedication to the Father's will! How far short of God's glory and the Savior's example we see our own self-willed lives! Our Lord did not presume anything of His own accord. He did not hold back anything in His obedience and submission to the Father's perfect will. With every ounce of His deepest feeling He threw Himself in His Father's arms, there to depend on the Father's strength as He exclaimed simply, "Thy will be done!"

5:8. Yet being the **Son** -- that more excellent Son of chapter one -- Christ **learned obedience**. The Greek here says "the" obedience, as if to underscore the thought. Christ **learned** obedience in experiencing absolute submission to God's will. This does not mean that His life ever contained any element of rebellion or disobedience, for it did not. He came for the purpose of doing God's will ([Hebrews 10:7](#)) and He finished what He came to do ([John 17:4](#)).

Learned here translates rather a word kin to that from which we have "disciple" and "discipline." Christ was the disciple, par excellence. He experienced the full discipline of obedience -- even in suffering. By His suffering He learned experientially what full obedience means. In this He learned and qualified to sanctify those who should put their trust in Him. He is now perfectly able to help them when they are tempted (see [2:17-18](#)).

5:9. Christ was **made perfect**, not in a moral sense, but for the business of saving. **He then became the author** or source **of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him**. By the obedience learned only in suffering, Christ was made complete as Captain of salvation (2:10). By the same suffering and obedience He was perfected as Source of eternal salvation. "Captain" signifies "pioneer," and Christ has already gone ahead to enter the eternal glory which will be shared one day by the "many sons" ([2:10](#); see [6:20](#)).

Author here means "source," as it is only from Christ, and through Him, and by His work of obedience that those "sons" will share in the glory He now has as Son. **Author** may also be translated "cause," suggesting that Christ's perfect obedience is the cause of our salvation, not our own imperfect obedience, though this very verse affirms the fact of obedience on our part if we are recipients of the salvation He has made a reality. The English connection between "author" and "authority" is not in our word here, though Christ certainly has all authority as Son and Lord ([Matthew 28:18](#); [Philippians 2:9-11](#)).

Christ is author or cause or source of salvation **to them that obey him**. It is always the case that blessing follows obedience, though sometimes the obedience of one man secures blessing for another. Abraham's obedience was the basis on which God blessed his descendants ([Genesis 22:15-18](#); [Deuteronomy 4:37](#); [9:4-6](#)). How much more does Christ's obedience -- a perfect obedience -- result in the perfect salvation of all who share sonship with Him (see [Romans 5:19](#)). Yet those who share Christ's sonship and His righteousness ([Isaiah 61:9-11](#); [Jeremiah 23:5-6](#); [33:15-16](#); [I Corinthians 1:30](#); [II Corinthians 5:21](#); [Philippians 3:9](#)) must and will share also with Him in faithful obedience to God an obedience in which He led the way, set the example and obtained salvation for those who follow.

5:10. Because Christ did not glorify Himself to be made a high priest (verse five), choosing instead the submissiveness of suffering, He was **called** or greeted by God **as high priest after the order of Melchizedek**. Melchizedek held the double office of priest-king, a privilege denied the priestly offspring of Levi or the royal heirs of Judah that is, until Christ came. Now He, the prophet-Son, serves also as high priest and as king.

5:11. Having introduced Melchizedek, our author immediately leaves him for the moment. He attributes this digression in thought to the dullness of his hearers. After a warning and exhortation in chapter six, he will return to a detailed analysis of Melchizedek's priesthood in chapter seven. There he will show Melchizedek's office to be unlike that of Aaron's sons, but of the same sort as the Son's which it prefigures.

We have many things to say is literally "the discourse or conversation is much or long." **Hard to be uttered** does not mean that the writer had difficulty expressing himself, but that his discourse concerning Melchizedek would be interpreted or explained only with elaboration, for which his readers were not prepared. The transmitter was working well but the receivers needed repairs!

Dull of hearing is literally "sluggish or numb in ears (hearing)." Lenski remarks: "Unbelief closes the ears; incipient unbelief dulls them." These readers had not fallen into apostate unbelief but were apparently drifting in that direction. Our author pauses long enough to point this out to them and to sharpen their dull ears.

5:12. For indicates the cause of his statement. With reference to **the time** which has passed since they became Christians, his readers should have become **teachers**. The word here indicates clock-time, not merely "occasion" (as in [Romans 13:11](#) and other places).

Rather than this, however, they still had **need** for someone to **teach** them **again**. It is not in difficult matters alone that they are ignorant. They need instruction in **first principles**, the rudimentary matters, the spiritual ABC's.

How well this indictment fits so many in the church today. How many there are now who should have been teaching others long ago yet who continually need teaching in elementary principles. Some people are simply dull of hearing; others are "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:7). The first need to be sharpened; the second are to be rejected (II Timothy 3:5). The recipients of Hebrews were at the first point but not yet to the second.

They were in need of **milk**, not **strong meat** or solid food. Milk is a predigested food, suited for one who lacks ability to receive and digest his own nourishment. The spiritual milk-baby is not able to learn and digest his own spiritual food. He depends on someone else to do most of his learning and thinking for him. This is a beginning point, to be sure, but it should not characterize those who **for the time** ought to be able to teach others.

A certain measure of the blame for this condition must be put on some among the teachers and preachers who have not led the babes to stronger food. When the bottle is administered at every feeding time, and often the same formula warmed over, the hungry souls can not be expected to develop into maturity. Let each teacher and preacher learn from this context as well, to follow our author's example as he himself leaves the **first principles** to carry his readers on to maturity and perfection.

5:13. The spiritual infant who still partakes mil is **unskillful** or inexperienced **in the word of righteousness**. As an infant is without experience in eating strong food so long as he remains with milk alone, so the believer who never has experience in teaching others will remain in need of simple nourishment himself. This is not condoned but condemned

5:14. **Strong meat** is for the one who is of **full age**, the perfect or mature person. The mature Christian **by reason of use** or exercise has his **senses exercised to discern both good and evil**.

Senses translates a word which give us our "aesthetics," though here it has a figurative meaning. **Exercised** is from a word family which gives "gymnasium," and suggest perhaps that maturity in spiritual discernment comes only through regular workouts.

To discern good and evil represents the ability and/or the authority to make independent moral choices (see [Genesis 3:5, 22](#); [Deuteronomy 1:39](#); [II Samuel 14:17](#); [19:35](#); [I Kings 3:9](#); [Isaiah 7:16](#)). The Christian is to mature to the point of making his own moral judgements; he is to learn to discern the Lord's will in each circumstance of his own life (see [Romans 12:2](#); [Ephesians 5:10, 17](#); [I Thessalonians 4:1-4](#)).

CHAPTER SIX

6:1. The principles of the doctrine of Christ are the elementary matters which had been previously taught to the Hebrew Christians. They are encouraged to be **leaving** these things -- not in the sense of rejecting their truthfulness, or attempting to unlearn them, but as a child leaves the first reader in school for one more advanced, or as he leaves milk for solid nourishment. And they are called **to go on to perfection** or maturity or completion. The idea of perfection will reappear in the coming chapters.

It is necessary to lay a **foundation** in the construction of a firm building, but once the foundation has been laid, it is not put down again and again. This point is the basis for verses four through six. Those who fall away, having once been instructed in the fundamentals, will not be reclaimed by beginning from the first as if they had never heard the gospel. If they experienced these initial responses and understood these fundamentals -- but then fell away -- they have rejected what they know and have no room in their hearts for a conversion as at the first. **Again** is an important word in understanding these verses.

Six matters are listed as elementary principles, and they have been variously interpreted. Some take these as elements of Old Testament teaching in contrast to the more perfect lessons of the gospel. It is true that the terms which follow are all used at times of elements of pre-Christian truth. On the other hand, it seems more nearly correct to think of these fundamentals as basics in Christian instruction, both in view of the larger context and the specific terms as well.

The six points are given in three pairs of two each. We might speak of these pairs under the headings of preparation, initiation and motivation or direction. First mentioned is **repentance from dead works** and **faith toward God**. Repentance and faith are joined also in [Mark 1:15](#) and [Acts 20:21](#). In repentance, one feels the guilt of his own sin and rebellion against God, is sorry for it, and purposes to change his direction of life. He abandons **dead works** (see [9:14](#)), "works of righteousness" or "works of law," which are **dead** because they lead to death, can not bring spiritual life and are futile so far as pleasing God. Someone has pictured works springing from obligation as dead in the sense that they do not spring from life. They are as sheep's wool draped over a wolf's back; there is no vital connection between the animal and the wool.

In **faith toward God** one not only accepts intellectually that God is, but places his confidence in God for salvation. He does this by trusting the reconciliation God has already brought about through the life and death of Jesus Christ, and by throwing himself on the mercy and grace of God by identification with that sinless Son through living faith.

By repentance, man denies himself; by faith, he takes up his cross to follow Jesus. By repentance, he is crucified to the old way of life and all human merit or personal boasting; by faith, he takes hold of life in Christ and gratefully claims the merit and reward of Christ's

perfect life. **Repentance** and **faith** here stand for the initial hearing of the gospel and the response of the heart to it.

6.2. The next pair consists of **the doctrine** or teaching **of baptisms** and **of the laying on of hands**. The word here translated baptisms is that commonly applied to the various washings of the Old Testament (see [9:10](#); [Mark 7:4](#)). The doctrine of baptisms would therefore seem to involve explanations regarding the difference between Jewish washings on the one hand and gospel baptism in the name of Jesus the Messiah on the other. This would certainly involve some teaching on the significance of Christ's blood and sacrifice, a point to be developed in detail later in the epistle.

Laying on of hands was done in healing, blessing, or simply giving approval and endorsement. Many scholars feel that the laying on of hands also accompanied believer's baptism and signified the giving of the Holy Spirit, if so, these two teachings go together in a special way and have to do with Christian initiation, or entering upon the Christian life.

Resurrection of the dead and **eternal judgment** form the third pair of fundamental principles, and have to do with Christian motivation or direction. These are not the only proper motives, to be sure, but in the elementary teaching of the gospel one is taught to look to the resurrection and judgment as the completion of what God has already begun, and therefore as motives for faithfulness.

6.3. The writer acknowledges his dependance on the will of God. **If God** is willing, he will lead the reader to more advanced teaching and so to personal maturity.

6.4. **Those who were once enlightened** are Christians who have been instructed in the first principles of verses one and two (see also [10:32](#)). The following terms refer to these same individuals. In the post-apostolic writings, "enlightenment" came to be a technical term for baptism. In the New Testament the knowledge of God through Christ in the gospel is put in terms of light ([John 1:9](#); [Acts 26:18](#); [Colossians 1:12-13](#)). **Once** is an important word, and means once for all time. This enlightenment can take place only once; it can not be repeated.

Taste signifies experience (see [2:9](#)). **The heavenly gift** may mean the Holy Spirit, the remission of sins, or (probably) the entire new life as a child of God. As **partaker of the Holy Ghost**, Christians are partners of the Spirit. He is God's gift, the seal and earnest of future blessing and the originator of fruit well-pleasing to God ([Acts 2:38](#); [5:32](#); [II Corinthians 1:22](#); [Ephesians 1:13-14](#); [Galatians 5:22-25](#)).

6.5. Those who have **tasted the good word of God** are those who have experienced fulfillment of the precious promises God offers by claiming and receiving them in faith. The expression used here occurs also in the Greek Old Testament at [Zechariah 1:13](#) and [Joshua 21:45](#). **The powers of the world to come** probably refer to the miraculous manifestations given the infant church (see [notes at 2:3-4](#)), but to a Jewish Christian this phrase would speak of the present reality of the Messianic era in which such things would take place. **The**

world to come is literally the Coming Age, which is how the Jews spoke of the era of fulfillment and blessing under Messiah in the Kingdom of God (see [notes at 1:2](#); see also 1:14; 2:5; 13:14).

6:6. **If** is not in the original Greek, and the verb **fall away** is of the same tense as those preceding it in verses four and five. It is impossible **to renew again unto repentance** those who experienced the benefits of verses four and five, then **fell away** (our almost-literal English idiom would be "dropped out"). Not that all hope is gone, for God may once again give them repentance in acknowledging the truth ([II Timothy 2:25](#)). But it is impossible for those individuals to experience again the renewal through enlightenment which was theirs in the first hearing of the gospel (see [Acts 11:18](#)). They can not **again** go through the fundamental process of repentance and faith, or of initiation into the body of Christ, as they did before (read this verse in the context of those preceding it). They have done that once, but have now rejected all that God offers. For such a person the gospel holds no appeal.

These individuals (considered hypothetically as among the readers) **crucify for themselves the Son of God**. By their apostasy they judge Christ to be an imposter and guilty of death. In such a person repentance cannot take place, for it is based on godly sorrow and a conviction of sin growing out of faith in Christ as the Son of God.

Such apostates **put Christ to an open shame** (see [10:29](#)). This same verb is used in the Greek Old Testament at [Numbers 25:4](#) ("hang them up," KJV), where its point is clearly seen in a context of apostasy from God. Christians who fall away do just this to the Son of God. They hang Him on the cross again, whether they forsake Christ for the world, for antichrist religion, or simply for carelessness and indifference.

6:7-8. **The earth** or ground **which drinketh in the rain** and then bears produce **meet** or fitting and appropriate for those who have worked, **receiveth blessing from God**. On the other hand ground which produces **thorns and briers** or thistles proves itself unworthy of blessing and is rejected (the same word translated "reprobate" in [II Corinthians 13:57](#)) for cultivation. Instead it is burned over, perhaps to prevent the further spread of briers to the adjoining land. A double meaning is certainly intended here, for such unproductive and evil men will meet their **end** in the **burning** of hell (see a similar thought in [Matthew 3:10,12](#); [13:30](#); [John 15:6](#)).

6:9. What is true in the physical realm is true also in the spiritual, and the author's intention is to prevent this fate among his readers. Having given such a stern warning, he now quickly softens his tone to encouragement. He is **persuaded** or convinced that **better things** than this will come from his readers. He looks for the fruitful lives and works which **accompany salvation**, things closely aligned with it and holding fast to it (see [Ephesians 2:10](#); other passages in [notes on 13:21](#)). His words are meant as a warning, not as a present judgment. His readers have shown fruits worthy of God in the past, and he urges them to remain steadfast in such a life in the future.

6:10. God is not unrighteous and will not **forget** any **work** or **labor** growing out of **love** and done because of **his name** or because of the relationship sustained to Him. The Hebrew Christians had **ministered to** or served **the saints**, their brethren -- both in the past and in the writer's present (see [10:32-34](#)).

6:11. He wants every **one of** them to demonstrate the **same diligence**, not only now **but to the full assurance of hope unto the end**. Their danger was in stopping short of completion, of falling back before the goal had been attained. Against this he warns repeatedly ([3:6](#), [14:10:23](#)).

6:12. They are not to be **slothful** (the same word translated "dull" in [5:11](#); see [notes there](#)), but rather are to be (literally "become") **followers** or imitators of those godly men of old who did **inherit** the blessings contained in God's **promises**. Success always comes **through faith** (which in the Bible means trust, reliance and commitment as well as intellectual acceptance) **and patience** or longsuffering perseverance.

6:13. For example, when God promised **Abraham** in [Genesis 22:16-18](#) concerning his numerous descendants and other blessings, God **could swear by no greater** person than Himself, and **so he swore** by His own name or personal character.

6:14. In the Hebrew text of this passage, an idiom is used which simply means "I will surely bless you and multiply you." The Greek Old Testament translated the phrase word for word and gave the rather awkward reading which our author quotes here and which is carried over into the English.

6:15. So, thus, in this manner and under these circumstances, Abraham first **patiently endured**; only then **he obtained** the fulfillment of the **promise**. He saw the beginning of the fulfillment in the spared life of Isaac. The rest he saw only by faith according to [11:13](#), [39](#). As Abraham had to wait, so do we. This is the writer's exhortation, and this is why he mentions Abraham.

6:16. It is the case with **men to swear by the greater** than themselves. Among men, an **oath** serves two purposes. Negatively, it is **an end of all strife**. When a man takes an oath there is no more point in disputing his word or questioning him. Positively, it is **for confirmation**. It gives all the assurance that is possible by the spoken word.

6:17. Because of this, God condescended to man's own level of understanding and **confirmed** His promise to Abraham **by an oath**. This was to **show** or demonstrate to **the heirs of promise** (see [1:14](#); [9:15](#)) the unchangeableness or **immutability** of God's **counsel** or purpose and design.

6:18. God's promise was made twice sure **by two immutable things**: His word (it is **impossible for God to lie**), and His oath (taken in His own name). As man views the situation, he may have full confidence in the promise of God.

Strong is emphatic here and is read by weak men who need the encouragement. **Consolation** would be better translated "encouragement." Christians are those who **have fled**

for refuge (the Greek Old Testament uses the same word of fleeing to the cities of refuge). **The hope set before us** is to be laid hold of or seized. God's twice-sure word of promise is a strong encouragement for all Christians, by patient waiting, to do just that.

6:19. This hope is **an anchor of the soul**. The anchor was a symbol of hope in the ancient world as well as now. Our anchor is **both sure** or unfailing **and steadfast** or firmly fixed. We can have strong confidence in our hope. **Within the veil** indicates the most holy place of the tabernacle, into which only the high priest entered one day each year. The phrase here symbolizes the presence of God, and refers to the fact that Jesus has passed into heaven as the next verse will state.

6:20. Into the very presence of God in heaven our **forerunner** has already **entered** (see 2:9-10; 4:14). **Forerunner** in secular Greek was used of a scout, one who went before and led the way (see [notes on "author" at 5:9](#)). Jesus has not only entered into God's presence for us (though as high priest He did that); He has also entered into heaven in front of us -- leading the way and guaranteeing by His own entrance that the path is clear for us to follow.

The Christian's hope is certain and confident. It is grounded in the person of Jesus Christ and is based on His sinless life and His atoning death. If our hope were in our own obedience or knowledge or power, we could have no strong confidence at all. But it rests in the Son of God, and for that reason it is sinful not to have strong confidence.

The Christian's sin is no cause for loss of hope, but rather for genuine repentance and prayer -- for throwing himself on the mercies of God through his mediator Jesus Christ. Because of the life Jesus lived and the death He died -- and because the Christian is one with Him -- God's people ought to cherish a living hope. They have fled for refuge to the merciful and all-powerful Son of God. Nor do they wait for the death of a high priest, for Jesus is their high priest, and He lives **forever -- after the order of Melchizedek**.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Having introduced Melchizedek in 5:10-11, our author temporarily put him aside to give in chapter six an exhortation to diligence and steadfastness and a warning regarding the end of slothfulness. He then returned in 6:20 to Melchizedek. Now he discusses him at length in chapter seven, which follows.

7:1. This Melchizedek was the subject of much speculation in Jewish circles, including the Essene community of the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls. He is mentioned in Scripture, however, only in Hebrews, [Psalm 110](#) and [Genesis 14](#). Melchizedek was a king-priest, contemporary of Abraham, and a servant of God. **Salem** is probably an ancient name for Jerusalem (see [Psalm 76:2](#)). Adoni-zedek, another Old Testament king of Jerusalem ([Joshua 10:1](#)), had the same element in his name as Melchizedek, which also indicates an identification of Salem with Jerusalem. Some have suggested that Salem here is the Salim of [John 3:23](#); a few take the term figuratively as a title (see verse two) devoid of any geographical intent. It is in line with known facts to suppose that Melchizedek was an actual priest-king of the city-state captured by David from the Jebusites and known to us as Jerusalem (see [comments at 12:22](#)).

Melchizedek is **priest of the most high God**, and this point interests our author. Although the Hebrew term parallels the name of a Canaanite god, there is no reason to think that Melchizedek served any deity other than Jehovah. The Most High God is identified in Genesis as the God of Abraham; the Greek Old Testament lies behind the phrase in our present passage; Old and New Testament writers alike present Melchizedek as a servant of Jehovah.

[Genesis 14:17-20](#) reports that Melchizedek **met Abraham** as he was **returning from the slaughter of the kings** of the East who had taken Lot captive in the course of a plundering campaign. That text also says that Melchizedek **blessed** Abraham, a point our author will consider later.

7:2. Abraham gave a tenth part or tithe **of all** that he had to Melchizedek. Melchizedek's name is now analyzed in its separate Hebrew components. This practice, though strange by Western logic, was not an uncommon method of reasoning when Hebrews was written -- and here it has the approval of the Holy Spirit. The name Melchizedek is composed of two Hebrew words; **melek** means "king" and **tsedek** means "righteousness." Together they mean **king of righteousness**, which, **by interpretation**, Melchizedek was. He is also called **King of Salem**, and since Salem stands for the Hebrew **shalom** or "peace," Melchizedek is here called **king of peace**.

Righteousness and peace appear together frequently in the Old Testament Scriptures (see for example [Psalm 72:7](#); [Isaiah 9:6-7](#); [Zechariah 9:9-10](#)). To the Hebrew, "righteousness" meant the faithful performing of all duties proper to a relationship. In a spiritual sense that

meant faithfulness to God first of all, because of His covenant mercies to Israel, then faithfulness to fellow-Jews who were recipients of the same covenant blessings.

In [Isaiah 5:7](#), God looks among His people for righteousness but finds instead a cry. The cry speaks of perverted justice, cruelty and a general absence of the life described by righteousness. There is also a play on words in the Hebrew text of this verse, but that does not concern us here.

When the people maintained righteousness, "peace" was the result. Again the term has first a spiritual significance of peace with God, and then of peace with one's fellows under God's covenant care and rule. There could be no peace apart from righteousness, and righteousness was expected to result in peace ([Isaiah 32:17](#)). Melchizedek of Salem incorporated both these concepts in his name and office, and even in this foreshadowed the Lord who is our Righteousness and our Peace ([I Corinthians 1:30](#); [Ephesians 2:14](#)).

[7:3](#). Melchizedek had no ancestor in the priesthood. Unlike the Jewish priests who had to establish their genealogy to qualify for service ([Nehemiah 7:63-64](#); [Leviticus 21:17](#); [Ezekiel 44:22](#)), this man neither received his office by hereditary right nor passed it on to a physical descendant. So far as we are told in Scripture, he was **without father or mother**; not that he was other than human, but that he did not belong to any line of priests

Without descent is better translated "without genealogy." See the point just above. **Neither beginning of days nor end of life** means that Melchizedek's priesthood is not recorded as to origin or end. He is a lone figure who suddenly appears on the stage of history for a brief moment, then as suddenly and mysteriously removes from the scene. No one can say of this strange man, "here is the beginning of his priestly service" or "here is the end of his priesthood."

Because God opened the curtain in the middle of Melchizedek's priestly service and closed it in the same place, Melchizedek is **made like unto the Son of God**, who is also alone in a unique priesthood. **Continually** is not the phrase usually translated "forever," but may be translated "for the duration," "perpetually," or "without interruption." This term will appear later in the chapter.

[7:4](#). In the following verses we will **consider how great** Melchizedek was. In the first place, **Abraham** -- not another by the same name, but **the patriarch** himself -- paid tithes to Melchizedek. Nor was this a poor tithe, but **of the spoils**, literally "off the top of the heap" -- the choicest tenth.

[7:5](#). The **sons of Levi** or the Levitical priests, who **receive the office** they hold, **take tithes** because of a **commandment** and a **law**. They also take tithes from **their own brethren**, who are descendants of Abraham.

[7:6](#). Melchizedek is one **whose descent is not from them**, who had no commandments or law requiring Abraham to pay him tithes, and who had not received his priesthood by virtue of a lineage. Yet he **received tithes**, and that not from just any passing stranger, but

from **Abraham!** To this add the fact that Melchizedek then **blessed** Abraham -- the Abraham who **had the promises** from God.

7:7. It is indisputable that **the less is blessed** in this sense by **the better**. If Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, it follows that Melchizedek was a "better" man in terms of rank and office than the patriarch. Both men acknowledged this relative position: Abraham, by paying tithes to Melchizedek; Melchizedek, by blessing Abraham.

7:8. By comparison, note also that **here** in the Levitical priesthood **men that die receive tithes** (see [I Chronicles 6:49-53](#)), but **there** in Melchizedek's case one received them who had no successor.

7:9. To cap it all, and to be perfectly truthful about it, **Levi also, who receiveth tithes** under the law from his Jewish brethren, there **paid tithes** instead, **in Abraham**.

7:10. If one objects that Levi was not present in [Genesis 14](#), the writer notes that **he was yet in the loins of his father Abraham when Melchizedek met him**. Just as he can say that Levi received tithes (in the person of his descendants), so he can say as well that Levi paid tithes (in the person of his ancestor). **Levi** was forefather of the priestly tribe; therefore Melchizedek's priesthood was greater than Aaron's.

Our author has dealt with Melchizedek's characteristics as a person ([verses one through three](#)) and in relation to the Levitical priests ([verses four through ten](#)). Now he turns to his primary point, an exaltation of the priesthood of Christ in comparison with the Old Testament Jewish priesthood. [Verses 11-14](#) show that the priesthood was the basis of the law, and that because Christ's priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is permanent, so is the law which rests upon it. This is in contrast with the priesthood of Aaron, for it changed, necessitating a change in the law related to it.

7:11. If **perfection** (a key word in Hebrews, consult a concordance) **were by the Levitical priesthood**, there would have been no **further need** for **another priest** after another order -- that **of Melchizedek** and **not of Aaron**. An institution is perfect when it accomplishes the purpose for which it was instituted. The Aaronic priesthood did not do that.

The purpose of a priesthood is to bring men to God, to atone for their sins. The author will show clearly in the following chapters that the Levitical sacrifices and priesthood could not do this -- either perfectly or permanently. In the present passage, then, he refers to this imperfection in the Old Testament priestly order. He also shows that it had to be replaced by a perfect order which could fulfill these purposes.

We are accustomed to thinking of the priesthood as dependent on the law. Our author says the opposite. The law depended on the priesthood. This suggests that in God's ordering of affairs the priesthood was first in importance, then the law. Law pointed men to the reality of sin and to the fact that they were sinners. This recognition called for the priesthood as the divine ordinance and institution for the removal of sins. But the imperfection of the Old Testament priesthood pointed them even further to the future when the Son of God

would come as great high priest and Lamb of God, completely removing all sins forever by one offering of Himself. The priesthood, then, was the basis and grounds of the law.

7:12. When **the priesthood** was **changed**, there was **of necessity** a **change also of the law**. When the foundation is removed the building collapses. There can be no legal code unless there is provision for those who break it. In the case of Israel, the priesthood is changed (to one which is perfect), then a new law is given based on that perfect priesthood and relating to it. There is room for thought along this line, that the new law (perfectly suited to its priesthood) is as far superior in nature as well as content to the old, as the new priesthood of Christ is superior to the priesthood of Aaron's sons. The purpose of each law is suited to its particular priesthood.

7:13. **He of whom these things are spoken** is the Lord Jesus Christ, as the next verse will state, and He belongs **to another** or a different **tribe** from Levi. He is of a tribe from which **no man** ever served **at the** priestly **altar**.

7:14. It is **evident** on the basis of His genealogies in Matthew chapter one and Luke chapter three that **our Lord** descended from **Judah**, a tribe from which the Law of Moses said absolutely **nothing** so far as **priesthood** is concerned. The priesthood has therefore been changed, and the next verse will adduce still another proof of this.

7:15. The priesthood has been changed, not only in tribe, but in the quality and sort of its priest. This point makes **far more evident** than the former point the change A priest has arisen now who is **another** in quality and kind. He is a different type of priest, not resembling the Levitical priests at all, but after the likeness of **Melchizedek**.

7:16. Christ has become a priest twice-different in nature from the sons of Aaron. His priesthood rests not on **the law of a carnal commandment** but on **the power of an endless life**. Old Testament priests were priests by virtue of a **law**, outside and apart from themselves or their personal fitness. That law did not attempt to select on the basis of moral or spiritual qualities, but simply according to physical ancestors. It was thus a **carnal commandment**, having to do only with physical restrictions and requirements.

Christ has been made priest, not on this basis, but because He possesses an inherent **power** that fits Him for the position He is to occupy. The term **power** here does not signify authority, but might, and speaks of a characteristic of Christ Himself, inherent in His righteous person. This was the **power** or might of an **endless life**.

Because He was not a sinner, though He was fully tempted, the Son of God could not be held by Satan in death (see [comments at 2:14](#)). He possessed the strength or dynamic of a life that, literally, "could not break down." A perfect life has no weak spot; sin is the weakness which brings down all other men, including the Old Testament priests. Christ's priesthood and service are firmly grounded in the inherent power of a life that will never end. The writer will return to this wonderful thought in [verse 25](#).

7:17. To this agrees the Scripture introduced much earlier ([Psalm 110:4](#)) which says, "Thou art a priest **for ever** after the order of Melchizedek."

7:18. The familiar Greek construction "on the one hand/on the other hand" is used in verses 18 and 19. On the one hand there is a **disannulling** or placing aside or removing of the previous or former **commandment** regulating priests (verses 5, 15). This setting aside was necessary because of the inherent **weakness** and **unprofitableness** of that system which could not bring perfection ([verse 11](#)), which was based on a carnal requirement ([verse 16](#)) and which was manned by imperfect priests ([verses 27-28](#)).

7:19. **The law made nothing perfect** (see [Romans 8:3](#); [Galatians 2:21](#); [3:21](#)), for it rested on a priesthood which could not perfect ([verse 11](#)). "The law made beginnings, taught rudiments, gave initial impulses, hinted, foreshadowed, but brought nothing to perfection, did not in itself provide for man's perfect entrance into God's fellowship" (**Expositor's Greek Testament**).

Perfection did come, however, in Christ's work and in the **better hope** which He introduced and confirmed. **Better** is a key word in Hebrews, and the serious student will profit from a study of its many occurrences in this epistle. The **hope** spoken of here has already been discussed to some extent (see [notes on 6:18-20](#)).

The blessed feature of this hope, and the ultimate basis of comparison between all that belonged to the inadequate Old system and all that pertains to the perfect New, is that **by it we draw nigh unto God**. The verb translated **draw nigh** is the same one used in the Greek Old Testament at [Exodus 19:21](#), when, at the giving of the Law, God specifically commanded the people **not** to draw near to God. They could not draw near to God under that system because their lives were unholy and their sins were ever-present. Under the covenant of the Son, men in themselves are no better, but they can draw near to God by virtue of Christ's life which is holy and His blood which atones for their sins. Such a blessed thought this is for meditation and such a holy basis for living!

7:20-22. The three verses go together, joined in the Greek and English by the connecting phrases translated **inasmuch as** (verse 20) and **by so much** (verse 22), and including verse 21 which is parenthetical. The author presents a ratio. **Inasmuch as**, or to the extent, that Christ supercedes the Old Testament priests by an oath-appointment versus a simple appointment, **by so much** or to that same extent, **Jesus is surety of a better testament** than theirs.

It was **not without an oath that** Christ became priest; rather it was with an oath. This is proved by a chief passage on the subject, [Psalm 110:4](#). Jehovah **sware** to Jesus, "**Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek**." Earlier the Hebrews author dealt with the **forever** in this psalm; here he is concerned with the **sware**.

To say that God **will not repent** does not speak of repentance of sin, for by nature God can not sin. **Repent** here is not the word normally translated that way (which itself has the

basic meaning "to change the mind," see 12:17), but stands for a word which emphasizes the thought of concern or care. God will not change His mind because of afterthought or later concern, as He did -- for example -- with the house of Eli (see [I Samuel 2:27-36](#)). Christ is a priest **forever**.

Because God will never change His mind about Christ, Jesus has become **surety of a better testament**. The word translated **surety** is a noun form of the verb translated "draw nigh" in [verse 19](#) (see [comments there](#)). The same life of Jesus which enables us to draw nigh to God remains forever, because Jesus has the "power of an endless life" ([verse 16](#)). Nor will God change His mind about that life presented as an offering, for He has so given His oath ([verse 21](#)). Jesus is therefore **surety** of His covenant. He is a guarantor to man from God that God has accepted a perfect sacrifice on man's behalf. And Jesus ever lives to make intercession for them that come to God by Him ([verse 25](#)).

Testament appears here for the first time in Hebrews, and will be discussed in the following chapters. The same word is sometimes translated "covenant" though in the Old and New Testament Scriptures it frequently has the force of a one-sided disposition or will involving two parties, rather than a two-sided agreement or bargain between equals. God's **testament** or covenant is given to man by God, man accepts or rejects it, but he may not change it. More on this later.

[7:23](#). **They** who served under the Old covenant **were many priests**, one taking the place of the other **because** no single one could **continue** in the priesthood forever **by reason of** his own **death**. Josephus says that 83 high priests officiated from Aaron to the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Our writer gives no specific number but notes simply that they all died!

[7:24](#). In contrast to this, Jesus has **an unchangeable priesthood** because He **continueth forever**. He will never die. He will never need a successor. His priesthood is authenticated by God's oath. In short, His is an unerring and immovable priesthood and priestly service. it is perfect in every sense of the word.

[7:25](#). **Wherefore**, because of all these considerations, Christ **is able to save to the uttermost**. This may be taken either with regard to time (He saves forever), or extent (He saves completely), or both. Neither should be excluded. Both are true. Christ's complete and eternal salvation is for **them that come to God by him**. They are those who come to Him as priest, who lay their sins on Him as God's Lamb, who trust His offering of a perfect life as sufficient in God's sight for blessing, and who by faithful perseverance rely on His intercession for all these things. It is for no one else, though "whosoever will" may take advantage of it, and it is offered by God to all men.

Christ is priest because He has the power of an endless life. Because **he ever liveth**, He needs no successor. He now sits beside the Father **to make intercession for** His people.

Christ made but one sacrifice, but He ever lives to make intercession on the basis of that sacrifice. In terms of His death, He was the sin-offering. In terms of His resurrection and present work, He is high priest. The priest of the Old Testament did not merely kill the sacrifice; he then presented its blood, standing for its life, as an appeal to God for forgiveness and blessing ([Leviticus 17:11-12](#)). In both particulars he had an imperfect priesthood. The sacrifice was amoral and could not take away sin (see [10:1-4](#)); the priest was mortal and had to be replaced (as the present chapter has shown).

Christ, however, offered a perfect sacrifice (His own sinless life), was then raised (as a sign of God's acceptance of that life given in death) and will never die again. Unlike the Old Testament priests and their sacrifices, Christ died **once**, but **forever** makes intercession for His people (see [I John 1:7b, 9; 2:1-2](#)).

The one who is in Christ rests his salvation, forgiveness and hope of blessing on the vicarious death and perfect obedience of Jesus his high priest. Because Jesus died, though sinless, He was able to be sin-bearer, "taking away the sins of the world." Because He offered God a sinless life, the Father is pleased with one Man (though with no other on his own merit) and is justly able to dispense full blessings. Yet because the Christian is one with Christ, His death counts for him and His life does as well. God can, therefore, forgive the one "in Christ" on the basis of Christ's blood and can also give him every blessing and favor on the basis of Christ's life so long as he clings to Him in faith (see [Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12](#) [Romans 4 25; 5:8-11; II Corinthians 5 21; I Peter 2 24; Revelation 1:5; 7:9-17](#)).

7:26. Such an high priest as Christ is just what man needs. He **became us**, that is, He was fitted to our needs. Man needs a priest who is **holy**, for he himself is not. The word translated **holy** here also includes the idea of compassion and tender mercy. Man's priest must be **undefiled** and **separate from sinners**, but every Aaronic priest was weak and sinful. Our priest needs to be **higher than the heavens**, living forever to intercede on our behalf.

7:27. Christ does not need **daily** to make a sacrifice **for his own sins** and **then for the people's**. He had no sin Himself, and so He offered **himself** as a perfect sacrifice for the people. Because He had a perfect sacrifice He did not need to offer it but **once**.

7:28. The law of the Old Testament priesthood made men high priests who had **infirmity** or weakness. In contrast to this the **word of the oath** (see [verse 21](#)), which was **since the law** in origin but replaced it, made the **Son** a priest -- and He is **consecrated for evermore**.

The beautiful point of these last verses found wonderful expression in the following hymn, written in 1742 by Charles Wesley.

Arise, my soul, arise, shake off thy guilty fears:
The bleeding Sacrifice in my behalf appears.
Before the Throne my Surety stands;
My name is written on His hands.
He ever lives above, for me to intercede
His all-redeeming love, His precious blood to plead;
His blood atoned for every race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.
Five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me.
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"
My God is reconciled; His pard'ning voice I hear;
He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And "Father, Abba, Father!" cry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8:1. Of the things spoken in this treatise, **this** which the author is about to say is the **sum** or, as better translated in the later versions, the chief point. And what is this chief point? That we believers have Jesus as **high priest**, and that He is performing priestly service for us at **the right hand of God in the heavens**.

This figure of Christ at God's right hand comes from [Psalm 110](#) (see [notes at 1:13](#)) and is frequently joined in the New Testament to that of the authoritative "Son of Man" of Daniel, chapter seven. The psalm also combines Christ's priestly and His royal offices. While most other New Testament references to the psalm point to its royal imagery (but see [Romans 8:34](#)), the epistle to the Hebrews pays special attention to the priestly.

8:2. Jesus is a **minister** or, literally, "public servant" of **the sanctuary** or holy things. But His service involves **the true** or substantial **tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not** any structure erected by **man**. His sanctuary is heaven itself, the "most holy place" where God dwells.

While it is true that the physical body of Jesus is referred to as a temple ([John 2:19-22](#)), that is not meant here, for verse five says that Moses used this sanctuary for a pattern. Nor does the text speak of the spiritual body of Christ, the church, for the church has the benefit of service performed in this sanctuary; it is not itself the sanctuary. In addition, the "church in the wilderness" corresponds in the present analogy to the New Testament "church" (if we extend the analogy to include either), and each "church" **has**, not **is**, its own sanctuary and priestly service.

8:3. Because **every high priest** holds office for the express purpose of offering **gifts and sacrifices** (see [note at 5:1](#)), Jesus **of necessity** must also **have something to offer**, for He is our high priest. What is true in general is true in particular. Here the emphasis is on the fact of His service; what He offers is told in 7:27.

8:4. This very fact indicates that His ministry is in heaven, not **on earth**, for His sacrifice would not fit the earthly system. Besides, there are no vacancies in the Jewish priesthood for a priest such as He (see also [7:13-14](#)). Christ is our high priest -- that has already been established. Yet if His service were earthly, He could not even be a regular priest, much less a high priest (see [Numbers 18:1-7](#)). In the Greek, this verse contains the first part of a phrase which is completed in verse six and means "on the one hand . . . on the other hand."

8:5. The earthly priests of the Jewish system do not **serve** the substantial, true (verse two) **heavenly things**, but rather the **example** or copy or outline and **shadow** of those things. A shadow is not itself the solid reality, but gives assurance that the substantial object exists of which it is an outline or copy.

That this Old Testament tabernacle was but a copy of the heavenly reality and not the original prototype is seen in the command concerning its erection. **Moses was admonished by God** in [Exodus 25:40](#) to **make all things according to the pattern** which he was shown

in the mountain. It is said by some of the rabbis that Gabriel descended in a workman's apron from heaven with models of the tabernacle furniture which he showed Moses how to build. The Bible does not give such details, but simply states that Moses was shown a pattern (literally something struck from a die or stamp) and told to build with it as a reference in all things.

What Moses built, though by God's instruction and according to a divine pattern, was not the original and substantial sanctuary but a copy of it. No man or group of men can build the true sanctuary, for it is pitched by the Lord, not by man (verse two, 3:4).

The point here was not altogether new to the Jews, though the application was. An uninspired Jewish writer of the period just before Christ had said of Solomon's temple: "Thou gavest command to build a sanctuary in thy holy mountain, and an altar in the city of thy habitation; a copy of the holy tabernacle which thou preparedst aforehand from the beginning." ([Wisdom 9:8](#)). That writer had surmised that the earthly sanctuaries were copies; it remained for our author to tell the real original and for our high priest to enter and serve in it!

To have the benefits of a perfect sacrifice administered by a perfect high priest serving in the true sanctuary built by God and not man is a grace given for the first time to God's covenant people in Christ. We have no mere copy of shadow, but the original holy things of heaven themselves -- now fully revealed and fully served by the Son who is Priest-King.

[8:6](#). This verse gives "the other hand" in contrast to the truth stated in verse four. Christ has **now** in this age of fulfillment and reality **obtained a more excellent ministry** or service than that from which He is barred by tribe and nature on earth. To the same extent, He is **mediator** or middle-man of a **better covenant** than that served by the Jewish priests, for His is **established** or legalized on the basis of **better promises** than theirs. The writer enumerates these promises in the rest of the chapter.

The first covenant was also given through a mediator ([Galatians 3:19](#)) and the people approached God through him ([Exodus 20:19](#)). But while Moses was mediator and Aaron high priest, Jesus is both! In the century before Christ, certain Pharisees looked for a Messiah who would save both Jews and gentiles, and they spoke of a mediator who would intercede before God for the righteous. (Testament of [Dan 5-6](#)). Yet even these lofty dreams failed to anticipate the plans of God, for we have one who is high priest, mediator and universal Savior combined -- and not even from Levi's tribe.

The same may be said with reference to the Qumran Jews described in the Dead Sea Scrolls. They seemed to have looked for two or perhaps three Messiahs; apparently they could not envision one man doing all that needed to be done. But God's Son -- higher than any angel -- did all that God saw required, and far surpassed the very thoughts and desires of His own people! "How much better," the Hebrews author affirms over and over!

8:7. If the first covenant (this word is added by the translators and is therefore in italics) **had been faultless, no place would have been sought** by God or needed by man **for a second** arrangement. Yet God did propose a new covenant, even in the former period of time, and spoke of it then to His people. Therefore, the writer argues, that first was not faultless (see [7:18-19](#)).

8:8. The **fault** lay with the people to whom the first covenant was given, because they did not keep their part of the arrangement. Yet the first covenant was of such nature that all blessings depended on the ability of the people to do just that. This made the covenant itself faulty in effect, or from the point of view of the people. Because of the fault that lay **with them**, God promised a new covenant in [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#), and the author of Hebrews quotes that passage in verses 8-12.

Jeremiah began to prophesy just five years before the great reform of Josiah described in [II Kings 23](#). After centuries of neglect of the Law, the nation affirmed again its commitment to God in a great covenant-renewal ceremony led by the king himself (verses one through three). Only a few years passed, however, until the zeal was dampened and the promises forgotten. Many had never been sincere in their pledge to God's covenant ([Jeremiah 3:10](#)) and most of the rest were victims of time and circumstance. The covenant was not in their hearts, and even a royal service could not put it there to stay. Because of this inherent weakness of the people and derived weakness of the covenant, God promised Jeremiah that He would make a new arrangement with His people in the future.

The days come is literally "days are coming." See [comments on the "last days" at 1:2](#). The **new covenant** was promised through [Jeremiah 600](#) years before Christ, but Jesus used the expression in instituting the Lord's Supper ([Luke 22:20](#)) and Paul repeated it in the same connection ([I Corinthians 11:25](#)). Paul also used the phrase in a ministry context ([II Corinthians 3:6](#)). Outside this chapter of Hebrews, the term appears only at 9:15 except for these passages.

New here signifies "fresh," not simply new in terms of time. [Hebrews 12:24](#) uses a different word to call this covenant "new" in time as well. The point of the present word is that our covenant is fresh and of a different sort from the old arrangement between God and His people.

The Greek Old Testament, which our writer quotes, said "covenant a new covenant." He changes that to "perfect a new covenant," with the same concern for the perfection or completion of the Christian system as stressed already in [2:10](#); [5:9](#); [6:1](#); [7:11](#), [28](#) and other places

This fresh new kind of covenant would be made with the **house** or people or family of **Israel** and that of **Judah**. In Jeremiah's time the people had been long scattered from Israel by Assyria, and Judah was even then being carried captive by Babylon Yet God would bring back a remnant from both ([Jeremiah 31:7-9](#)) and would establish a new order.

Jesus was God's fulfillment and fulfiller of all spiritual promises to the Jews, according to [Romans 15:8](#). Yet the next ten verses of that chapter show from the Old Testament that gentiles are also to be beneficiaries of gospel grace. The book of Hebrews is addressed to Christian Jews, and our author does not concern himself at this point with the gentile mission.

8:9. This new kind of covenant will not be like that one made with the Jews at Sinai, though that one came from a God whose gracious and powerful acts of deliverance had brought His people together to receive it. Jeremiah speaks of God's merciful deliverance in the Exodus in saying that He **took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt**. The figure is that of a tender father gently leading a **small and still-wobbly son before he has learned to care** for himself. Such imagery is not uncommon in the Old Testament ([Hosea 11:1-3](#); [Deuteronomy 1:31](#)). Similar imagery is employed of Christ and His new-covenant people at 2:16 (see the [comment there](#)).

In spite of God's tender care for Israel, **they continued not in** the covenant to fulfill their part of it, and God **regarded them not**, as a lord whose subjects had failed to keep what was required of them. Our text of Jeremiah has "although I was a husband to them," which some translate "and I was as a lord to them," with the sense stated above. It has also been suggested that a certain Hebrew word for "disregard" is only one letter different: from the Hebrew word for "husband" or "lord," and that this might explain the difference in readings. In either case the point is the same and the matter is of little importance for understanding.

8:10. The first of the better promises is given. God's laws are given in a special people - God relationship under both the old and new covenants ([Exodus 6:7](#)), but here is a difference. Under the former covenant the laws were written on stone tablets, external to the people. Under the new covenant the laws are **put into their mind** and written **in their hearts**. Paul makes a similar point in a covenant context at [II Corinthians 3:3-18](#) (see also [Romans 8:4](#); [12:2](#); [Ephesians 3:16-20](#); [4:23-24](#); [Philippians 2:12-13](#); [Colossians 3:9-10](#); [I Thessalonians 2:13](#); [II Thessalonians 1:11-12](#); [Hebrews 4:2](#); [James 1:21](#)).

When true regeneration takes place, the Christian finds God's laws to be in accord with the spirit within him. Apart from the fleshly nature against which he must continually battle, he will delight in the laws of God and find them perfectly suited to his own spiritual inclinations. They are not external and foreign to his nature; he has become partaker of the divine nature and to that new nature they are exactly fitted.

8:11. A second promise is that all who are God's people under the new covenant will **know** Him personally. **From the least to the greatest** no individual covered by the new arrangement is excluded. The covenant at Sinai was entered by a nation including many who did not know God personally until after they were involved in the covenant. All who were later born into the relationship as Jews had to be taught of God and learn His former acts of deliverance and provision.

The new covenant is entered by individuals, one by one, and only on the knowledge of God and His saving acts in Christ (see [John 6:44-45](#)). Those entering the new covenant already know what God has done for them in the Son. They will to commit themselves to Him in the confidence that His work is sufficient for their pardon and blessing. They signify both their knowledge and their intention by the obedience of faith in baptism.

When one has entered this relationship with God as one among His covenant people, he already knows God as his own saving God. There is no need for those who are in the covenant to be teaching each other a knowledge of God in this sense. Each **brother** and each **neighbor** or fellow-citizen in the new commonwealth already has that knowledge.

[8:12](#). A third promise is given, concerning forgiveness of sins by a merciful God. The people of the first covenant were given laws externally inscribed and foreign to their nature. When they broke those laws, as they always did, no sacrifice could remove the memory of that sin. The people of the fresh and new covenant have God's laws in their hearts and minds (this does not detract from but increases a hunger and thirst for the written Word of God). These laws are compatible with their new nature. When they do break them, as they sometimes will, forgiveness is already available on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus (see [10:1ff](#)).

[8:13](#). This verse is the author's inspired comment regarding the words spoken by Jeremiah so many centuries before. **In that Jeremiah saith "A new covenant," he** (Jeremiah) **hath made the first old** by contrast -- and that was six millennia before Christ! Our writer is saying concerning Jeremiah's statement "By saying 'new,' Jeremiah has long since antiquated the old."

If it was old in Jeremiah's day (and Jeremiah by implication says that it was), how much older it is when Hebrews is written! It is, in fact, **ready to vanish away**, to pass from view, to completely disappear. Lenski speaks picturesquely of the old covenant here as "tottering with senility" and "like an old, old man who is sinking into his grave."

CHAPTER NINE

Our author has spoken already of the legitimacy of Christ's priesthood (chapter five), which he carefully explained as after the order of Melchizedek (chapter seven). Because this kind of priest can not serve under the old covenant, Christ has also mediated a new covenant suitable to His work (chapter eight). Chapter nine contrasts the sanctuaries and the rituals of the two covenants, and then, by a play on words, demonstrates another blessing Christ's death gives His people.

9:1. The first covenant involved **ordinances** and arrangements for **divine service**, but the **sanctuary** in which these were carried out was **worldly**. It was, as verse nine will show, a figure of something more substantial in the eternal order.

9:2. The Mosaic Tabernacle consisted of two tent-compartments. **In the first** or outer one was the **andlestick** (better, lampstand; [Exodus 25:31-40](#); [Leviticus 24:1-4](#)), **and the table** ([Exodus 25:23-30](#); [Leviticus 24:6](#)) on which the priests placed the **shewbread** (literally "loaves of presentation" or "bread of the presence"; see [Exodus 25:30](#); [Leviticus 24:5-9](#)). This first tent was called the **sanctuary** or holy place.

9:3. A **veil** or curtain ([Exodus 26:31-33](#)) separated the holy place from the **holiest of all** or the most holy place (literally, "holy of holies"). It is called **the second veil** in contrast to the linen curtain separating the holy place from the outside court ([Exodus 26:36-37](#)).

9:4. The second compartment **had** or involved the use of **the golden censer** or altar of incense ([Exodus 30:1-9](#)). Although this altar was in the outer holy place ([Exodus 30:6](#)), the smoke from it filled the most holy place on the Day of Atonement so that the high priest never came **into** God's clear presence ([Exodus 30:10](#); [Leviticus 16:12-13](#)).

The **ark of the covenant** was also in the inner tent ([Exodus 25:10-15](#)). When first built, this gold-plated wooden chest contained three articles which reminded Israel of God's covenant-mercies

The **golden pot that had manna** ([Exodus 16:32-34](#)) reminded Israel of God's miraculous provision of food in the wilderness. The English Bible follows the Hebrew in not mentioning the vessel being gold, but our author is quoting from the Greek version which included that detail.

Aaron's rod that budded ([Numbers 17:1-11](#)) was a perpetual sign of the exclusive right of Aaron and his descendants to the priesthood. This rod was involved in the miraculous incident which occurred after the rebellion led by Korah ([Numbers 16](#)). See also [notes on 5:4-6](#).

The **tables** or plaques **of the covenant** were the **two** tablets of stone cut by Moses after he had angrily shattered the first tablets because of Israel's idolatry ([Exodus 32:19](#); [34:1-4, 28-29](#)). On these were engraved the ten commandments.

Archaeology has suggested an interesting possibility regarding the dual tablets of stone. In the absence of carbon paper or photocopy machines, covenant-treaties in the ancient

world between protective lord and a vessel people were often written twice -- one copy for his records and one for theirs. These tablets would be kept in the respective temples as solemn reminders of the covenant. Because Israel's sanctuary was at the same time God's only visible "dwelling," both copies of the "covenant" were kept in the most holy place. Whether the two tablets reflected this practice or not, they gave the ark containing them its name.

When Solomon built the Temple, nothing was in the ark but the two tables of stone ([I Kings 8:9](#); [II Chronicles 5:10](#)). The other articles may have been removed during the seven months the Philistines possessed the ark ([I Samuel 4: 11](#); [6:1](#)).

Scripture does not tell the final destiny of the tabernacle or its furniture. An ancient Jewish tradition had Jeremiah taking the tabernacle, the ark and the altar of incense to a cave atop Mount Pisgah, where he hid them "until God shall gather the people again together, and mercy come . . . and the glory of the Lord shall be seen, even the Cloud" ([II Maccabees 2:1-8](#)).

9:5. Over the ark was a lid of solid gold called the **mercy-seat** ([Exodus 25:17](#)). The Greek word here is the same translated "propitiation" in [Romans 3:25](#), where Christ is our mercy-seat. These are the only two times this word appears in the New Testament Scriptures.

Connected to the ends of the mercy-seat were the **cherubims of glory**, two golden angels facing each other with upspread wings that covered the mercy-seat ([Exodus 25:18-20](#)). From here God would give His commandments ([Exodus 25:22](#)) and here He would "meet" the high priest on the Day of Atonement ([Leviticus 16:2, 13-15](#)).

Our author speaks only generally of these items which were in the tabernacle. That he **cannot now speak particularly** means simply that he will not at this point; enter on a detailed discussion of the individual pieces. Since he makes only a general typological point regarding these items, we will here do the same.

9:6-7. Having spoken of the equipment of the Aaronic priests, he turns now to their ritual. These two verses emphasize one theme in three ways: the inaccessibility of the most holy place under the former covenant. **The priests** ministered in the holy place; **the high priest alone** could enter the most holy place. **Service** was performed always or daily in the first tent; it was performed in the second tent only one day **every year**. The outer tabernacle was entered for many purposes; the inner tent could **not** be entered **without blood**. This blood the high priest offered that single day each year, first for himself and then for the **errors of the people** (see [5:3](#); [7:27](#); [Leviticus 16:6, 11, 15](#)).

When these things were thus ordained refers to the time of Moses. The phrase has no bearing on the date of this epistle.

9:8. In the very limited access to the most holy place, the **Holy Ghost** or Spirit was **signifying that the way to God was not yet made manifest** to sinful man. So long as **the first tabernacle was standing**, so long as there were two tents, just that long man could not approach God directly or with a clear conscience. The next chapter will show that the work

of Jesus has opened the road to God for the people of the new covenant (10:19-20; see [Matthew 27:51](#); [John 10:9](#); [14:6](#); [Romans 5:2](#); [Ephesians 2:18](#)).

9:9. All this was a **figure** or parable for the period of **time** in which the Aaronic priesthood was ministering. It should have indicated to them that their **gifts and sacrifices** (see [5:1](#), [8:3](#)) were not for the perfecting of **the conscience**.

9:10. Such offerings involved ceremonial cleansing from **meats** or foods **and drinks** through various **washings** and **carnal ordinances**. The ceremonial laws and the rituals pertaining to them were all temporary, and were **imposed** only **until the time** or period of sacred history in which God would effect **reformation**.

Reformation translates a word which means a straightening, and was used in Greek literature of setting a fracture, repairing roads or houses, or even paying debts. The general meaning is "putting right" or "bringing to a satisfactory state." In this verse, the present period of the priestly work of Messiah Jesus is the time when God is putting right sinful man and bringing to a satisfactory state the ordinances foreshadowed by the incomplete shadows and symbols of the old covenant system.

9:11. **Christ** having arrived (that is literally what he says), so has the **time of reformation** just mentioned. He is **high priest** of all the **good things** which belong to the order **to come**, that is, the Messianic order of fulfillment. The phrase "to come" is used several times in Hebrews of the still unrealized future ([2:5](#); [13:14](#)), but the entire epistle agrees that this perfect order has now begun in part, and that its power may already be enjoyed ([6:5](#)).

Christ's service involves a **greater** and **more perfect tabernacle** or sanctuary. It is **not made with hands** (see [8:2](#), [5](#)); in fact, it is **not** a part of **this** physical creation or **building**.

9:12. Nor is His service dependent on the **blood of goats** for Himself or of **calves** for the people. Through the merits of the sinless life represented **in his own blood** He has **entered into the most holy place once** for all time, and there He has found or **obtained a redemption** that is **eternal**.

Unlike the temporary elements of the first covenant, all that pertains to the new covenant belongs to the **eternal** order. This eternal covenant ([13:20](#)) brings an eternal redemption ([9:12](#)), inheritance ([9:15](#)) and salvation ([5:9](#)), because it rests on the offering of Christ by His eternal Spirit ([9:14](#)).

This is not a Platonic distinction between the world of true being and that of forms or appearance. It is not simply a lower and an upper world. Rather the writer of Hebrews speaks of the eternal things and the carnal ordinances with both horizontal and vertical significance.

On the one hand, there is an eternal realm which exists at the same time as but transcendent to the first-covenant types and shadows based on it. On the other hand, this eternal realm was manifested in the course of human time and history, displacing the former types and shadows.

In combining these concepts the writer is in complete accord with the rest of the New Testament Scriptures that the Christian order involves both what already has come into human history and what has not yet appeared. It is unfair to our author to say that he is voicing Greek philosophy, or even that he is speaking in Platonic terms. He is rather speaking in language that is common to Jewish expression (the "vertical" typology) on the one hand, and to Christian teaching (the "horizontal" element) on the other.

9:13. Here is another of those "how much more" contrasts with which we have become familiar in Hebrews. This time it clinches the point made so far in chapter nine: Christ as a priest ministers a service which excels that of the Aaronic priests, and, in keeping with that, He gives far better benefits.

The blood of bulls and of goats was used in sin-offerings on the Day of Atonement or at other times, and the **ashes** of an unblemished red **heifer** were used in rites of purification ([Numbers 19:1-22](#)). These things could **sanctify** so far as **purifying the flesh** from ceremonial uncleanness, or even staying God's wrath against sin momentarily.

9:14. Yet **how much more**, we are asked, will **the blood of Christ** cleanse the **conscience**, not from uncleanness incurred through touching a dead body ([Numbers 19:11-16](#)), but from "practices and attitudes which belong to the way of death, which pollute the soul and erect a barrier between it and God" (Bruce) -- that is, from **dead works**?

Freed from such practices by the blood of Christ, His people are free **to serve the living God**. Note the contrast between dead works and a living God. For a similar point see [Romans 6:6, 13; 7:4-6; II Corinthians 2:16; 3:6](#).

The basis of this superior benefit of Christ's offering is that He **through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God**. Christ's sinless life has already been attested to, and will appear again in chapter ten. His life was "offered" to God, not to Satan as some Medieval theorists surmised. This was a sacrifice of love, but also of "bearing sins." A sinless life could justly meet all God's requirements for man and at the same time pay the ransom for sin. One ought not press these figures beyond scriptural bounds, but simply glory in what God has done and be content to understand that by such terms as EIE has chosen to use in revealing it.

Through the eternal spirit. In the face of arguments for "spirit" and "Spirit" here, it does no violence to the passage or the larger context to allow both meanings. It was through the offering of His own spirit, first in complete obedience and then in death, that Christ's blood possessed merit. His spirit is eternal because by nature He is the Son who belongs to the eternal order; EIE was raised to be priest because He possesses an indestructible life ([7:16](#)).

On the other hand, it was by anointing Jesus with the Holy Spirit ([Isaiah 42:1](#)) that God announced Him to be the Servant on whom He would also lay "the iniquity of us all" ([Isaiah 53:6](#)). It was by the Spirit that Christ was raised from the dead ([I Peter 3:18](#)) and declared

to be the Son ([Romans 1:4](#)), fulfilling the promise that He would "prolong His days," "see the travail of His soul and be satisfied" and "justify many" ([Isaiah 53:10-11](#)).

9:15. Because of Christ's meritorious blood, by which He became **mediator of the new testament**, one may say that **by means of death** those **who are called** of either covenant **receive the promise of eternal inheritance**. His death was **for the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament**, as well as for sins of those who should live afterward (see also [Romans 3:25](#)). Because Christ's blood can cleanse from dead works (verse 14), the **inheritance** contained in God's **promise** is assured to His people.

Having spoken of the **inheritance**, the author's thoughts seem to move for a brief moment to a double meaning possessed by the word which he has been using for "covenant." For the word translated "testament" here is the same one translated "covenant" in the preceding chapter.

Because the English language needs two words to express what the Greek language could say in this one, the English reader is at a disadvantage in understanding the present argument until he learns of this double sense.

Ordinarily in Scripture this word means "covenant." It is a great theological word of the Old Testament, where it stands for the Hebrew term signifying the divine disposition or arrangement imposed by God on Israel, through which He brought Israel into a special relationship with Himself. That covenant was one-sided in that God planned and expressed it and Israel could not bargain the terms. But it was two-sided in that Israel accepted certain stated conditions involving both blessing and punishment.

In New Testament times, however, this same Greek word was used commonly for a last will and testament. Not only so, the word for the man who offered a covenant to another was the same word for the man who made a will. There are similarities and differences between these two concepts.

A covenant and a will have in common that both (at least in a divine-human covenant) involve a death. They are distinct inasmuch as such a covenant provides for both benefits and punishments, but a will provides only for benefits -- which are assured by the death of the man who makes the will.

In verses 15-20, the word is used both ways. Verses 15, 18-20 use this word in the usual biblical sense of a covenant. But verses 16-17 use the same word (as the Greeks commonly used it) of a will. By this subtle shift in emphasis from one to the other and back again, the author points out a special benefit of the new covenant which the old could not give.

9:16. Where a testament or will is, there must be publicly established and proved **the death** of the man who made the will. This is a general statement concerning normal human affairs.

9:17. Such a will is **of force** only after the man who made it is **dead**. It has no legal power while he is living. The point here is not particularly that Jesus was free during His life time

to dispense blessings in a manner other than that provided for in His "will," though it is true that "the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." Rather the author's concern is that a death must take place in the establishment of either a divine covenant or a human will, and that, in the case of a last will and testament, once the death has occurred the benefits provided by the will are guaranteed to the beneficiaries.

Because the death of Jesus can purge the conscience from dead works, His beneficiaries will receive the eternal inheritance. His new testament is of the nature of a will, as well as that of a covenant (which was discussed in chapter eight), but as a will it provides only benefits!

This does not diminish the force of numerous stern warnings against apostasy. For the beneficiaries of Christ's will are seen to be the people of the new covenant, not individuals in isolation. The benefits are for the "house" which "we" are (3:6). The true rest is for the "people" of God (4:9). Both "house" and "people" figure in the discussion of the new covenant (8:8, 10).

For this reason, individuals are to exhort "one another" lest "any of you" be hardened (3:13). They know that the Lord will judge His "people" (10:30). Some who have entered the covenant may certainly be lost, though only through failure to remain in the covenant by faith (fulness). All who remain among the covenant people will obtain the blessings which Christ's offering secured for them, for His death was that of a testator as well as that of a covenant-mediator. "He is testator and executor in one, surety and mediator alike" (Bruce).

9:18. Leaving now the idea of a last will and testament, and returning to the ordinary meaning of covenant, the writer notes that the first covenant or **testament** was also **dedicated with blood**.

9:19. **When Moses had spoken** the terms of the covenant **to all the people**, he sealed with blood their acceptance of it and God's acceptance of them on that basis. The account of this covenant-sealing ceremony is given in [Exodus 24:1-8](#). Several details in Hebrews are not mentioned in the Old Testament. Exodus makes no mention of goats in the ceremony. It does not mention the use of water, scarlet wool or hyssop in the sprinkling. It makes no mention of the Book being sprinkled, but does say the altar was, which Hebrews omits.

Delitzsch believes the expression "calves and goats" in Hebrews is a general term for sacrifices of all kinds. It is also quite possible that our author had information not given in Exodus.

The mixing of water with blood for sprinkling and sprinkling by means of wool wrapped around hyssop may be inferred from the case of the Passover lamb ([Exodus 12:22](#)), the purification ceremony for one cleansed of leprosy ([Leviticus 14:4-1, 49-53](#)), or the cleansing of one who had touched a dead body ([Numbers 19:17-18](#)). The author of Hebrews either assumes the sprinkling of the Book because the altar and people were sprinkled, or he has information not extant today.

9:20. Be that as it may, the point he makes is that blood was directly involved in the dedication of the first covenant, and he quotes Moses to that effect. He does change the wording slightly, giving " **this is the blood of the testament**" for "behold the blood . . ." in Exodus. This may reflect a simple paraphrase, or he may be aligning those words to the words of institution at the Lord's Supper ([Matthew 26:28](#)).

9:21. When the tabernacle was erected, **Moses sprinkled with blood** the **tabernacle** itself and **all the vessels of the** ministry. Again the Old Testament does not give all these details, though it does say the tabernacle and its furnishings were sprinkled with oil ([Exodus 40:9-11](#); [Leviticus 8:10-11](#); [Numbers 7:1](#)) and the altar with blood as well ([Leviticus 8:15](#)).

Josephus, however, says that the entire tabernacle and furnishings were purified "both with oil first incensed, as I said, and with the blood of bulls and of rams" (*Antiquities* 3:8:6). Again we may suppose that our author had information beyond that in the books of Moses.

9:22. **Almost all things**, according to the Old Testament **law**, were **purged with blood**. This statement leaves room for exceptions, as in the case of a poor Israelite ([Leviticus 5:11-13](#); see [Numbers 16:46-48](#); [31:21-24](#); [31:50-54](#)). The next statement, however, has no exceptions. **Without shedding of blood there is no remission** or forgiveness.

The three words **shedding of blood** stand here for a single Greek word, which is found only here in all biblical literature. This word emphasizes the actual taking of blood, and calls attention to the fact that blood offerings represented the presentation of a life ([Leviticus 17:11](#)). Shedding of blood is also linked to the remission of sins in the Lord's words at the Last Supper ([Matthew 26:28](#)).

9:23. Because of the general practice of cleansing with blood, and because forgiveness of sins may be obtained only through blood-shedding, **it was necessary** that the **patterns of things in the heavens** (see 8:1, 5) **be purified** with the blood ceremonies already described. But the same principles require that **the heavenly things themselves** be purified **with better sacrifices than these**. The heavenly realities are purified with the blood of Christ, and this purification is necessary because of the general curse of sin on creation and because Christ has opened the way for redeemed sinners to enter the most holy place not made with hands.

9:24. **Christ** has **entered** into a holy place **not made with hands** (see 8:1, 2, 5; 9:11-12), not the mere **figures of the true, but into heaven itself**. He has gone to **appear in the presence of God**, to be examined as a sacrificial offering, as a Lamb without spot or blemish, to be carefully scrutinized by God Himself -- and that with no cloud of incense to obscure the view! Not only so, He has presented Himself in this manner **for us**, and it is for His people alone, not for Himself, that Christ became the Lamb of God or that He made this appearance.

Philip the Evangelist preached Jesus as a lamb, based on a prophetic passage full of the Gospel ([Acts 8:32](#)). Peter wrote of the Christian's redemption by the blood of Christ "as of a lamb without blemish" ([I Peter 1:19](#)). John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the "Lamb of

God that taketh away the sins of the world" ([John 1:29, 36](#)). Paul speaks of Christ as our "Passover" (Lamb) who has been slain ([I Corinthians 5:7](#)).

The figure of Jesus as a sacrificial lamb appears only in Revelation otherwise, though there frequently. He is the Lamb whose sacrifice has been received; He is a Lamb worthy of praise; the Lamb who has redeemed His people; the Lamb at God's right hand; the Lamb who will come in Judgment; and the Lamb who will be forever a light for His people ([Revelation 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:16; 7:9-17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3](#)).

9:25. Because of the quality of His offering, Christ made but one for all time, though as eternal priest He perpetually mediates on the basis of that single sacrifice. Here the contrast is with the Aaronic priesthood. The regular priests under that covenant entered the holy place often, the high priest entered the most holy place one day each year. But Christ, the priest of the new covenant, entered the heavenly holy place only one time forever. **He does not need to offer himself often, not even every year, for He did not carry the blood of others but His own.**

9:26. If Christ's single sacrifice were not sufficient for all time, He **must have suffered** a bloody death **since the foundation of the world**, for just that long men have been sinners and in need of a sacrifice. But instead we see Him now in the end of the world, at the consummation of the ages, when the eternal order is breaking in on man's history, at the time of perfection -- appearing **once** on the scene of history to make His single offering and **put away** or disannul the power (same word at [7:18](#)) of sin for all time.

Note the contrasts in this verse. Christ has not suffered death often, but once; not from the foundation of the world, but only now in the end of the ages, not (as the high priests of [verse 25](#)) with the blood of others, but by the sacrifice of Himself.

The exact expression here translated **the end of the world** (literally, "the consummation of the ages") appears only here in the New Testament Scriptures. It is parallel, however, to the expression found at [Matthew 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3](#) and [28:20](#), and closely related in meaning to similar phrases in [I Corinthians 10:11](#) and [I Peter 1:20](#). As Bruce points out, "it is not that Christ happened to come at the time of fulfillment, but that His coming made that time the time of fulfillment." See [notes on 9:10-12](#) and especially [on 1:2](#).

The singularity of Christ's offering is expressed here in three ways. It is once for all; it is in the consummation of the ages; it is to abolish sin. If sin is abolished, there is no need for another sacrifice. If the consummation of the ages has come, there is no time for another. If Christ's offering is once for all, there can be no other. Chapter ten will show how this once-for-all character of His offering brings both marvelous blessings and a dreadful warning to the people of the new covenant.

9:27. The general rule is stated that it **is appointed** by God **for men to die once** and only once, inasmuch as they live once in a mortal body, and **after this** comes **the judgment**.

The author does not deal with the time lapse between death and judgment; that is not his concern. He simply calls attention to the fact that men live one time, die one time and (sometime thereafter) are judged by God for the life they lived before they died.

9:28. In keeping with this general rule, **Christ** (who became one with His human brethren by taking on flesh and blood, 2:14) also lived one time in the flesh, died one time in the flesh and appeared before God one time to be judged on the basis of the single life lived before He died.

Christ, however, lived a representative life on behalf of others (as chapter ten will explain); He died **to bear the sins of many**, so **was offered**; and has been judged for others as well (verse 24). Yet the point remains the same as with all men: He can only live once, die once, and be judged once for that life. But Christ has already lived, died, and been judged -- therefore He can not repeat His fleshly life, or death, or (this is the point in relation to verses 25-26) offering.

Not only was Christ's life unique (both because it was sinless and because it was lived for others), and His death one of a kind (because it was offered as a sacrifice, for others, and by Himself), but His "judgment" was the first among men, signifying the beginning of the end of the world and guaranteeing the outcome of the judgment of all His people

The second point in this verse uses imagery of the Day of Atonement. Christ our high priest has entered the presence of God bearing the offering. His people, meanwhile, are waiting outside the sanctuary for Him to return and certify that the sacrifice has been received and that they are forgiven. The Day of Atonement, according to an ancient Jewish source, came to a happy end with the high priest going to his own house. "All the people accompany him . . . and he holds a festival to celebrate his having come successfully out of the sanctuary." See [Appendix V](#).

The writer seems to be saying that our high priest of the new covenant has entered the presence of God with a suitable sin offering, and that He will certainly **appear the second time** to His people **that look for him**. Unlike those priests who foreshadowed and symbolized Him, Christ does not repeat the performance. Having **once** been offered **to bear sins**, He will reappear only to bring **salvation** to those for whom He once suffered. One should not stretch the analogy beyond measure, but we might observe in the light of the rest of the New Testament Scriptures that the Holy Spirit's descent, which authorized the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel, was a case of the high priest sending a messenger out in advance of Himself to tell the waiting people that His sacrifice had been received and that remission of sins was effected.

CHAPTER TEN

10:1. The law, standing here for the entire Old Testament economy, offered only a **shadow** of the **good things** which were **to come** in the Messianic era of fulfillment, an era which, with Christ, has already begun (see [note at 9:11](#)). It did not minister **the very image** of heavenly realities but mere types and shadows. The thought here is the same as at [8:2, 5; 9:1](#), although the words used are different.

Since perfection belongs to the new order and not to the former, it is not surprising that worshippers under the old were not made **perfect**. That they were not is evident in the offering of **the same sacrifices** one year after another, **continually**.

10:2. If the **worshippers** had been **purged** or cleansed by those offerings, they would have had no longer a bad **conscience** regarding **sins**. By contrast see [John 13:10](#); [Acts 15:9](#); [I Corinthians 6:11](#); [Hebrews 9:14](#); [I Peter 3:21](#).

10:3. The opposite was true, however. The offering of jealousy, for example, was "an offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to remembrance" ([Numbers 5:15](#)). Even the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement were reminders of past sins ([Leviticus 16:21](#)); furthermore, yearly repetition testified to their inability to cover future sins.

A contrast may be noted here between the sacrifices of the old covenant and the Lord's Supper of the new. The former memorialized the sinfulness of the worshippers and constantly reminded them of their shortcomings. The latter memorializes the single sacrifice of Christ, by which worshippers now are constantly cleansed of sin. **Remembrance** here is the same word found in [I Corinthians 11:24-25](#) and may be translated "memorial."

10:4. All that has been said in the first three verses leads to one conclusion: the **blood** of animals can not **take away** the memory of or bad conscience resulting from **sins**.

10:5. Foreseeing that animal blood could not take away sin, God had from eternity planned another offering to which burnt sacrifices always pointed. What follows must be seen in the light of this **wherefore**, as the writer begins to explain the significance of sacrificial **blood** and the forgiveness Christ makes possible.

The purpose of Christ's advent into the world as a man may be expressed in words taken from [Psalm 40:6-8](#), which our author here puts in His mouth. "**Sacrifice** and **offering** of animals or produce is not what You really desire," Jesus says to the Father. "You have **prepared** a human **body** for **me** instead."

Our author is quoting the Greek Old Testament which says "a body you have prepared." The Hebrew text says, "you have dug out my ears." The final meaning is the same, however, and may be explained along either of two lines. Ears may stand here for the entire body, the part for the whole. If God formed ears for the man, He prepared also the rest of his body.

Approaching the text another way, one may interpret Christ (or David, originally) to be saying "You have made ears that I may hear Your will and do it" (see [Isaiah 50: 4-5](#)). Either way the point is the same God does not desire a mere multiplication of Old Testament

sacrifices and offerings. What He does want from man is indicated by the gift of a human body. He wants a human life lived according to His will.

10:6. God has never desired sacrifices above human obedience. If man had obeyed, in fact, he would not have needed sacrifices at all. This was true from the beginning of Israel's history ([Jeremiah 7:21-23](#); [I Samuel 15:22](#); [Psalm 51:16-17](#)) to the time of the great writing prophets of the eighth century ([Isaiah 1:11-17](#); [Amos 5:22-24](#); [Micah 6:6-8](#)).

Each type of offering under the old covenant served a particular purpose, and all are included under the present principles. **Sacrifice** was the regular term for the peace offering, a conciliation for the restoring of fellowship. **Offering** was the generic term for the meal or cereal offering, a donation representing the consecration of the giver. **Burnt offering** indicates the oblation expressing worship. The **sin-offering** was made for expiation or atonement.

Whatever the purpose and whatever the offering, none was God's first choice from man. It is better to maintain fellowship than to restore it, to show consecration by a life than by an offering, to worship by giving oneself than a burnt animal, to obey than to atone for disobedience. God simply wanted human conformity to His will, manifested in sincere and loving obedience. Christ came to give this -- and the Father gave Him a body for that purpose.

10:7. The psalm quotation continues. " **I come,**" Jesus says, " **to do thy will, O God.**" The parenthetical phrase, "**in the volume of the book it is written of me,**" is also from the psalm. Again, two meanings are possible. Christ may be saying, "what is written in the Law I apply to myself to keep." Or He may mean, "what David said in the psalm regarding obedience was a prophetic statement of Myself and My work." Both are true and both should be included in our understanding.

[Psalm 40:8](#) adds a phrase not quoted here: "Thy law is within my heart." David of old applied what the Law said to his own life, so that God's precepts were not written in the book alone but also inscribed in his heart. How fitting for the Christ to be foretold in such a context! For the new covenant He mediated is characterized by laws inscribed in men's hearts (see [8:10](#)).

10:8-9. Our author comments on the sense of the psalm. Christ first mentioned sacrifices and offerings, he notes, **then** He spoke of His own coming **to do** God's **will**. Christ took away the **first** -- the offering of all those sacrifices, to make the **second** stand -- human obedience to all God's expressed will for man.

10:10. Because Jesus gave God human obedience in a human body, then offered that body in death, we who are His people **are sanctified** or made holy on the basis of God's **will** which Jesus perfectly demonstrated in His body. **Will** here is the same as in verses seven and nine; it is not the same word used for a testament-will.

Sanctified here is in a participle form meaning something now the case because of what happened previously. We are those who have been sanctified and still are -- because of the past offering of the body (symbolizing the well-pleasing life) of Jesus.

Once for all is emphatic in the original here because of its location in the sentence. We have seen this word already at [7:27](#) and [9:12](#). A slightly less intensive form appears at [6:4](#); [9:7](#), [26-28](#); [10:2](#) and [12:26-27](#).

[10:11](#). The old testament **priest** performed imperfect service, and stood day after day to repeat often and regularly the same sacrifices; sacrifices which, ironically but logically, could never fully remove sins.

[10:12](#). Jesus, on the other hand, presented **one sacrifice for sins**, His body (or, in other places, His blood), standing for His perfect human life. This was sufficient **for ever**. His offering completed, Jesus has now **sat down**. Delitzsch expresses the contrast of these verses well. "The priest of the Old Testament stands timid and uneasy in the holy place, anxiously performing his awful service there, and hastening to depart when the service is done, as from a place where he has no free access, and can never feel at home; whereas Christ sits down in everlasting rest and blessedness at the right hand of Majesty in the holy of holies, His work accomplished, and He awaiting its reward."

The figure of Christ at God's **right hand** is taken from [Psalm 110](#), which our author has used many times. Here he has come almost full cycle from 1:3, and is about to tie up his argument.

[10:13-14](#). Christ as priest has made His offering. Christ as king is waiting for the total subjection of all His subjects. God has made Him king already; Christ now possesses all authority ([Matthew 28:18](#); [Ephesians 1:21-22](#); [I Peter 3:22](#)). But not all men have yet acknowledged His authority, though some day they must ([I Corinthians 15:24-25](#); [Philippians 2:8-11](#)).

[Psalm 110](#) forms a backdrop before which the risen Christ is seen throughout the New Testament Scriptures. As noted already, most references to the psalm outside Hebrews emphasize Christ's kingship. Hebrews usually stresses His priesthood. Here the two are combined. As priest, Christ has made His offering and His people are waiting for His return. As king, He is at God's right hand, waiting for full recognition by men. As throughout the New Testament writings, the end has already begun but it is not yet completed. We live in the interim.

[10:15-17](#). Those trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus are perpetually and completely sanctified. This has been argued already, and to this the Holy Spirit agrees as witnessed in the Old Testament Scriptures. Our author refers again to [Jeremiah 31](#), which he discussed at length in [chapter eight](#).

The Spirit there stated first, "This is **the covenant I will make**," speaking of Christ's covenant in which **laws** would be placed in men's **hearts and minds**. But the Spirit added (our author points out), "**and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more**."

[10:18](#). **Remission** of sins means that God does not remember them any longer. Where there is such remission, **no more offering** is needed **for sin**. With this, the argument of

Hebrews ends. The rest of the epistle consists of exhortations or warnings based on the points already established.

We have a high priest who has offered a perfect offering because it represented a human life perfectly in accord with God's will for man. By that sacrifice, we are perfected. God has promised not to remember our sins any more. There will be no further offering; there is no need for another.

Christ now is mediating the blessed benefits of His once-for-all sacrifice for all His covenant people. He waits for His kingship to be fully recognized. His people wait for His return with the inheritance already secured. The writer of Hebrews urges his readers to be among the faithful who will receive the blessing.

10:19. Boldness here represents a word which has the root idea of freedom of speech, therefore, freedom from fear or inhibition. The phrase, **to enter the holiest**, may also be translated "boldness for an entrance into the holiest." Both the personal act and the general fact depend on the **blood of Jesus**.

10:20. Our entrance (see [Ephesians 3:12](#)) is by means of a **way** or road that is **new**, a particular Greek word which originally meant "freshly-slain." It is also **living**, therefore effectual to attain its desired and intended goal.

Some commentators and translators think **his flesh** explains **the veil**, others that it refers to **the way**. If the former is intended, the human body of Jesus is a **veil** separating His perfect life from God in heaven. His spirit passed through that flesh on its way to glory. If the latter is meant, the human body of Jesus is itself the **way** which He consecrated through the figurative veil separating man from God. His people travel down the road of His human Life into God's presence. In fact, Jesus did pass through the flesh to His present position of glory and man must pass through His human life (that is, the merits it secured) to find salvation.

In either case, Christ has **consecrated** or dedicated or officially opened a new highway from man to God by His blood. We have confidence to venture upon it because Jesus has travelled it ahead of us and is now safely in heaven at God's right hand (see [comments at 6:19-20](#)).

10:21. The Christian has also a **high priest** over the **house of God** (see [notes at 3:1-6](#)). Having both **boldness** and such a **high priest**, saints are exhorted regarding relationships with God, their own faith and one another.

10:22. Let Christ's people **draw near** (the same word in [4:16](#); [7:25](#) and [11:6](#)) to the Father with a **true heart**, a heart that is sincere and without guile (see the same point in [John 4:23-24](#)). Such an approach is to be **in full assurance of faith**, that is, in the complete confidence and total persuasion which faith can give.

We have been separated from dead works by the figurative sprinkling of the blood of Jesus (see [9:13-14](#)); we have been set apart for service to God as well. The priests were to

wash in water before entering the tabernacle to serve ([Leviticus 16:4](#)) -- this may be in the mind of the author here.

I believe that the **hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience** represents the spiritual cleansing of the conscience by the Holy Spirit, through the merit of the life of Jesus as represented spiritually by His blood -- in other words, the inner part of regeneration. The **bodies washed with pure water** represents the physical act of baptism in water, the divinely-ordained manner by which faith reaches out to take hold of sovereign grace. It is the **outer** element in regeneration.

It is not uncommon for New Testament writers to speak of the physical and spiritual together in this way. Jesus talked of a birth of water and the Spirit ([John 3:3, 5](#)). Peter told his Pentecost audience to be baptized for remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 2:38](#)). Saul of Tarsus was told to be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord ([Acts 22:16](#)); neither he nor Ananias had any doubt that his sins were washed away by a spiritual cleansing based on the blood of Christ.

We read of the Corinthians being baptized by **the Spirit** into one body ([I Corinthians 12:13](#)); of the washing of water by the word ([Ephesians 5:26](#)); of merciful salvation by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit ([Titus 3:5](#)). Peter makes it clear that baptism is related to salvation because it is the appeal to God for a good conscience ([I Peter 3:21](#)). His careful explanation that baptism is not merely the removal of bodily defilement shows that the inner and outer go together and that they might be misunderstood. The same verse emphasizes that baptism saves "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

The **full assurance of faith** is possible just because our Standing is grounded in the finished work and the single offering of Jesus Christ. John Bunyan speaks of God addressing the sinner in these words: "Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy sins and infirmities I cannot save thy soul, but behold my Son is by me, and upon Him I look, and not on thee, and will deal with thee according as I am pleased with Him." We are accepted in the Beloved -- first, last and always ([Ephesians 1:6](#), KJV); but, praise God, in the Beloved we are accepted"

10:23. Again the exhortation to **hold fast** our own **profession** or commitment **of faith**. The better manuscripts here have "hope," in keeping with previous exhortations (see [3:6, 14; 4:14; 6:11](#)). **God** is the one **that promised**, and **God is faithful** reliable and trustworthy. No one who commits himself to God in hope will ever be disappointed or betrayed (see also [6:11-12, 18](#)).

10:24. Christ's people must also **consider** or pay attention to **one another**, with an intention **to provoke** or stir up **to love and good works**. The word here translated **provoke** gives the English word "paroxysm," and appears in the New Testament Scriptures only here and at [Acts 15:39](#). The mutual consideration enjoined is the duty of every Christian and is a clear, though frequently neglected obligation.

10:25. Such holy provocation can not occur with the **forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**, although **some** had done just that. It happens rather by **exhorting** each other in assemblies called for that purpose, as well in the normal course of daily life.

It has been suggested that these readers were still meeting in Jewish synagogue assemblies, but remaining for Christian devotions on the Lord's Day. Some were neglecting this additional assembling, for which they are chided. Others have suggested that **some** were absenting themselves from the regular assemblies of the saints through pride or party-spirit and were holding private meetings instead.

It is best to take the passage in its context and simply say that those who have access to God's presence and who have a high priest in heaven are to draw near to God, hold fast their own hope, and encourage Christian loving and living in one another. They will not do this by calling an end to Christian assemblies (through fear of persecution or simple indifference), but rather by meeting together for exhortation.

Such encouragement is to intensify **as the day** is seen **approaching**. Throughout the Old Testament literature "the day" means an occasion when God visits a people to punish sin and deliver the righteous. The New Testament writers also speak of such a final day of punishment and salvation. Before the destruction of Jerusalem, many early Christians did not know to separate the end of the Jewish state and religion from the close of the present age and end of the world (see [Matthew 24:3](#); [Acts 1:6-8](#)). Jesus had taught, however, that the two would not come together ([Matthew 24:33, 36](#); [Mark 13:29, 32](#)).

The author to the Hebrews may write before or after the climactic days of the closing sixties. Whatever the date, he speaks of the final **day** of the Lord -- the denouement of all human history at the consummation of the age. His readers had not learned to separate that "day" into the separate events of resurrection, judgment and so forth, but thought of the entire event in terms of the phrase from the Old Testament.

As Delitzsch puts it, this is "the day of days, the final, the decisive day of time, the commencing day of eternity, breaking through and breaking up for the church of the redeemed the night of the present." It is a poor argument that believers could not **see this day approaching**. James could urge patience in affliction "for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (5:6-8). Paul could speak of saints "knowing the time" that "the day is at hand" ([Romans 13:11-12](#)). Peter could write of impending judgment and "the end of all things" as "at hand" ([I Peter 4:5, 7](#)). The word in all three passages is the word translated **approaching** here. Furthermore, all three contexts contain ethical instruction regarding proper conduct and mutual concern among Christian believers in view of the impending end.

10:26. Warning follows exhortation. To **sin willfully** is not to commit a single sinful act of weakness or ignorance, but, as the Greek verb form indicates, to continue in a constant practice of sin. Nor is **sin** here just any kind of sin, but specifically the sin of disbelief which shows itself in forsaking Christ altogether. While such apostasy may occur gradually (see

the warnings of [2:1-3](#); [6:11-12](#)), it ultimately comes about through an act of the will which rejects Christ and His offering for sin. One might observe that even the Old Testament sacrifices made provision only for sins committed in ignorance or weakness -- not for presumptuous or willful sins ([Numbers 15:22-31](#)).

What is envisioned here is a rejection of the new covenant, after it has been received with faith and joy. Here is a will to sin in spite of a full **knowledge of the truth**, knowledge being a thorough knowledge both in mind and by personal relationship.

Apostasy from Christ is dreadfully severe because there is **no more sacrifice for sins**. His offering, once for all, is man's last chance and only hope. The person who rejects that -- especially the man who has known it personally and then rejected it -- is hopelessly lost, for he has set his will against the only basis of forgiveness and the only sacrifice God will accept. Regular assembling of saints for mutual exhortation is so important because it helps prevent the damnation that comes through loss of faith.

[10:27](#). The deserter may look forward only to **judgment** and **fiery indignation** (see [Deuteronomy 9:3](#); [Psalm 79:5](#); [Isaiah 26:11](#); [30:27](#); [64:2](#); [Zephaniah 1:18](#)), which is all the more **fearful** because it is **certain**. This judgment is designed for God's **adversaries** or enemies or opponents. One places himself in that category when he forsakes Christ and rejects His sacrifice.

[10:28](#). Under the **law** of **Moses** the man who forsook God's covenant and worshipped idols was stoned to death **without mercy** upon conviction through the testimony of **two or three witnesses** (see [Deuteronomy 17:2-7](#)).

[10:29](#). If apostasy under the inferior covenant was hastily and rigidly punished, **how much sorer punishment** must be proper for the man who rejects the new covenant instituted by the blood of the Son of God? The question is left open for consideration by each reader -- **suppose ye?**

Rejection of Christ and His offering involves a turning from the most holy elements of divine religion, and that in the cruelest manner. It is to renounce and tread **under foot** (see the same word at [Matthew 5:13](#); [7:6](#); [Luke 8:5](#)) **the Son of God**. It is to regard **the blood of the covenant** (see [comments at 9:18-20](#)) which makes man holy (**wherewith he was sanctified**) as itself common and **unholy**. It is to despise the very Spirit of grace.

Do despite translates a word which comes into our language in the noun "hubris." This word was used by the ancient Greeks for the most presumptuous arrogance and haughtiness, and was regarded as the worst possible sin. The idea is seen in various forms of the word translated "entreat spitefully" ([Luke 18:32](#); [Matthew 22:6](#)), "use despitefully" ([Acts 14:5](#)), "reproach" ([II Corinthians 12:10](#)) or "shamefully entreat" ([I Thessalonians 2:2](#)). Just as it is cruelly ironic for the covenant blood which makes holy to be regarded as itself unholy, so it is for the **Spirit** whose ministry brings divine **grace** to be rejected with arrogance and insolence!

10:30. We can appreciate the severity of punishment awaiting such a one, for **we know** God who has claimed **vengeance** as His own prerogative and has promised to **recompense**. These words are probably taken from the Song of Moses ([Deuteronomy 32:35](#)), and they are quoted by Paul in urging Christians not to avenge themselves ([Romans 12:19](#)).

Another quotation from the Song of Moses shows the severity of divine judgment: **The Lord will judge his people** ([Deuteronomy 32:36](#)). This phrase may be interpreted two ways. In the Old Testament passage (see also [Psalm 135:14](#)) God judges His people by rescuing them and punishing their enemies. The author of Hebrews may be saying that God will vindicate those who are faithful to Christ in spite of adversity and temptation by punishing those who once knew Him but turned away. Or he may use the term in a general sense to mean that God will condemn the apostates and so "judge" them.

10:31. In either event, the point is the same: **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!** It is **fearful** because He is God, and all-powerful; it is more fearful because He is the **living** God and eternal in wrath.

It is well that we should realize that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not soft, shallow, or flabby. It **is** a matter of blood and fire, a solemn, and, at times, almost a fierce thing (Robinson).

10:32. Fear of punishment is a powerful incentive; so is the precious memory of early faithfulness. **Call** those **former days** to your mind, he urges. After becoming Christians, or being **illuminated** (see [comment at 6:4](#) where the same word is used), they had endured much for their faith.

Great fight here translates a word for an athletic contest -- the figure will reappear in [12:1-2](#). **Afflictions** are literally "pressures" on the Christian. This pressure results from tension, created by the opposing pulls of old nature and new, God and Satan, of the Present Age and the Coming Age.

10:33. On the one hand, our author's first readers had been personally **made a gazing-stock**. This word means to be brought shamefully before public view, as in a theater, and reminds us of the later martyrdom of Christians by wild animals in public displays. These saints had not faced lions or leopards but the spiritual beasts of **reproaches** (see [11:26](#); [13:13](#)) and **afflictions** from their associates.

On the other hand, they had become **companions** or partners or sharers with other Christians so mistreated for Christ's sake. **Used** here signifies a way of life characterized by affliction. This is not a one-time occurrence. Under such perpetual and constant attack, the man of faith shows the genuineness of his commitment. This will be the subject of a strong exhortation in the next chapter.

10:34. The Hebrew Christians had shown **compassion** or sympathy toward those who were imprisoned for their faith. The better manuscripts and later versions have "those in bonds" instead of "me in my bonds." They had experienced the **spoiling** or snatching away

of their own **goods** or substance, and that with **joy**. They knew that they had **better** possessions in heaven, possessions that were **enduring**, and for those they could endure the plunder of earthly goods.

10:35. They had been faithful before, they can now remain true to Christ. Do not **cast away your confidence** (see [comment at 10:19](#); see [3:6](#); [4:16](#) "boldly"), he urges. It has great wages or **recompense of reward** ([2:2](#); [11:26](#)).

10:36. **Patience** means endurance, and is a key note in the author's song of encouragement. What God has promised He will surely give ([9:15](#); [11:13](#), [39-40](#)), but only after faithful endurance according to the **will of God**.

10:37. **Yet a little while**, he urges, taking words from [Isaiah 26:20](#). The Greek here literally says, "a little -- how very, very little!" By comparison with the ages of eternity, how very' very well this describes the short Christian conflict on earth! For the same point from the perspective of saints already martyred, see [Revelation 6:9-11](#).

He that cometh here refers to Christ the high priest. The author takes the phrase from [Habakkuk 2:3](#) (Greek version>. Christ was "He that Cometh" when He came into the world as Messiah (see [Matthew 11:3](#); [Luke 7:19](#); [John 6:14](#)). He is "He that Cometh" now to the Christian who awaits His return (see [9:28](#)). Assurance is given that He **will come** and **will not tarry**.

10:38. Two categories of men are named. **The just** or righteous will **live** through their **faith** -- again words from Habakkuk ([2:4](#); see also [Romans 1:17](#); [Galatians 3:11](#)). **Faith** here stresses the element of endurance -- with almost the sense of "hope" in other New Testament epistles. The second category consists of those who **draw back** in disbelief' and in them God finds **no pleasure**.

10:39. The exhortation closes with a word of optimism We includes the author and his first readers. **We** are not of that class who **draw back**, and end in perdition or **destruction**, but of those who **believe** and keep on believing **to the resultant saving of the soul**. The next chapter will demonstrate the character and behavior of saving faith through examples of saints long dead. Here the readers are urged to be among the faithful.

Some will be rejected, cursed and burned ([6:8](#)), but "we are persuaded better things of you" ([6:9](#))! Let each believer be fully informed regarding the destiny of deserters and apostates. Let him tremble before the Wrath of a righteous God. But let him then be encouraged and consoled and strengthened, lest he become discouraged and fall to another of Satan's devices. This is the true style of exhortation, and Hebrews is above all a "word of exhortation" ([13:22](#)).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

11:1. In this chapter our author will illustrate that faith which saves the soul by pointing to men and women from Jewish history who possessed it. He begins, however, with a statement concerning this saving faith, which some have called its definition.

Faith is, on the one hand, **the substance** or confidence or courageous assurance (see the same word at **3:14**) **of things hoped for**. This term expresses the sense well of the Hebrew word for faith used throughout the Old Testament. It is that confident and assured trust in God which enables one to endure with patience while moving toward the object of his hope.

Faith is, on the other hand, **the evidence** or proof, the absolute conviction, **of things not seen** with the physical eyes. This terminology expresses the sense of the Greek word for faith used in the New Testament. Saving faith, however, in every age and among all men, involves both these elements. It

is its own proof of the existence and active energy of unseen facts and realities, and able by its own immediate intuitions to dispense with the evidence of the senses and laborious proofs of reason. It carries the imperious conviction of the truth it holds within itself (Delitzsch).

Putting it more simply, such faith "is convinced of future good because it knows that the good for which it hopes already exists invisibly in God" (Barrett). In that conviction, faith rises to meet great occasions, accomplishes mighty works through God's power, and endures every kind of suffering for the sake of Him whose voice it has heard and whose reward it has seen.

11:2. By it the elders or honorable men of the past **obtained a good report** or were well-attested by God. This general term will include heroes of faith from Abel the son of Adam through the Maccabean martyrs of the second century before Christ.

It was common practice among Greek orators, as among speakers now, to illustrate particular traits by calling attention to individuals in whom they have been particularly apparent. When Mattathias, the priestly father of the Maccabean brothers, encouraged his sons on his deathbed he said,

Now my children, be zealous for the Law, and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers. And call to mind the deeds of the fathers which they did in their generations, that ye may receive great glory and an everlasting name (**I Maccabees 2:50-51**).

He then reminded them of the faith and deeds of Abraham, Joseph, Phinehas, Joshua, Caleb, David, Elijah, Daniel and his three friends.

Another Jewish writing began with the following words a seven-chapter description of the merits of good men from Enoch to a Maccabean priest named Simeon:

Let me now hymn the praises of men of piety, of our fathers in their generations.
No little glory did the Most High allot them, and they were great from the days of old
([Sirach 44:1-2](#)).

Our author is not unique in naming famous men. He is alone in calling attention to the clear quality of saving faith which has exemplified all who truly pleased God. This verse may give a capsule illustration of the first part of faith's description in verse one. These elders were men who maintained a confidence and courage and assurance toward God in the face of whatever circumstance they encountered.

11:3. **Through** this same kind of **faith we understand** the origin of the universe although we have no physical evidence to support our understanding Paul uses **understand** in a similar statement in [Romans 1:20](#). Here is just one example of the second part of the definition found in verse one.

The worlds (see [1:2](#)) here refer to the space-time universe which is known by sensory perception, although the particular word literally means "ages." All that is now **seen** was **framed** or came into being by the spoken word of God. Nothing came originally from what philosophers would call the phenomenal, but from God's own invisible word and will.

The **word** of God here is not the same as in [John 1:1ff](#). John uses a word which includes both rationality or thought and the speech by which that is expressed. Our author uses a term which emphasizes the act of speaking. The farmer may be included in his remark that what we see did not come from what is apparent, and in the implication that it came from the mind and thoughts of God -- which are invisible -- by means of the spoken word of God.

If Moses saw a pattern of the true tabernacle in heaven before he built the one on earth ([8:5; 9:1](#)), it is not surprising that the visible creation should have come from the thoughts of God and in the absence of any visible "stuff."

On creation through God's spoken word see also [Genesis 1, 2; Psalm 33:6, 9](#) The important point is that **through faith we understand** this, and that we may have the same proof or **evidence** through faith that one might seek through physical senses.

11:4. The first example of **faith** is **Abel**, who **by it offered a sacrifice** which **God** regarded as **more excellent than** that offered by his brother **Cain**. The story is told in [Genesis 4:3-7](#). A number of suggestions have been made as to why Abel's offering pleased God when Cain's did not.

Cain brought his fruit but Abel brought his firstfruits. Abel's blood-offering may have signified a realization of his need for forgiveness, while Cain's offering of produce showed no such insight or humility. Others have concluded that God prescribed the specific offering desired and that we have a simple contrast between obedience and

disobedience. Our author says only that Abel's acceptance was due to his faith. There seems to be a simpler explanation of these words than any yet mentioned.

Faith which successfully approaches God by nature involves the heart. Our writer urges that the heart not be hardened (3:8), or evil and unbelieving (3:12) when judged by God's word (4:12). It is rather to be inscribed with God's laws (8:10; 10:16), sincere, with full assurance of faith (10:22) and strengthened by grace (13:9). The text here says that Abel's offering was accepted because he presented it out of faith, and the Old Testament indicates a distinction between the hearts of Abel and his brother Cain (Genesis 4:7).

Calvin pointed to this factor in his comment that Abel's sacrifice was accepted "because he himself was graciously accepted," and Proverbs 15:8 affirms the same principle. As all righteous men of all time, Abel pleased God through faith. This faith which guided all his life caused him to be accepted, and the occasion of his offering gave God opportunity to acknowledge the acceptance of his faith. This was in contrast to Cain's rejection, because of disbelief.

It is even here the case that faith comes by hearing the word of God, but Abel's faith responded to God's word in general and regularly, not simply on this occasion. The key to his accepted offering is not the offering itself but his heart. God was pleased to accept the offering because of the faith which prompted the man who brought it.

By the same **faith** Abel **obtained witness** from **God** that **he was righteous**. If one construes the which here as referring to the sacrifice instead of the faith, the point remains unchanged. For, if by the sacrifice Abel obtained witness from God, it was only in God's testimony that he was known to be righteous -- but he was righteous because of his faith.

That Abel was **righteous** is stated by our Lord Himself (Matthew 23:35) as well as by the apostle John (1 John 3:12). Josephus also states that Cain and Abel

were pleased with different courses of life; for Abel, the younger, was a lover of righteousness, and, believing that God was present at all his actions, he excelled in virtue. . . . But Cain was not only very wicked in other respects, but was wholly intent upon getting.

God testified that Abel was **righteous** by receiving **his gifts**. Whether He indicated this reception by a divine word or by sending fire upon the altar (see Leviticus 9:23-24; Judges 6:21ff; 13:19-23; I Kings 18:30-39; II Chronicles 7:1) we are not told.

Though Abel had been long **dead** even when Hebrews was written, **by his faith he yet speaketh**. His message is not only a cry to God for vengeance (Genesis 4:10; Hebrews 12:24), but is particularly a word to all God's people that they may find divine favor through faith.

11:5. If Abel died as a result of his faith, the next witness found life through his. **By faith Enoch was translated** when God took him (Genesis 5:24; see II Kings 2:3, 5, 10), which our

author interprets as meaning that **he** did not **see death**. When Enoch's associates searched for him **he was not found** (see [II Kings 2:15-17](#)). But **before his translation** Enoch **had** received **this testimony** or witness **that he pleased God**.

The Greek Old Testament says that Enoch "was well-pleasing to God," where the Hebrew text says he "walked with God." These terms are applied by the Old Testament to Noah as well as to Enoch, but to no other man ([Genesis 6:9](#)). Jude indicates that Enoch's contemporaries were anything but pleasing to God (verses 14-15), and one piece of uninspired Jewish literature had him "caught away lest wickedness should change his understanding or guile deceive his soul" ([Wisdom 4:11](#)). Again, what is important is that Enoch pleased God through his faith.

11:6. Although the Old Testament does not state that Enoch was a man of faith, our writer argues that he must have been. For **without faith it is impossible to please God**, yet Scripture says that Enoch did. What is true of Enoch is true in general. Any person who **comes to God** (the same Greek word used in [Hebrews 4:16](#); [7:25](#) and [10:1, 22](#) of approaching God) **must believe** or have a two-fold faith. First, **that God is** or exists; second, **that he** becomes a **rewarder** to those who **diligently seek him** by faith.

Both these are in keeping with the nature of faith as described in verse one. Faith believes that God is, although He is not seen, and that He will give those seeking Him the reward for which they hope. Only with such faith is God pleased, He has no pleasure in those who draw back in disbelief ([10:38](#)). Those who received this epistle needed just such a faith if they were to receive their reward ([10:35](#)). Those who read it today need the same.

11:7. Noah was also a man of **faith**. Like Abel, he was righteous; like Enoch, he walked with God or pleased Him ([Genesis 6:9](#)). When **warned of God** Noah **prepared an ark**, for his faith provided evidence of **things not seen as yet**. He **moved with** godly **fear** or piety (see the same word at [5:7](#); [12:28](#)), itself a companion of faith, which resulted in the **saving of his house**.

By faith, Noah **condemned the world** which did not have faith. He **became** an **heir** of the only righteousness God recognizes, that which is according to **faith**. Noah was saved by faith. His faith showed itself by acting in assurance of the unseen, through confidence in the God who had promised.

11:8. The next five verses speak of Abraham's faith, noted by Old Testament writers ([Genesis 15:6](#); [Nehemiah 9:8](#)) as well as New ([Romans 4](#), [Galatians 3:6-9](#)). Our writer has already discussed Abraham twice (he is mentioned in [2:16](#)); once in connection with God's faithfulness ([6:13-15](#)) and once in giving historical background to Melchizedek ([7:1-10](#)). Here Abraham's faith is in the spotlight.

By faith Abraham obeyed the call of God **to go out, not knowing** where he would go. He knew only that God had commanded. "Faith and obedience are inseparable in man's

relation to God." Abraham "would not have obeyed the divine call had he not taken God at his word; his obedience was the outward evidence of his inward faith" (Bruce).

Abraham was to **receive** a promise of the land as **an inheritance**, but that promise was not given until **after** he had initially obeyed ([Genesis 12:1-7](#)). The promise concerning an inheritance was itself a reward for his initial faith, not the original motive for his obedience. That rested on his faith alone.

11:9. By faith Abraham **sojourned** or lived as a stranger who was passing through **a strange country**, although in fact he was **in the land** which according to God's promise would some day belong to his descendants. He lived **with Isaac**, who was born when Abraham was 100 years old ([Genesis 21:5](#)), and Jacob, born when he was 160 ([Genesis 25:26](#)), for fifteen years ([Genesis 25:7](#)) **in tabernacles** or tents.

As semi-nomads ([Genesis 26:12; 33:17](#)) the patriarchs did not settle for the luxuries of any city around them. The metropolitan areas of Sodom and Gomorrah were by no means alone in Palestine and Syria of Abraham's day. Jericho had been a fortified city already for more than 5,000 years. Yet the patriarchs remained intentional strangers, looking for a special kind of city which only God could prepare.

11:10. Abraham, and apparently Isaac and Jacob as well (see [verses 13-16](#)), **looked for the city which hath the foundations**. Both definite articles are present in the original, adding emphasis to the uniqueness of the city for which they searched. The following verses tell us that they were trusting God for a home in the heavenly city. This verse calls it the city with the foundations, **whose builder** or craftsman or architect **and maker** or constructor **is God**.

In addition to other references in Hebrews ([12:22; 13:14](#)), the new or heavenly Jerusalem is mentioned in Galatians (4:25-26) and Revelation (3:12; chapters 21, 22) At times it is a present reality, distinguished from earthly Jerusalem as the spiritual is distinguished from the physical, and is discernable by faith. At the same time, it is to be distinguished in a temporal sense as the inheritance not-yet-given which awaits the people of God. In Hebrews, notes Bruce, "it is the heavenly Jerusalem, the commonwealth of God in the spiritual and eternal order, now effectively made accessible by the completion of Christ's high-priestly work, to which all the men and women of faith come to be enrolled as free citizens" (see also [Philippians 3:20](#)).

11:11. The text used by the King James translators notes that **by faith Abraham's wife Sarah** was enabled to bear a son although **past** the normal **age**. A problem arises here, however, because the Greek word translated **conceive seed** is not the word for the mother's part in conception at all, but the father's. In addition, Sarah is pictured in the Old Testament, not as believing God's promise, but laughing at it in scorn and disbelief ([Genesis 18:12-15](#)). Finally, the statement that Sarah **was delivered of a child** is not in the better Greek manuscripts or the later English versions.

A solution may not be far away. The original words here represented as **Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed**, may, by remarking the vowels, be translated "He also, with Sarah, received strength to beget a child, when he was past age." This reading is suggested in the margin of the Westcott and Hort Greek text and is noted with approval in the lexicons translated by Thayer and by Arndt and Gingrich. It does not do violence to the original text, either, for vowels in it were not marked. This reading not only accounts for the particular Greek word used, it fits the facts of the Old Testament and makes the present passage far more readable **By faith** Abraham went out (verse eight), sojourned (verse nine), with Sarah had a son ([verse 11](#)), and offered Isaac ([verse 17](#)).

The fulfillment of this promise, impossible by human calculations, became possible by the **faith** of Abraham. He exemplified that highest quality of faith which judges God to be **faithful** in all that He has **promised**, and acts accordingly.

11:12. Not only Isaac, but eventually a **multitude** as numerous as the **stars** in the sky ([Genesis 15:5; 22:17](#)) or the grains of **sand** by the shore ([Genesis 22:17](#)) came from the **one** man Abraham ([Isaiah 51:1-2; Ezekiel 33:24](#)). To this add that he was **as good as dead** so far as producing offspring when Isaac was promised. The text literally says that he had long been dead in this sense. Paul uses the same form of this word in [Romans 4:19](#). There he insists that saving faith is faith in a God who is able to raise the dead, and he develops that point with reference to Christian faith in the gospel concerning Christ (see also verse 19 in this chapter).

11:13. **These** sojourning worthies -- Abraham (and Sarah), Isaac and Jacob -- **all died** just as they had lived, in the sphere where faith is the motivating principle. Although they did not during their lifetime receive the object of the **promises** given them, by faith they had **seen them** as if from a distance. Their faith saw what was invisible and the conviction it produced caused them to react with certain assurance. They embraced what they saw (literally "greeted" or "saluted"), and happily **confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims** -- not only in that land but **on the earth** itself (see verse ten).

Abraham confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim ([Genesis 23:4](#)), as did Jacob ([Genesis 47:9](#)). David, a later man of faith, made the same confession in his day ([Psalm 39:12; 119:19; I Chronicles 29:15](#)). Peter urges Christians to have the same attitude ([I Peter 1:17; 2:11](#)), as does our writer in making the present point

11:14. **They that** say that they are strangers and pilgrims on this earth **declare plainly** that they are looking for **a country** or fatherland of their own. The patriarchs did say **such things** and we may know that was their quest.

11:15. The country they sought was not one from which **they came out**, whether Haran or Chaldea. When on one occasion a servant suggested that Isaac return to Haran to acquire a wife, Abraham was urgent in insisting against it ([Genesis 24:5-8](#)). God had called him away from that country; his mind was not set on it and he did not **return** even when he **had**

opportunity. These men were pilgrims, not leaving a former home only, but travelling toward a future one. They were immigrants to the heavenly city, as well as emigrants from one on earth.

11:16. They wanted a **heavenly** country **better** than any earth could provide. They were not perfect mortals by any standard, but they were men who trusted God and took Him at His word. For this reason he **is not ashamed to be called their God** ([Genesis 28:13](#); [Exodus 3:6](#); see [Mark 12:26-27](#)). For the same reason He **has prepared** that heavenly **city** for which they looked during their lives.

Just as the true sabbath rest is fulfilled only in the eternal realm of realities entered after death by the faithful ([4:1-11](#); [Revelation 14:13](#)), so the faith-pilgrim finds his city only in the dimension of perfected existence.

An unknown writer from perhaps the third century after Christ had the same thought in mind when he described Christians in these words.

They live in their own homelands, but as foreigners. They share in everything as citizens, but endure everything as aliens. Every foreign country is their homeland, but every homeland is a strange country to them. They spend their time on the earth, but their citizenship is really in heaven (Epistle to Diognetus, my translation).

11:17. It was also **by faith** that **Abraham** was offering Isaac, having already offered him in his own heart and mind, when an angel of God stopped him short of the actual deed. The story is given in [Genesis 22:1-14](#). Jewish traditions had Isaac 23, 25 or even 37 years old at the time, and credited him with the same faith as his father, but the Genesis account leaves the impression that Isaac was much younger.

The tense of the first verb **offered up** indicates an action completed in the past with results carrying into the present. Abraham's faith was so real that he regarded Isaac as already having been offered. Apparently, God did as well. But Abraham's faith was not limited to his mind, for he was in the process of carrying out this act (as the tense of the second **offered up** suggests) when stopped by God. Faith is what justifies, not the act it prompts; yet justifying faith will always be acting in obedience to God.

Scripture refers to this incident as a test by which Abraham's faith was **tried** ([Genesis 22:1, 12](#)). An ancient Jewish work called The Book of Jubilees told of a confrontation behind the scenes between God and a demon, details borrowed, no doubt, from the Biblical story of Job.

11:18. There could be no doubt as to the crisis: it was to be in or through **Isaac** that the race which would be **called** the **seed** of Abraham would have its origin ([Genesis 21:12](#)). The test of Abraham's faith lay in the realization that God's **promises** to him depended on this very **only begotten son** whom God now commanded to be offered as a sacrifice. What does one do when God's promises seem to contradict His clear commands? Abraham's example would say that faith suspends human reasoning and obeys, trusting that God is both able and faithful to carry out His promises.

11:19. If God could **raise** one up **from the dead** by a miraculous birth to aged parents ([verse 12](#); [Romans 4:17-22](#)), He **was** certainly **able** to raise Isaac from the death Abraham was now commanded to inflict. This much Abraham knew, and he seems to have believed that God would do this very thing ([Genesis 22:5](#)).

Because Isaac was already dead in Abraham's faithful mind (see [verse 17](#)), our author says that is what did happen; not literally, but **in a figure**. Abraham's faith was approved. He **received** his son alive as a reward.

Because **figure** here is literally "parable," some have taken the phrase to mean that what happened to Isaac was a figure or parable of Jesus who was to come. Whether or not that was in our author's mind, a number of parallels are apparent. Isaac was Abraham's only begotten son ([verse 17](#); see [John 3:16](#)). He was a child of promise through whom God would bless the world. He was born of a miraculous conception.

Isaac carried the wood for his own death, as Jesus carried His own cross. Isaac was received back as from the dead, as our Lord was in fact. In Isaac's place, God provided a ram for the sacrifice, caught in a thicket by his horns. Jesus Himself was the Lamb of God, but died with a crown of thorns on His head. Both events involve a test of faith. Man is now asked to place all hope of salvation in the crucified and risen Jesus, a proposition as troubling to human reason as the dilemma faced by Abraham.

11:20. **By faith** this same **Isaac**, when he was old and blind, **blessed** his sons **Jacob** ([Genesis 27:26-29](#); [28:1-4](#)) **and Esau** ([Genesis 27:39-40](#)) **concerning things** which were to come in the distant future. These blessings involved the fortunes of two nations, Israel and Edom, and they came to pass as foretold. That Isaac spoke by faith implies more in the blessings than a fatherly prediction. What he said must have been based on a word from God.

The measure of faith required from Isaac is seen in the very circumstance of the blessing. Jacob had reversed the ordinary prophecy through common deceit, and the blessings were given unwillfully by Isaac. Yet Isaac was confident that God would carry out His purposes.

God is all-knowing and all-powerful, and faith trusts Him to accomplish His will in spite of all human obstacles. No circumstance may arise through human sin which God can not use for His own glory. This is the confident conviction of every one who believes that God is and that He becomes a rewarder to those who seek Him.

11:21. Many years later, **Jacob** acted **by faith** when he **blessed** Ephraim and Manasseh, the two **sons of Joseph** ([Genesis 48:1-22](#)). See the comments regarding the patriarchal blessing above.

The same faith was evident in Jacob when he made Joseph swear to have him buried some day in the land of promise, then leaned in reverence **upon the top of his** pilgrim's **staff** and **worshipped** the God of his fathers ([Genesis 47:29-31](#)).

God's promise to Abraham had included affliction in a strange country, but also a great deliverance after four generations ([Genesis 15:13-16](#)). In that promise alone Jacob placed all his confidence now. In spite of "the exhaustion of approaching death, he summoned all his bodily powers, and placed his aged limbs as well as he could in the position of profoundest adoration" (Delitzsch).

It may be noticed that Genesis has "bed" where our author has "staff." The same consonants in Hebrew may be either; our author is using a Greek translation which had "staff." The faith of Jacob remains the same in either case, and that is the point.

The writer of Hebrews may reverse the chronological order of the two events in this verse for smoother transition from Isaac's blessing ([verse 20](#)) to Jacob's blessing ([verse 21](#)), and from Jacob's death-bed ([verse 21](#)) to Joseph's ([verse 22](#)).

11:22. Dying Joseph acted **by faith** when he spoke of **the** divinely promised **departing of the children of Israel** (see notes on [verse 21](#)), **and gave a commandment concerning** the future burial of **his bones** ([Genesis 50:24-25](#)). His faith in God's promise was vindicated many years later when his bones were carried up out of Egypt ([Exodus 13:19](#)) and laid to rest at Shechem ([Joshua 24:32](#)).

11:23. **By faith, Moses**, who has been commended already for faithfulness in God's house ([3:2, 5](#)), **was hid three months** ([Exodus 2:2](#)) by **his parents** Amram and Jochebed ([Exodus 6:20](#)). Their act was in violation of **the king's commandment** that Hebrew male infants should be destroyed ([Exodus 1:22](#)). To say that Moses was **a proper child** is to say he was urbane, stately or well-favored (see [Acts 7:20](#)). Jewish tradition said that Moses' parents were informed of God's plans for Moses, through either a dream of Amram or a prophetic utterance by Moses' sister Miriam. Scripture states simply that they acted from faith.

11:24. **When Moses was mature or come to years**, he acted **by faith** and **refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter**, by whom he had been adopted as an infant ([Exodus 2:9-10](#)). The refusal may have taken the form of a dramatic confrontation or it may have been by identification with the enslaved Hebrews through incidents such as that recorded in [Exodus 2:11-12](#) (see also [Acts 7:23-25](#)).

The identity of **Pharaoh's daughter** must remain a present mystery. The designation "Pharaoh" is of no help, since it was not a personal name but the ancient royal title meaning "The one who lives in the great house." Josephus says the Pharaoh's daughter was named Thermuthis, and the Jewish Book of Jubilees called her Tharmuth. Both are names of a daughter of Rameses II, who lived during the thirteenth century before Christ. Another daughter of Rameses II, Meri, has also been suggested as the princess of Exodus.

Conservative scholarship has generally preferred an earlier date for Moses, and some writers have suggested that this princess was Hatshepsut, a powerful daughter of Thutmose

I. Hatshepsut later became "king" herself, and even wore the ceremonial beard of the pharaoh. She ruled during the fifteenth century before Christ.

Our historical curiosity must wait for further evidence from archaeology, but our appreciation of the faith of Moses remains unaffected. Whenever he lived, his worldly position warred against his faith. To his eternal credit Moses trusted God instead of appearances, and of his alternatives our author now speaks.

11:25. Moses could have known a powerful position in Egypt, perhaps even becoming Pharaoh. Instead he cast his lot with a race of slaves. His faith looked behind the scenes and calculated it better **to suffer affliction with the people of** the eternally existent and rewarding **God than to enjoy all the conceivable pleasures of sin** which were temporary (see this same word at [II Corinthians 4:18](#)). By faith, Moses "looked through the deceptive appearances of worldly good things, to their inward and essential nothingness, and to their fearful end" (Delitzsch).

11:26. The treasures of Egypt were fantastic, as demonstrated by a few small caches uncovered in certain royal tombs. The treasures of King "Tut" (Tutankhaton, fourteenth century before Christ) are well known; that much or more might have belonged to Moses. But **faith** appraised the alternatives and pronounced **reproaches** with God's people to be the **greater riches!**

Moses chose the **reproaches** (see [10:33](#)) of **Christ**. Suffering accepted for God's sake binds together saints of troth testaments and identifies them all with Christ ([Philippians 1:29](#); [Colossians 1:24](#); [II Timothy 2:10](#)). David so spoke in [Psalm 69:7-9](#), in words later seen to refer also to Christ ([John 2:17](#); [Romans 15:3](#)). In another psalm, Ethan spoke of his sufferings as for the sake of God's anointed one (the literal meaning of "Christ," [89:50-51](#)). Moses endured **reproaches**, as Christ was to do, he was a type of Christ ([Deuteronomy 18:18](#); [Acts 3:20-23](#)). His suffering was one link in the great chain of events by which God directed history to its focal point in Christ.

11:27. By faith Moses **forsook Egypt** for Midian ([Exodus 2:15](#)). Lest the Exodus account be misunderstood, our author adds that this flight was not prompted **by the wrath of the king**. Like his parents before him ([verse 23](#)), Moses was well aware of Pharaoh's wrath, but also like them he acted through positive faith in God and not through fear. Fear might have led a slave rebellion -- which would have been crushed at once. Faith quietly retreated to the desert to be molded forty years for God's great deliverance.

In this particular crisis and thereafter, Moses **endured the consequences** of his faith by looking toward God **who is invisible**. Again we are reminded that faith believes that God is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. The faith of Moses stood against the unbelief of Pharaoh, who Philo says "did not acknowledge any deity apart from those that could be seen." The plagues on Egypt were judgments against its many visible gods ([Exodus 12:12](#)).

Some relate this verse to the Exodus rather than to Moses' earlier flight to Midian, but at least four objections may be raised to that view. First, the order here is reversed. The Passover preceded the Exodus but is mentioned in the verse following this one. Second our writer does not mention the faith of Israel here, as he does regarding the Red Sea ([verse 29](#)) and as one might expect if this refers to the Exodus. Third, Pharaoh of the Exodus was not the king from whom Moses fled, yet our author has to deny that fear prompted the flight under consideration ([Exodus 2:23](#)). Fourth, Israel did not leave Egypt under fear, but at the urging of Pharaoh and the Egyptians ([Exodus 12:31-33](#)).

11:28. By **faith** (the word here is exactly that translated "try faith" elsewhere in the chapter), **Moses kept the passover** for the first time and left it as a perpetual celebration ([Exodus 12:1-20](#)). Faith prompted the **sprinkling of** the lamb's blood; it was rewarded in Israel's deliverance when **the firstborn** of Egypt's men and animals were **destroyed** by God ([Exodus 12:21-30](#)).

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at a passover meal. His selection of bread and fruit of the vine as the elements of His covenant meal also demonstrates the continuity between old and new testaments

John's Gospel presents Jesus' death against a background of the slaying of passover lambs in the temple ([John 19:31, 36](#)). Paul makes the unleavened bread of passover week a type representing moral purity among Christians, whose Lamb is Christ ([I Corinthians 5:6-8](#)). Our author does not use passover typology He stresses the Day of Atonement and its perfect fulfillment in the self-offering of Christ. For additional references on Christ as God's Lamb, see notes on 9:24.

11:29. The Israelites were represented by Moses in the previous verse. Here they are mentioned as a company. It is striking that examples of faith are drawn from individuals, usually persons who were faithful when all around them were not. The nation is used to illustrate disbelief ([3:9-11](#); [3:16-4:11](#); [I Corinthians 10:1-12](#)). This great moment of Israel's faith immediately precedes forty years of unbelief in the wilderness.

By **faith** Israel **passed through the** midst of the divided **Red Sea** ([Exodus 14:21-22](#)), though God divided the sea with a strong east wind which came at a signal from Moses ([Exodus 14:21](#)). The Egyptians lacked faith, (literally) "made a trial of" the sea, and **were drowned**.

The Hebrew Old Testament calls this the Sea of Reeds. English versions generally agree with the Greek Old Testament in calling it the Red Sea. [Exodus 14:2](#) indicates that the crossing took place at a northern extension of what is now the Gulf of Suez. This mighty act of divine deliverance was immediately celebrated in a song of praise ([Exodus 15:1-21](#)); still later it was used to represent God's great power to accomplish His covenant purposes ([Isaiah 11:15-16](#); [51:10-11](#)). Paul used this crossing as a type of Christian baptism, and argued

from it that those once in fellowship with God may forfeit their blessing through loss of faith ([I Corinthians 10:1ff](#)).

11:30. The capture of Jericho (Joshua six) involved what we call psychological warfare; the inhabitants must have been terrified after six days of encirclement by a silent army who marched behind blowing trumpets. But **the walls fell down** on the seventh day -- and that **by the faith** which prompted the past week's strange behavior. On Israel's part the six days of marching demonstrated the perseverance of true faith -- an element close to our writer's mind as he pens this chapter ([10:35-39](#); [12:1, 3](#)).

An archaeologist named Garstang thought he had uncovered the very walls which fell before Joshua, but dating based on later work of Kathleen Kenyon made that identification very unlikely. Such matters are of interest, but the truthfulness of the biblical story does not depend on the excavator's spade. The same God whom Israel's faith touched that day thousands of years ago stands now behind our written account of that event, and the same kind of faith which trusted His direct word then places confidence now in His word that is written.

11:31. When the walls of Jericho fell and Israel stormed the city, **Rahab** and her family were the only survivors ([Joshua 6:22-25](#)). Her salvation was the result of her faith, which had been demonstrated earlier in hiding **the two Israelite spies** ([Joshua 2](#)). Her act was of faith because she had heard of God's past deeds for Israel and she behaved from a reverent recognition of His power and purposes ([Joshua 2:10-11](#)).

Rahab is contrasted here with **them that believed not**. The word translated "believe" here implies obedience that comes from a persuasion of faith (the same word is used at [3:18](#)). James uses Rahab as an illustration of that saying faith which does not merely profess but obeys ([2:25](#)). Clement of Rome, an early Christian author whose work was not inspired, used Rahab as an example of hospitality and faith (I Clement 12:1).

Some pious Jews of antiquity tried to make Rahab an innkeeper or a seller of food, instead of a **harlot**, but the word used in both Old and New Testaments demands that she be just that. Nor is this the word for a cultic or pagan temple prostitute, but an ordinary harlot. In spite of her former way of life, Rahab was transformed through the power of faith. She later was to marry a Hebrew named Boaz to become a chosen vessel in the ancestry of our Lord ([Matthew 1:5](#)).

11:32. Using a Greek phrase common to orators, our author notes that his **time would fail** if he detailed every example of faith, and draws his list to a close.

The first four names are selected from the period of the Judges, and carry the Old Testament story from the time of Joshua to the time of the kings. **Gideon** delivered Israel from marauding Midianites who used the speed of camels to make their plundering attacks ([Judges 6-8](#)). Gideon is also called Jerubbaal ([Judges 6:32](#)).

As Deborah's war-captain, **Barak** shared in the deliverance of the northwestern tribes from a confederacy of Canaanite kings who used chariots long before they were a common vehicle of war. The story in [Judges 4-5](#) does not indicate Barak's faith, unless it is to be seen in his agreement to assist Deborah with prospects of no personal glory (4: 8-9). Chronologically Barak comes before Gideon, but in importance the order is here reversed.

The exploits of **Samson** against Philistine occupation-troops are familiar to the Bible student ([Judges 13-16](#)). Samson's faith was not always strong or active, but it came to the fore on the occasion of his death.

Jephthah was instrumental in delivering the eastern tribes from Ammon ([Judges 11-12](#)). Though he is now remembered chiefly for a rash vow, his general behavior was grounded in a knowledge of God's past acts on behalf of Israel and a confidence that He would act once more for His own people (11:14-27). Jephthah also illustrates the fact that God may use ignoble individuals to accomplish great things ([Judges 11:1-3](#)).

It is possible that these four individuals were grouped together soon after their own times. First Samuel 12:11 speaks of Jerubbaal (Gideon) and Bedan (the Greek and Syriac versions have Barak) and Jephthah and Samuel (the Syriac version has Samson, but that seems to be a change that is unwarranted).

Time would fail, indeed, to give details of the faith of **David** ([I Samuel 16-31](#); [II Samuel](#); [I Chronicles 11-29](#)). The man after God's own heart ([Acts 13:22](#)) who served God's purpose in his own generation ([Acts 13:36](#)) must have been characterized by exceptional faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God at all.

Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of a chain of **prophets** who would instruct Israel through the rest of the Old Testament period ([I Samuel 19:20](#)). Although he preceded David, he is here placed more naturally with **the prophets** who followed him. Samuel's own birth was in answer to a prayer of faith ([I Samuel 1:10-20](#)), and his personal ministry early included a total trust in the word God revealed to him ([I Samuel 3](#)).

The prophets include Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah and other non-writing prophets, as well as the sixteen whose books bear their names. One does not have to look far to be impressed by their faith. He needs only to consider the mighty works of Elijah and Elisha, the patient and trying service of Hosea or Jeremiah, the holy boldness of Micaiah or Amos or Daniel, the unquestioning obedience of Ezekiel, or the confident reliance which Habakkuk expresses so beautifully in his poetic third chapter. These men all, along with a host of God's holy ones whose faith will be celebrated only in the resurrection, eloquently illustrate the many-faceted qualities of that faith which is unto the saving of the soul.

11:33. Through faith men have subdued kingdoms. Joshua, the judges and David come to mind at once. Others have **wrought righteousness** by the public administration of divine justice. This is noted of Samuel ([I Samuel 12:4](#)) and David ([II Samuel 8:15](#); [Psalm 101](#)). **Faith** has **obtained** the fulfillment as well as the word of **promises**: of the Exodus, of Canaan's

possession, of great territories, of God's care and protection of Jerusalem, of a captivity that ended as predicted and a return home

Faith has **stopped the mouths of lions**, by death ([Judges 14:5-6](#); [I Samuel 17: 34-36](#)), but especially when Daniel had been delivered to hungry lions by his enemies and God delivered him from their jaws ([Daniel 6](#)).

11:34. Faith has **sometimes quenched the violence of fire**, most notably in the case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego ([Daniel 3](#)). Peter's mention of "fiery trials" may suggest that such persecution was a possibility in the case of those who first read this epistle ([I Peter 4:12](#)).

Elijah ([I Kings 19](#)), Elisha ([II Kings 6](#)) and Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 36](#)) all **escaped the edge of the sword** by faith, but others by faith met the steel ([Hebrews 11:37](#)).

Out of weakness men and women of faith **were made strong**. Gideon was the most insignificant member of his family, but God used him mightily. Neither Saul nor David claimed personal merit when God called for service. Both responded to that call in faith, and in personal weakness found God's strength. Others already discussed in this chapter were enabled by faith to accomplish what would otherwise have been impossible.

God has never depended on numbers, nor has He valued man's appraisals of strength and weakness (see [Deuteronomy 32:30](#); [Leviticus 26:8](#); [Joshua 23:10](#); [II Corinthians 1:9-10](#); [12:9-10](#)). To consider the examples in this chapter is more frequently than not to see God working in spite of the very instruments He chooses to use, overcoming men's own weaknesses and mistakes to bring about His eventual glory. This lesson is always needed in the church, for men constantly face the temptation to view life through human values rather than with the clear and certain lens of faith.

By faith other **waxed valiant in fight** and **turned the armies of the aliens to flight**. Old Testament characters could be adduced here, but these terms also fit the heroic men of faith who lived between the testaments. The book of I Maccabees is not inspired, but it tells of numerous victories which faith brought the sons of Mattathias in their godly struggle against the pagan Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes.

11:35. Women who had lost loved ones **received them to life again** through the power of faith. We think of the widow of Zarephath ([I Kings 17:17ff](#)) and the Shunemite woman ([II Kings 4:17ff](#)); perhaps there were others.

Tortured here translates a word which describes quite literally an extremely cruel persecution in which an individual was stretched on a rack then beaten to death. Second Maccabees is not quite so reliable as the first book, but it tells of a godly scribe named Eleazar who died in this very manner for his faith in Jehovah ([16:18-31](#)).

When Eleazar was captured, he was offered **deliverance** if he would eat swine's flesh. This he refused, in hope of a **better resurrection**. Whether our author has him in mind or not, Eleazar's dying words are characteristic of those who are intended here. "The Lord, who

hath holy knowledge, understandeth that although I might have been freed from death, I endure cruel pains in my body from scourging and suffer this gladly in my soul, because I fear Him."

One Jewish mother of the period was forced to watch the torture and murder of her seven sons, but tenderly encouraged each in his turn to be faithful to God. Their dying words eloquently illustrate this verse. One said, "Thou dost dispatch us from this life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for His laws, and revive us to life everlasting." Another extended his limbs for torture with the words, "These I had from heaven; for His name's sake I count them naught; from Him I hope to get them back again." When all the others had died, the youngest son was offered riches and a position of state if he would deny God. He answered,

These brothers, after enduring a brief pain, have now drunk of everflowing life, in terms of God's covenant; but thou shalt receive by God's judgment the just penalty of thine arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and soul for our fathers' laws, calling on God [these deaths are related in [II Maccabees 7](#)].

11:36. Others faced the test of **mockings** by many cruel and sportive tortures. They endured **scourgings** or whippings; they suffered **bonds and imprisonment**. The recipients of our epistle had endured some trials of faith early in their Christian lives and had shared with others who were imprisoned for Christ ([10:32-34](#)). Jeremiah had know imprisonment for the word of God ([Jeremiah 20:2](#); [37:15](#); [38: 6](#)), as had Joseph for his faithfulness to God ([Genesis 39](#)).

Others includes individuals not yet mentioned, and perhaps unknown to us, but known to the original readers. The tortures endured by the seven faithful brothers already mentioned compare in severity and depravity with any atrocities of times nearer ourselves. The tormentors tore out the tongue of the oldest brother, scalped and mutilated him in the presence of his younger brothers and his mother, then fried his body, maimed but still alive, in a huge cauldron ([II Maccabees 7:15](#)). The others suffered similar agonies, but we will follow the advice of the final verse in that chapter and "let this suffice" for "the excesses of barbarity."

11:37. Long before Stephen, men of God had been **stoned** to death for their faithfulness. When Joach was king of Judah and the nation turned from God, a prophet named Zechariah came to testify against the people. "And they conspired against him and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord" ([II Chronicles 24:17-21](#)).

Tradition has Jeremiah stoned to death by the Jews who took him into Egypt after the captivity of Judah (see [Jeremiah 42-44](#)). Nor was he the only man of God to meet this fate from those who were called God's people ([Matthew 23:37](#); [II Corinthians 11:25](#)).

Others for their faith **were sawn asunder**. Very ancient Jewish traditions say that Isaiah was killed with a wooden saw under the reign of Manasseh. Scripture does not confirm this

story, but one can well imagine such an act from a king who offered his own children in pagan sacrifice ([II Chronicles 33:6](#)) and who made the people of Judah "do worse than the heathen" (verse nine).

Faithful saints **were tempted** in many ways, but held fast their confidence in the God they could not see. It has been suggested that the word here translated **tempted** might, by the change of one letter, be translated "met death by fire." This was the fate of some faithful ones during the time of the Maccabees ([II Maccabees 6:11](#)), but textual evidence does not appear to warrant such a change here.

Some were **slain with the sword** for their faith, although others by faith escaped this death ([verse 34](#)) Elijah was Spared when others died ([I Kings 19:10](#)). Jeremiah escaped the sword when Urijah was slain ([Jeremiah 26:23-24](#)). Herod killed James with the sword but Peter was spared ([Acts 12:2ff](#)). Only God knows why some died and others did not, but the faith of each will have its reward.

Because they walked by faith, God's people have sometimes lost their homes and have been forced to **wander about in sheepskins and goatskins**. While it is true that Elijah ([II Kings 1:8](#)), John the Baptist ([Mark 1:6](#)) and perhaps others ([Zechariah 13:4](#)) wore hairy garments, our author speaks of a condition brought on by force, not choice, and apparently intends some others than these.

[11:38](#). Godless crowds have cried that faithful saints were unfit for this world ([Acts 22:22](#)). With this our author agrees, though with an opposite meaning! Of such **the world was not worthy**, so they lived in **deserts, mountains, caves** or **dens** while they waited for their heavenly city and eternal homeland

We see Elijah hiding at Horeb, Elisha at Carmel, or 100 prophets in caves. During the period between the testaments, many of the faithful were forced to forsake their homes to seek safety in remote areas. E.M. Zerr believes the prophecies of [Daniel 11:31-36](#) were fulfilled in the persecutions of that period; Keil includes the Maccabean heroes but only in a larger picture.

[11:39](#). What was said earlier of the patriarchs (verse 13) is said now of **all these** faithful men and women. They **obtained a good report** or were subjects of good testimony regarding their **faith** -- whether directly from God (verse four) or by later men of faith (verse two). Yet they **received not the** particular **promise** which faith always grasps -- that final and complete inheritance from the invisible God who is trusted to be a rewarder.

We must not take this to mean that these ancient saints were outside the provisions of divine grace or that they will not be among the glorified faithful with Christ eternity (see [notes on 12:23](#)). Indeed they were justified by faith -- they had this testimony -- and the offering of Christ declares that God was righteous in accepting them because of their faith ([9:15](#); [Romans 3:25-26](#)).

11:40. The fact that their faith was unrewarded in life is not a sign that faith is ineffective or that God is unfaithful. It is rather a pointer to the unity of all men of faith in every dispensation or age. **They** who lived by faith before Christ were **not perfect** or complete **without** those of **us** who know God through Christ in the new covenant. "Christ himself is the essential bond of union which binds together the saints of all ages" (Milligan).

At the same time, **God** has **provided** something **for us** that is **better** than anything they were given. This is the knowledge of a high priest who has offered a perfect sacrifice for sins once for all, who now sits at God's right hand making intercession for His people, who has opened the way into heaven by His own life and death, and who has promised to return to His people to, share the glory with them He has already acquired as their representative

Better is a key word in Hebrews and is characteristic of the new covenant with all it offers particularly in contrast to the former covenant and institutions. It is used of Christ's name or position (1:4), His dedicatory sacrifices of the heavenly sanctuary (9:23), the new testament (7:22) or covenant (8:6), the Christian hope (7:19), resurrection (11:35), country (11:16), substance (10:34) and message of Christ's blood (12:24). It is also used of the behavior these blessings should elicit from Christ's people (6:9).

The verb **make perfect** is also a frequent one in this epistle. It is used both of Christ (2:10; 5:9; 7:28) and of those covered by His sacrifice (7:19; 9:9; 10:14; 12:23). Such perfection is given through faith: faith that accomplishes great feats but also faith that suffers and endures. Perhaps most of all it is the faith that endures. That is our author's chief point now as he urges the lesson on his readers.

CHAPTER TWELVE

12:1. Wherefore here translates a compound Greek word composed of three lesser particles, each meaning "therefore" or "wherefore." This very strong combination word occurs only one other time in the New Testament ([I Thessalonians 4:8](#)). Here the emphasis is in view of the **great cloud of witnesses** to whom our author has called attention in the last chapter and whose presence he now puts forward as strong inducement for the faithfulness of his readers.

Cloud frequently stood for a great host in both secular Greek literature and in the Old Testament ([Ezekiel 38:9, 16](#)). The Greek word translated **witnesses** gives the English word "martyrs." It first meant one who saw or experienced something, then, one who gave a testimony or bore witness of his experience. Because one's testimony often led to his persecution or even death, the term gradually came to designate one whose witness cost him his life. So derives our word "martyr." The word carried this idea in several biblical passages although it only later gained this exclusive significance ([Nehemiah 9:26](#); [Acts 22:20](#); [Revelation 2:13](#)).

Some of the witnesses of chapter eleven were martyrs in the narrower sense, but they all were witnesses. They had seen Him who is invisible, and they had seen the realities of the world of faith. They had given their testimony to these realities, usually in a hostile environment and to an unbelieving audience They had been the subject of other testimony, as God gave them a witness that He was pleased with their faith.

The term **compassed about** or surrounded, as well as the clear athletic imagery which follows, suggests that these individuals are now witnesses in still another sense. "Each of them has, in his own age and in his own way, run his section of the great 'relay race,' and, having handed on the torch to his successor, has joined the multitude of interested spectators and skilled judges" (Robinson). Delitzsch speaks of "our life here" as "a contest, its theatre the universe, the seats of the spectators ranged through heaven!" That these witnesses are spectators of our race must be inferred from the context; the word itself does not carry that idea.

Because of these faithful saints who encourage us by their record, and perhaps by their own watching, we are admonished negatively to **lay aside** every hindrance or distraction, and positively to **run with patience** or endurance the course which has been laid out for us.

Weight is used in the literature of the time of any excess poundage, frequently of obesity or stoutness, which the athlete must shed before he runs The Christian must put off all that does not measure up to his calling and is not becoming to his intentions. The term also suggests the weights worn by an athlete in training which are then laid aside for the actual contest.

Sin surrounds the believer to distract him from the goal. Like the flowing garment worn in the first century, it also clings to him and impedes his progress. Sin itself, of every sort

and all kinds, must be renounced by the man running the race of faith. This present context suggests the particular sin of disbelief which results in apostasy.

It is not enough to begin the race only to fall during its course. This was the point of Israel's example in chapters [three](#) and [four](#), and the thought which triggered the present discussion in [10:36](#). The Christian must **run with patience the race set before him**. The object is not speed but endurance. The prize is not for the first runner through but for every runner who finishes.

Paul uses the imagery of the runner in several epistles (see [I Corinthians 9:24-27](#); [Galatians 2:2](#); [Philippians 2:16](#); [II Timothy 4:7](#)). The terms "fight," "strive," and "conflict" often represent a single Greek word also taken from the vocabulary of the athlete or soldier.

Similar language is used in the so-called Fourth Book Of Maccabees, a Jewish writing of uncertain date and authorship, which credits the victories of Jewish heroes to the use of proper reason. I quote the following passage because many readers will not have opportunity to see it elsewhere. Speaking of his intertestamental heroes the writer says:

For truly it was a holy war which was fought by them. For on that day virtue, proving them through endurance, set before them the prize of victory in incorruption in everlasting life. . . . The tyrant was their adversary and the world and the life of man were the spectators. And righteousness won the victory, and gave the crown to her athletes. Who but wondered at the athletes of the true Law? (17:11-17).

[12:2](#). Patience for the course may be found by **looking** intently and constantly **unto Jesus**, who is not only a witness **of faith** but is its **author** or pioneer (the same word used at [2:10](#)) and its **finisher** or perfecter. Barnes applies these two expressions to the race official who enrolls entrants and awards the final prizes, but he gives no support for this interpretation. More likely the thought is that Jesus (our author here uses His human name, perhaps to stress His unity with His people) is **author** of faith because He was the first to run faith's course all the way to its goal in heaven. He is finisher or perfecter because He leads all who follow Him to the same finish or end or goal (see [I Peter 1:9](#)).

Jesus has experienced faith's trials and its reward. **The joy set before him** may refer to His delight in doing the will of God ([Psalm 40:8](#); [Hebrews 10:5-10](#)), but it has special reference to the promised position of Savior and Lord which He would be given on behalf of His people (see [2:9](#); [5:4-10](#); [Isaiah 53:10-12](#)). Jesus received God's promise in faith. He placed Himself within the Father's purpose in simple and wholehearted trust. He then **endured** all that came in the course of the Father's will with forward-looking faith and joy and hope.

The cross was a symbol of great **shame** in the first century world. It represented a death reserved for political insurrectionists or the basest of criminals. Roman citizens were not only guaranteed immunity from crucifixion (Peter was crucified but Paul was beheaded, according to reliable tradition) but Cicero urged Romans not to talk about, look at or think

on this death. Yet Christ **despised** or considered as insignificant this ignoble suffering when measured against the joy to be had through patient submission to the will of God.

Nor was His faith in vain, for when this epistle was written Christ was already **set dawn at the right hand of the throne of God**. The verb tense here indicates not only that He had taken this seat but that He still occupies it! For a discussion of the use of [Psalm 110](#) in the New Testament see comments at 1:13; [8:1](#) and 10:12. Christ led the way in the procession of faith. He has now arrived at faith's goal. He now guarantees the safe passage of all who follow Him in trusting endurance.

12:3. Consider this Jesus, our author urges. Do not merely glance at Him, but literally "draw an analogy" between His situation and your own. He **endured** verbal and active **contradiction** or opposition from **sinner**s. Compare your own sufferings to His so that you do not become **wearied and faint** or fall out **in your minds**. The words point again to the race track and the runner who tires to the point of exhaustion.

12:4. In contrast to Jesus, the readers have **not yet resisted unto blood**. Some think this expression alludes to the barehanded boxers of the day who fought until their hands were bleeding and bruised. Your **striving** or fight **against sin** has not reached this point of total dedication, our author would be saying. It is possible, however, to regard the words in the most natural sense and say the original readers of Hebrews had not yet faced the threat of martyrdom, though some of their predecessors might have (13:7). Jesus followed the way of **faith** to the cross. His followers must also be willing to die for their **faith**, if necessary.

12:5-6. In verses five through eleven our writer presents another figure with different imagery. **You have forgotten the exhortation** of [Proverbs 3:11-12](#), he says, in which the believer views his circumstances as discipline from a father who loves his children. Much of the wisdom contained in Proverbs (particularly chapters 1-7) is addressed by the king to his son. The words which follow are taken from that setting and are applied to God's children of the new covenant

Chastening in this entire context translates a more general word meaning discipline in all its forms. It involves the training of a son by the father. It is the **discipline** or training which makes **disciples**. Such discipline is a sure proof of the father's love (see [Revelation 3:19](#)). For this reason its recipients ought not to **despise** or belittle its value and purpose. God first disciplines, then **receives**, His child who has been so molded.

12:7. If is only one letter different in the original language from a preposition meaning "for" or "unto," and the better manuscripts and later versions here have the latter. It is for the very kind of discipline or **chastening** described just now that **ye** presently **endure**, the author points out. **God** is simply treating you **as sons**, and sons are disciplined by their fathers. Your suffering is neither without God's knowledge or His purpose. The verb may also be translated as an imperative ("endure for the purpose of discipline"), but it is probably a simple indicative stating what is the case.

12:8. If you were **without** any **chastisement** or discipline there would be cause for alarm, **for** it **is** the illegitimate son who is unrestrained, untrained, unpunished and sometimes unknown by his father. The son who will bear the father's name with pride in the next generation must bear up under the father's rod now if he is to be fitted for the task. Again our author joins warning to reassurance. "But you **are all partakers** of this discipline and may therefore know you are beloved children" (see [6:9](#); [10:39](#)).

12:9. Ordinary human experience demonstrates these truths. **We have all had** human, fleshly **fathers**. They **corrected us**. We later understood and appreciated that discipline -- and even then **we gave them reverence** or respect. How **much rather** should **we be in subjection** to our spiritual **father**, whose discipline is part of His grand design to lead us to abiding and true life in communion with Him!

"Fathers of our flesh" is a Hebraic manner of saying "our fleshly fathers." "Father of spirits" is in simple contrast to the other expression, and ought not to be strained to fit either side of the metaphysical argument concerning the origin of individual spirits. Milligan sees a special contrast.

Our earthly fathers are like ourselves, carnal , frail, sinful mortals . . . liable to err in their discipline. . . . God . . . has none of the weaknesses and infirmities of the flesh . . . [and] can not like our earthly fathers err in His chastisements.

That contrast is clearly made in the next verse.

12:10. During the **few days** of our childhood, our earthly fathers **chastened** or trained us **after their own pleasure**. Sometimes they might have acted hastily or in anger; they always acted under human limitations of knowledge and design. Our heavenly Father, on the other hand, knows exactly what is needful for our **profit** as He prepares us **to be partakers** or sharers **of his holiness**. This holiness involves not only the judicial pronouncement of a new state because of union with Christ ([10:10](#), [14](#), [29](#)), but also a daily life of godly thinking and behavior (see [verse 14](#)).

12:11. One writer remarked of this verse that "the only proper commentary is our own personal experience." All discipline, however instructive, is painful at the time it is administered, but later its benefits are seen in those who appropriate the intended training. **The peaceable fruit** of such training is **righteousness**. Peace and righteousness are related in both the Old ([Isaiah 32:17](#)) and the New Testaments ([James 3:18](#)). Here the fruit is **peaceable** in contrast to the discipline which produced it.

12:12. In this verse and the next our author quotes from [Isaiah 35:3](#) and the Greek version of [Proverbs 4:26](#). He changes imagery to that of a group of wayfarers on a journey, and builds on this figure through verse 17.

Lift up the weary travellers' **hands which hang down** slack and loose from exhaustion; lend strength to **the feeble knees** which have lost their power to hold up and have become

as paralyzed. These were appropriate exhortations as addressed to Jews who would return to their homeland from faraway Persia. (The journey theme is also seen in [Isaiah 40:3-4, 29-31; 43:2, 5-7, 19-21; 48:20-21; 49:8-13; 52:10-11; 58:11-12](#)). The same exhortations are appropriately given to faith-pilgrims of the new covenant who have become weary in well doing and are about to faint with fatigue. It should also be noticed that this encouragement is given to believers as a company, and that their pilgrimage involves mutual concern and careful attention to one another (see [comments at 3:12-13; 9:17; 10:24](#)).

12:13. As believers travel together toward the heavenly city, they are to **make straight paths** so that the **feet** of those who are **lame** will not **be turned out of the way**. The latter phrase has been translated two ways. The reading of the King James Version agrees with the thought of the Greek text of [Proverbs 4:26-27](#), which urges making straight paths, then says not to turn to the right hand or to the left. Many other versions translate our author equally well with a slightly different thought as "lest the lame limb be dislocated altogether," or words to that effect. This translation more obviously contrasts with the next statement of this verse, **but let it rather be healed**.

Either phrasing is possible from the Greek and both thoughts are appropriate. Let the Christian pilgrim remove from the path anything that would impede the progress of his weak brethren or cause them to stumble. Let nothing be left before them which would cause one to miss the trail or would trip a lame traveller and put his limbs completely out of joint. Rather let each sojourner hear with his fellows, lend them strength when needed, help with the burdens of the weak, encourage the faint-hearted and clear the path for those who are tired and weak.

The verb form of the word here translated **lame** is used in [I Kings 18:21](#) (Greek translation) of those Israelites who were "halting between two opinions" and could not decide whether to serve Jehovah or Baal. This passage suggests at least one form of lameness which afflicted the weak Hebrew saints who first received this epistle. They were weak in the faith. They were wobbling between allegiance to Jesus Christ and to their former Jewish religion. The term should not be limited to this application though it seems to include it.

12:14. In their journey together it is essential that the travellers **follow** or actively seek **peace with all** their companions. The phrase is from [Psalm 34:14](#). Peter quotes it also in his letter which, interesting enough, is addressed "to those who reside as aliens" ([I Peter 3:11; 1:1](#), New American Standard Bible).

Such scriptural injunctions to peace or love need not be followed by immediate explanations which practically annul the biblical point. It is a pitiable generation in which the church is so strife-infested that peace and love are held as unholy words in some quarters. Many church quarrels have been blamed on error or attributed to truth which actually resulted from carnal and fleshly minds. The fault has often been with some who refused to put others ahead of self, to bear patiently with the weak, to seek peace at the expense of personal

pride or opinions. In short, through the sinful attitudes and conduct of some who refused to obey the clear teaching of the Word of God. It is one thing to stand for clear truth against clear error. It is quite another to call all one's own thoughts and inferences "truth," then immediately draw the circle of peace closely about those personal conclusions.

Those following Jesus in the highway of faith must seek **holiness** as well as peace, for **without holiness no man shall see the Lord**. Only the pure in heart will see God ([Matthew 5:8](#)). Holiness has always been required of God's people, and the command has always been grounded in the character of God who gave it ([Leviticus 11:45](#); [I Peter 1:15-16](#)). If peace makes association possible with [brethren, holiness makes it possible with God.

12:15. Looking diligently translates a Greek word from which comes our "overseer" or "bishop." It is "as if they were travelling together on some long journey, in a large company, and he says, 'Take heed that no man be left behind' I do not seek this only, that ye may arrive yourselves, but also that ye should look diligently after the others" (Chrysostom). It is the duty of the experienced (elder) Christian shepherds (pastors) to look carefully to the spiritual needs of their flock as overseers (bishops), and this responsibility is laid directly upon them by the Holy Spirit. As the same time, every pilgrim of faith has a similar duty to his fellow-wayfarers, and that is the point of this verse.

A congregation of saints will never enjoy the blessings of brotherhood and Christian love that God provides and intends so long as it conceives of itself primarily in institutional or external terms. The Christian religion is a religion of togetherness: saints together constitute the family of God in each place. They are to love as brethren. It is so difficult for men today to pass beyond the carnal view of the church, as a sort of religious club or organization' to its true nature as revealed in the Bible. This view must be seen if saints are ever to comprehend the real beauty of their actual state together in Christ.

Look diligently so that no one **fail** or come short of (see also 4:1) **the grace of God** that is given freely in Christ and enjoyed by faith. The figure here is that of the traveller who lags behind and never reaches the end of the journey. It is a sin of too many churches that saints may wander in one day and out the next with very little notice given either to their presence or absence. God's words concerning His Old Testament church often describe His New Testament people as well: "My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill; yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them" ([Ezekiel 34:6](#)).

Still using the pilgrimage motif, our author warns against **any root of bitterness**, or poisonous root, which might be cut as for food and result in widespread contamination of the people. The term comes from [Deuteronomy 29:18](#), where Moses uses it figuratively to warn Israel against turning from God to idols. Our author has already spoken against an evil heart of unbelief which leads one from the living God (3:12). Here he repeats the warning in figurative terms.

12:16. Watch diligently for **any fornicator**, not in the limited usage of the word alone, but as signifying any moral uncleanness. Some interpret this warning as against spiritual adultery, and equate it with turning from God. Our writer warns against sexual impurity, however, in **13:4**, and it is preferable to take the warning literally here.

The **profane person** is one who has no regard for what is holy. He is unable -- or worse, unwilling -- to distinguish between what is common and what is holy. Such an attitude frequently leads to immorality as well as other sins.

Esau is given as an example of a profane man. Jewish tradition made him a fornicator as well. **For one morsel of meat** or food he **sold his birthright** ([Genesis 25:29-34](#)). "The rights of primogeniture were among the most noble, honorable, and spiritual in the ancient world" (Barnes). Esau not only "despised," his double portion of the inheritance, he scoffed at his role in the patriarchal line through which God's covenant promises and election purposes were to be fulfilled. Behind many particular sins lies a basic inability to distinguish between what is valuable and what is of little importance. Christians who fail to appreciate their position in the Lord Jesus Christ are often prone to grievous sins. The best preventative against sin is a constant awareness of who and what one is called and called to be in the Son of God, and a regular meditation on one's position as he stands identified with the blameless Son before the Father.

12:17. The consequences of profanity involve not only the present loss of blessing but also the future impossibility of renewal. The disregard for what is holy, which leads to sin in the first place, also prevents true repentance -- even when the profane man sees his final end and is overcome with remorse. Esau also illustrates this fact (see [comments at 10:26-29](#)).

Ye know from the Old Testament story **how that afterward when** Esau desired to inherit **the blessing he was rejected** ([Genesis 27:30-40](#)). Three phrases in this verse are subject to more than one interpretation. Was Esau **rejected** by Isaac, by God, or by both? Did Esau find **no place of repentance** in himself or in his father or in both? Did he seek **carefully with tears** the blessing, or a place for repentance?

Esau's rejection may safely be said to have been by both God and Isaac, since the patriarchal blessing was ultimately given by God through the father (see [comment at 11:20](#)). When Isaac affirmed the certainty of Jacob's blessing, he was pointing out its divine origin ([Genesis 27:33](#)).

Esau **found no place for repentance** because there was no change of his father's mind regarding the blessing already given. Delitzsch sees Esau as "a type of the hopelessly apostate" and argues that he did not experience true repentance himself at all, but simply changed his mind about the inheritance and blessing when he realized the point to which his careless attitude had led. **Repentance** here has its most basic meaning of a change of mind, but it involves a change of mind that seeks to change the effects of the previous disposition. Esau

could not find such a change of mind in his father Isaac, nor was he able to change the effects of his own former attitude (whether or not he had the same attitude still).

Esau **sought** the blessing **with tears** ([Genesis 27:38](#)), but this involved tears for his father's change of mind. Both alternatives ought here to be included.

12:18. Again the imagery changes, this time to terms based on the giving of the Law at Sinai. **Ye** who follow Jesus, the enthroned Son at the Father's right hand, **are not come** to a mountain such as Sinai. There ancient Israel had gathered as God's elect nation, to receive the details and requirements of the covenant which graciously bound them to Him. According to the accounts of Exodus (19:16, 18) and Deuteronomy (4:11; 5:23; 9:15), the top of Sinai **burned with fire**. The lower parts of the mountain were hidden by the **blackness and darkness** of the storm clouds which covered them. Out of the clouds came loud noises and bursts of fierce storm and **tempest**.

12:19. When the people heard a sound as **of a trumpet** ([Exodus 19:16-19](#)) **and the voice of words** from God ([Deuteronomy 5:22](#)), they **entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more** directly, but rather through the mediation of Moses ([Exodus 20:18-19](#); [Deuteronomy 5:23-27](#)).

12:20. The assembly of Israel was awed and terror-stricken by the thought of God's command ([Exodus 19: 12-13](#)) that **if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned**. The phrase **thrust through with a dart** is not in the better manuscripts or in most later versions. The Old Testament command has the animal stoned (apparently if it wanders off the mountain within distance of the people) or shot (with an arrow, if it remains on the mountain out of the people's reach).

12:21. Even **Moses** was so overcome by the **terrible** or terror-inspiring **sight** as to remark, **I exceedingly fear and quake**. This statement is not reported in the Old Testament, though it is in keeping with what is stated there. [Exodus 19:19](#) says that when the trumpet sound became louder and louder "Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice." What Moses said is not told. The Greek text of [Exodus 19:18](#) says that all the people were driven out of their senses for fear, and Moses would certainly be included in that statement. Whether our author depends on that text or some other source for his information we do not know. What he writes, however, is Scripture, and as such has the absolute approval and endorsement of the Holy Spirit.

12:22. As fearful and terrifying as that scene was, the new-covenant saint has approached Clod under circumstances and in company far more demanding of a faithful response.

The word translated **ye are come** (here and at verse 18) in its noun form gives the English word "proselyte," suggestive perhaps of the move of the Hebrews from Judaism to Christ. All Christians, however, have come at conversion, and remain throughout life, in the presence of the figures and elements which follow.

Mount Zion is literally Zion-mountain, in contrast to Sinai-mountain. Zion was first a Jebusite stronghold in the Old Testament, but David captured it with his private army and made it his capital of united Israel ([II Samuel 5:6-9](#)). Since it had not formerly been a part of Judah or Israel, Zion was politically independent, much as Washington, D.C. in the United States. David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Zion in the next chapter. God's approval is seen in the dynastic and messianic promises given to David through the prophet Nathan ([II Samuel 7](#); see [I Kings 14:21](#); [Psalm 78:68](#)).

Solomon's Temple was actually on Mount Moriah, but the term **Zion** came to include that as well. In the Psalms, Zion is frequently celebrated as the holy city of God's choosing and the meeting place of His people Israel (see 120-134, especially 132-134).

The reference here is not to physical Zion, but to its heavenly prototype, which is part of **the city of the living God**. Our author has spoken already of this city ([11:10](#), [14-16](#)). He mentions it again in [13:14](#). We have not come to an earthly city, but to **the heavenly Jerusalem** where God dwells in glory.

A glorified Jerusalem was the subject of much Jewish speculation (between the testaments, including material from the Dead Sea Scrolls) and of some revelation (the very difficult chapters 40-48 of Ezekiel). The author of Hebrews adds to inspired knowledge on the topic, as do Paul and John (see [references and comments at 11:10](#)). That is not to say that all these biblical passages apply to the same things in every detail; each must be studied in its own context for the specific meaning. This verse clearly refers to the place where God dwells, to which Christ has opened the way by passing through the veil in His flesh, and to which Christians have come in their new-covenant faith in Him.

Included in this same awe-inspiring scene are an **innumerable company**, literally tens of thousands or myriads, **of angels** (see [Psalm 68:17](#); [Daniel 7:10](#); [Revelation 5:11](#)). These angels are sent forth by God for the service of His saints on earth ([1:14](#)), but in all their activities they exist for the praise of God.

[12:23](#). **The general assembly** translates a word which gives the English "panegyric." This Greek term is used in Greek literature of a public festival or celebration attended by all the people. Such celebrations usually included the praise of great men. There is some controversy as to whether the festive assembly here includes only the angels or also those mentioned next.

Church should be interpreted in its literal sense here of an assembly. It is composed of the firstborn ones (plural in the original) who **are written** or enrolled as citizens in the city of God **in heaven**. The phrase has been taken as of the angels or of first-generation Christians, but it seems best to think of **the church of the firstborn** ones as being the church of Christ of all times and all places on earth. As firstborn ones, Christians must heed the warning against profaneness already given concerning Esau, another firstborn (verses [16-17](#)).

God, the Judge of all, is present, and He will acquit or condemn each man. Here is a word of comfort for a suffering church, for God's judgments will involve a vindication of its cause (see [comments at 10:30-31](#)). That the presence of God speaks of comfort and not fear for His people is seen in the phrase that follows.

The spirits of just men made perfect refers to those saints who lived and died before Christ but who walked according to faith during their lives. They are declared **just** because the Judge has viewed their faith and pronounced them so on the basis of Christ's atonement (9:15). They are now **made perfect** or complete because they have arrived at the state of blessed rest with the Lord which was publicly announced with the beginning of the gospel proclamation. And the gospel speaks essentially of the life, death and resurrection of the eternal Son who partook of flesh and blood, but now sits as eternal Priest-King at the right hand of God. Just as the ancient saints could not be made perfect without their new-covenant counterparts (11:40), so we must live in view of them (see [comments at 12:1](#)).

12:24. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant is present (see [8:6](#)). Jesus is His saving name and associates Him with His earthly brethren ([Matthew 1:21](#); [Hebrews 2:9-18](#)). **New** here means "recent," and refers to the nearness in time between these first readers and the covenant Jesus had inaugurated shortly before. The presence of Jesus speaks assurance, for He is surety of the new covenant promises (see [comments at 7:22, 25](#); also [Appendix IV](#) on Christ's Sacrifice and the Christian).

The blood of sprinkling is the blood of Christ. Our writer has already spoken of sprinkled blood in terms of purification ([9:13-14](#); [10:22](#)), of covenant-ratification ([9:19](#)), and of Passover ([11:28](#)). Each figure bespeaks blessings for those bound to the Son who has now shed His blood on their behalf.

Christ's blood **speaks better** or more powerfully than the blood associated with **Abel**, whether one thinks of Abel's own blood shed by Cain or the sacrificial blood he shed by faith. Christ's blood also speaks of better things than either blood, for Abel's sacrifice spoke of atonement hoped-for, and his own blood called for vengeance. Christ's blood, however, assures all martyrs of faith that their blood was not shed in vain, and it speaks of an atonement which Christ has already accomplished and the Father has already accepted.

The two covenants are contrasted in this manner. The first began at fearful Mount Sinai, a mountain characterized by warnings and threats. The second began with glorious Mount Zion, populated by servant angels and saved men praising a holy God and His priestly Son. The first description closed with a voice of words which sent the people scurrying and left even Moses trembling. The second description closed with a Mediator's blood which speaks with eloquence and power of an accomplished atonement and the reward of faithfulness.

The exhortation to steadfastness in the midst of affliction is now coming to an end. Our author has demonstrated himself in this chapter to be a user as well as an author of Scripture. His exhortation here is built around four figures. First is the spiritual athlete, striving for

the prize. He is encouraged by the former contestants who now watch but especially by Jesus who is both author and finisher of faith. Second is the child, who meekly learns from the purposeful discipline of his loving father. Third is the company of pilgrims, who watch for one another as they move toward their destination. Fourth is the contrast between the Old Testament and New Testament churches, as gathered respectively before their covenant God.

The first illustration called on chapter eleven, which itself drew from the entire Old Testament and intertestamental periods. The second illustration came from Proverbs representing the Writings portion of the Hebrew Old Testament. The third was based on Isaiah, though it drew from other parts of Scripture as well. It stood for the Prophets. The fourth came from Exodus and Deuteronomy, standing for the books of Moses, the Torah.

In the final five verses of the chapter, our author looks again to the prophetic portion of his Scriptures, there finding words for his closing appeal.

12:25. See or take heed **that** you do **not refuse** God who is speaking. The thought is directly related to the epistle's opening affirmation that God has spoken ([1:1-2](#)). How He has spoken and what He has said have been our author's themes throughout. Now He urges care lest the readers fail to respond to the final message in the Son.

They who refused him that spake on earth refers to Israel. They heard God's voice from the smoking mountain ([verses 18-21](#)) but failed to heed it and were destroyed ([3:8-4:11](#)). **If** here expresses certainty, not indefiniteness; "since" would be a proper translation. Since their judgment was so sure, though pertaining to an earth-given revelation, punishment is **much more** certain for those who **turn away** from God now that He has spoken **from heaven**. See the opening comments on chapter two for a discussion of this type of argument and other references where it is used.

12:26. When God spoke from Sinai, His **voice shook the earth** ([Exodus 19:18](#); [Psalm 18:7](#); [68:8](#); [114:4](#)). **But** we **now** have His promise that **yet once more** He will **shake not the earth only, but also heaven**. The promise is found in [Haggai 2:6](#), and was given by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest at the dedication of the rebuilt Temple in 516 B.C. Our author applies the words to the final Day of the Lord (see [comments at 10:25](#)).

12:27. The words **yet once more**, our author explains, denote the **removing of those things that are shaken**. For if God will shake the earth once more, and apparently only **once** more, that shaking must come at the final shaking of the earth which will also be its **removing**. This is to be expected, he adds, for these are **things that are made, and** they are by nature temporary (see [1:10-12](#)). **Further**, it is necessary that those things be shaken and removed, so that those things of the invisible and eternal order **which cannot be shaken may remain**. It might not be straining the point to say that the trembling of Sinai was an indication that

the order it represented would one day pass away, just as the passing glory of Moses' face on that occasion is said to indicate the same thing ([II Corinthians 3:7-14](#)).

12:28. Our covenant is based on a word from heaven, however, and is an administration of the eternal and heavenly realities ([8:1, 2, 5](#); [9:1, 11, 24](#)). We have, in fact, received a **kingdom which cannot be moved** or shaken or ever destroyed. It is the everlasting kingdom of prophecy ([Daniel 7:27](#)). We ought, therefore, to **have grace** (a regular Greek expression for giving thanks), through which we **may serve God acceptably with reverence** or pious respect **and godly fear**.

12:29. Such reverence and respectful fear is absolutely required in view of the fact that **our God is a consuming fire**. The phrase comes from [Deuteronomy 4:24](#) (see that context), but the thought is found in numerous passages (see a partial listing in [comments on 10:27](#)).

It is an aspect of the character of God as revealed in the Bible that plays little part in much present-day thinking about Him; but if we are to be completely "honest to God," we dare not ignore it. Reverence and awe before His holiness are not incompatible **with** grateful trust and love in response to His mercy (Bruce).

A study of the Bible reveals that those men in each age who were closest to God and enjoyed the most intimate fellowship with Him have been also the most awed by His holiness. One thinks immediately of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Paul or the Apostle John. The greatest example is our Lord, who on occasion used the intimate term "Abba," but who more frequently is recorded as addressing God as "Holy Father" or "Righteous Father." Boldness is not audacity. "God is love" must always be joined to "our God is a consuming fire," for holy love demands a fire of judgment, and that fire is holy which consumes the adversaries of God and His people.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Our author has developed his case in twelve chapters. He has broken into his discussion periodically with urgent exhortations or earnest warnings. Now he has come to the end of his literary task, and he closes with specific words of practical import. Throughout the epistle he has spoken of God's new-covenant people who have come into a relationship with Him based on the saving work of the Son. The admonitions of chapter thirteen are addressed to Christians as faith-pilgrims. Because they share the benefits of Christ's work, they must encourage and tolerate and forgive each other.

Some critics have argued that this chapter was not an original part of Hebrews. They say it has no relation to the rest of the epistle, and that it was added by a later scribe or editor. Filson has clearly demonstrated the unity between this chapter and the previous twelve (see his book listed in the bibliography). In fact, he affirms that it is this final chapter which provides a key to the rest of the book. One does not have to agree with all Filson's conclusions to appreciate his basic point. It is enough here to say that the unity of Hebrews has been demonstrated convincingly, even from the standpoint of modern critical scholarship.

13:1. Brotherly love properly exists between those sharing a common father (see [2:11](#)). It is more than sentiment or affection; it involves the practical demonstration of what is in the heart and mind. The Hebrew Christians had manifested brotherly love soon after their conversion ([10:32-34](#)) and throughout their Christian lives ([6:10](#)). Our author does not tell them to begin its practice, therefore, but to **let it continue**.

13:2. Nor are they to **forget** hospitality. The Greek word translated **hospitality** literally means a love of strangers or travellers, and the King James Version tries to give this sense in its **entertain strangers**. Inns were available to travelers of the first century, but they were notoriously ill-kept, usually expensive, frequently bawdy and sometimes dangerous.

For these reasons, Jews and Christians normally cared for their own brethren who might be traveling or visiting in a strange city. Paul mentions this practice several times in his epistles. John speaks of the custom and corrects two abuses: that of giving fraternal hospitality and blessing to antichrists who denied the Christian gospel ([II John 6-11](#)), and that of failing to extend care to worthy brethren who needed it ([III John 5-10](#)). Peter also urges hospitality ([I Peter 4:9](#)), which for Christians was grounded in the words of Christ Himself ([Matthew 25:35-36](#)). In a book known as the Didache, an unknown Christian who lived shortly after the time of the apostles gave detailed instructions concerning the reception and treatment of traveling preachers and teachers. Later a Roman writer named Lucian called Christians gullible, saying that any tramp could find food and housing if he could convince them of his religion.

Our author notes that some in the past **have entertained angels** without knowing it, referring no doubt to Abraham ([Genesis 18](#)) and Lot ([Genesis 19](#)), and perhaps others. Because of what our author has already stated in 1:14 we must agree with Delitzsch that "any

man whom we entertain without knowing any details as to him. may be even for us a very angel of God." Not that this is the general rule, but hospitality does frequently return unexpected blessings, and by it Christ is served.

13:3. The original readers knew what it meant to **remember them in bonds** (10:34), **as bound with them**, and **them which suffer adversity** or literally "have it bad," **as being also in the body**. It is inviting to take the phrases as **bound with them** and **as being in the body** in the sense of the bond of love (Colossians 3:14) and the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12). Unless one assumes that Paul wrote Hebrews, however, he may not be sure that meaning is intended here. Even so, the point of the exhortation is about the same. Christians are to be so captivated by brotherly love that when one is bound the others sympathize as being themselves bound. When some are in bad circumstances the rest are concerned to help, being subject also to the ailments of mortality.

13:4. The original text has no verb here and the statement may be translated either as an indicative (as in the King James Version) or, perhaps better in this context, as an imperative. Let **marriage** be respected and regarded as **honorable**. Let it be free from the sanctions and regulations of asceticism on the one hand, and the profligate and licentious behavior of libertinism on the other. **In all** may be interpreted as among all people or in all things. The Greek expression frequently means simply "altogether" or "completely."

Let **the marriage bed** and the relationship it stands for be **undefiled**, for **God** (this word is emphatic in the original) **will judge** the impure (uncleanness, fornication and prostitute are all of the same word-family with this in the Greek) and **adulterers**. When Scripture makes a distinction between fornication and adultery the former refers to sexual impurity in general and in terms of moral uncleanness, while the latter refers to extramarital sexual relations by a husband or wife and in terms of the marriage covenant and relationship. A proper respect for the institution and relationship of marriage is the best prevention against God's judgment for fornication or adultery.

13:5. Again the verb must be supplied to urge that the **conversation** or turn of mind and life **be without covetousness**. Again there is a verbal link with what has gone before. **Covetousness** is literally a love of silver. Our author has urged love of brethren and love of strangers, but now he cautions against the love of money. Since this sin comes from the mind the solution must begin there as well.

Be content with such things as ye have. Milligan accurately states the teaching of Scripture in saying: "Be diligent in business; do all that you can lawfully and consistently to improve your own condition and to promote the happiness of others; and then with calmness and resignation leave all the consequences to God."

The basis of such trustful contentment is the word of God in such passages as [Genesis 28:15](#); [Deuteronomy 31:6](#), [8 Joshua 1:5](#); [I Chronicles 28:20](#); [Isaiah 41:17](#); [Matthew 6:25-30](#)

and many others, that **I will never leave thee nor forsake thee**. This promise is made very emphatic in the original Greek by the succession of three negatives.

13:6. Because God has given His word (and the phrase quoted here seems to have been common in Jewish speech, to judge from its use by the non-biblical writer Philo), the believer is to respond with a word of his own. **We may boldly say** in the words of [Psalm 118:6](#), which were also regularly quoted during the great feasts of the Jews, **the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me**. Both the Hebrew and the Greek may also be translated: "The Lord is my helper and I will not fear. What shall man do unto me?" In either case, the thought is the same. Because God speaks in promise the possessor of faith should speak in trust and confidence.

13:7. As examples of **faith**, the readers should remember their former leaders who used to speak **the word of God** unto them. Their **conversation** or way of life (not the same word used in verse five) led them to a praiseworthy **end**, which the readers are to be **considering** by thorough and continuing contemplation. Whether this refers to death by martyrdom or simply a life ending in faith we can not tell. The point is that the faith of these leaders was not in vain. Both the author and his readers had heard the gospel from the apostles ([2:3-4](#)). Since we do not know the author, the readers, or even their location, we can not know the specific identity of these who had **the rule** or leadership in earlier days.

13:8. The first leaders had died, but their faithfulness had been consistent. The object of their faith also remains the same. **Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever**. Our author spoke of the eternal "sameness" of Christ in 1:12, quoting from [Psalm 102:27](#). Christ is the greatest example of faithfulness and steadfastness: the same yesterday and today and for ever. He is the same subject of preaching yesterday, today and for ever. He is the same object of faith: yesterday, today and for ever.

Yesterday seems to refer to our author's immediate past. That was the time when Jesus became lower than the angels, became partaker of flesh and blood, received a body in which to do the will of God, offered Himself as a sinless sacrifice and was subsequently raised from the dead and taken up into glory. **Today** would refer to our author's present. **For ever** would refer to his future.

The atoning work of Christ took place in time and in human history, but that work has now reached its goal. God's salvation-purpose unfolded gradually. With the events involving Christ, which culminated in His position at God's right hand, the earthly work of atonement has reached perfection. No opportunity remains for possible failure, so far as Christ is concerned. He was tempted in all points during His "once for all" ministry, but that took place in the beginning of these last days and will never be repeated. The constant believer in any age may know that his salvation is secured in the person of the Son -- the Son at God's right hand in heaven -- Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and for ever.

13:9. If the readers will hold fast to the non-changing Christ (verse eight), imitating the faith of their leaders who also trusted in Him (verse seven), they will not **be carried about** as in a flood **with** various **doctrines** or teachings. These teachings are not part of the old familiar gospel or the teachings which had come from the apostles and prophets. Instead they are **strange**, alien and foreign. Specifically, the author warns against teachings about **meats** or foods, **which have not profited** those **occupied** with them, and which draw attention from **grace** by which **the heart** is **established** and strengthened.

At least five explanations have been offered of these teachings about meats. (1) Some think of a Jewish dispute over kosher food, over clean and unclean meats, as apparently is the case in 9:10. (2) Others think of meats offered to pagan gentile idols, as in I Corinthians 8. (3) Some suppose he refers to ascetic regulations of a gentile philosophy, as in Colossians. (4) Still others think of sacrificial meats of the Old Testament system, of which some were eaten by the priests and/or the people (5) And some have suggested a kind of Jewish fellowship meal, as described, for instance, by Josephus.

The entire context of Hebrews seems to narrow the choice to a Jewish answer. The fellowship meal is not attested in Scripture and might not have been a widespread custom at all. Disputes over clean and unclean foods would fit the general context but not these specific verses. The verses following seem to indicate sacrificial meats which were eaten by worshippers and/or the priest who offered them. If such sacrificial meats are intended, the point is that the Christian's sacrifice results in the distribution of grace which strengthens his heart, not in meat which strengthens his body.

13:10. The pagans frequently called Christians atheists because they had no visible gods. It is likely that the Jews pointed to the absence of visible sacrifices and cultic priests in their attacks on Christians. Our author has already affirmed that Christians have a high priest, though He is in heaven (8:1). Here he says **we have an altar** as well, and of its benefits those Jewish priests who used to **serve the Mosaic tabernacle** do not **have a right to** partake or **eat**. An Old Testament reason is given for this in the next verse.

Some Catholic writers apply this reference to the Mass, but against such a view stands the once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice in Hebrews, as well as the specific point of the next vers. Various other authors have explained the **altar** as being the cross, or a heavenly altar, or the death of Christ. It may be best not to seek a specific application, leaving our author's single point to stand alone. Christians do have an altar and, by metonymy, a sacrifice for their sins On that, also see Appendices II and III.

13:11. Under the Old Testament system, when **blood** of sacrificial animals was **brought into the** most holy place **by the high priest** as an offering **for sin**, the **bodies of those beasts** were **burned** outside **the camp**. This was true in general ([Leviticus 6:30](#)), and of the Day of Atonement sin-offerings in particular ([Leviticus 16:27](#)). Because the offering of Christ fulfills the sin-offering of the Day of Atonement, and because it is the only sin-offering God now

accepts, our altar is one of which no Old Testament priest could partake even according to his own Law,

13:12. In keeping with this figure, **Jesus also suffered** outside **the gate** of Jerusalem and therefore outside the camp of Israel, so **that he might sanctify the people with his own blood**. He not only was treated shamefully (12:2), but He was in the literal sense an outcast.

13:13. The believer in Christ is to be willing **therefore to go forth unto him** outside **the camp** and fellowship of Israel. If this means **bearing a reproach**, the reproach is **his** (see [11:26](#)). To be with Jesus the believer must leave the camp and go outside the gate, for that is where He went. The reproach is overshadowed, however, by the fact that Jesus' death not only was that of a sin-offering, but was the only sin offering God will ever again accept.

13:14. The loss of fellowship in the city of the Jews is further softened by the fact that Christ's people are faith-pilgrims who **seek** another city which is yet **to come**, though they have already come to it by faith (see [comments at 12:22-24](#)). On the other hand, the **city** which is **here** on earth (Jerusalem) is **no continuing city** at all, and either had been or shortly would be destroyed when our author wrote this epistle.

13:15. By Christ, the high priest and mediator, Christians are urged to **offer** their **sacrifice to God continually** (see [7:25](#)). This is not a sin-offering. Only Christ offers that, and He offered one sacrifice one time for all men of all time. The believer offers a **sacrifice of praise**, the same term used in the Greek Old Testament for the peace-offering of thanksgiving ([Leviticus 7:12-25](#)). **The fruit of lips giving thanks to his name** did not originate with the new covenant ([Psalm 50:12-15, 23; 141:2; Hosea 14:2](#)). Such praise does belong to it, however, and fulfills the types of thank-offerings under the old covenant.

13:16. **God** is also **well pleased with** the spiritual **sacrifices** offered by His people when they do **not forget to do good, and to communicate** or to share with those in need ([Amos 5 21-24; Micah 6:6-12](#)). **Communicate** translates the verb of the "fellowship" family.

13:17. The practical instructions continue, this time with regard to Christian leaders or **them that have the rule**. The community of faith is to **obey them** because of persuasion and to **submit** to their guidance. The leaders, on the other hand, have a charge to **watch for** the **souls** of those in the community, for whom they **must give account**. If Christians do submit and obey as the rulers watch and lead, the report **may be with joy and not with grief**, which would be **unprofitable** for those of whom a bad account was given.

Dods relates **that** which is **unprofitable** to the **watch for your souls** rather than the **give account**, and suggests that believers are to obey and submit so that the watching by the leaders will be a joyful task. A failure to cooperate will not only cause grief to those watching, but will make their work unprofitable for those for whose sake it is done.

The figure of a watchman comes from the Old Testament, particularly from Ezekiel (3:17-21; 33:1-9). Here it is joined to the pastoral task of the spiritual shepherd. While the leaders in this chapter are given no technical or descriptive name, several parallels with **I**

[Peter 5:1-5](#) suggest those there called Elders. Even there, though, the term is apparently used in both a general (verse five) and a specific (verse one) way.

13:18. **Pray for us**, the author urges, **for we trust** (or perhaps, are persuaded) that **we have a good conscience** and are **willing** or wishing **to live honestly in all things**. Some think that the author had been criticized or suspected of evil doing by certain of his readers. Whether that is the case or not we can not tell. He simply states a request and makes a statement of good conscience. Nor do we know whom the author includes in his **we**.

13:19. The **rather** is better translated "abundantly" or "exceedingly," and may modify either **beseech** or **to do** or both. He strongly requests their earnest prayers, **that he may be restored** or reunited **to them the sooner**. It is an assumption to say that the author was in prison at this time; he could have been on a preaching tour or some other mission. All the text proves is that he was not presently with his readers but hoped to be shortly, and that he asked for their prayers to that end.

13:20. This verse and the next give the author's benediction for his readers and touch on the major points of his teaching throughout the epistle. He calls on **the God of peace**, a designation comforting for worshippers who faced persecution or even instructive discipline. As is usual in Scripture, God is described in terms of His mighty acts. He **brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus**. This is the only explicit reference in Hebrews to the resurrection of Christ, though that has been presupposed throughout the discussion, and was necessary if the sacrificial victim were to become a living high priest.

Christ is described as **that great Shepherd of the sheep**. Not only do the church leaders watch for souls under His charge (on the analogy of I Peter five) but, as the great **Shepherd**, Christ has laid down His life for the sheep (see John ten). **The blood of the everlasting covenant** is related to the resurrection, as the evident sign and seal of its merits, and to **the great Shepherd** who proved His right to the title by shedding His blood.

Of Moses and Israel it was said that God "brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock" ([Isaiah 63:11](#), see [Psalm 77:20](#)). As Christ is counted worthy of more glory than Moses ([Hebrews 3:1-6](#)), God has brought Him up from the dead and will bring up His flock as well.

13:21. The prayer is that God, who has already raised Christ, will now **make** the readers **perfect** or equipped **in very good** thing for doing his will, and that he will be **working** or doing **in** them what is **well pleasing** to Him. All this is to be done **through Jesus Christ**, in whose name the prayer is offered.

To whom be glory for ever and ever may apply either to God the Father or to the Lord Jesus, and scripturally it applies to both. Milligan says that "doctrinally it may refer either to God or to Christ, but grammatically, it refers properly to God" in this passage. Lenski applies it to Christ here and sees it as complementary to the description of Christ's exalted position in chapter one.

13:22. Our author appeals to his readers to bear with his **word of exhortation**, meaning the entire book. He refers to it as **a letter**, although it is not in regular epistolary form. He apparently had much more he would have been pleased to write (see 5:11; 11:32), but he stops with these **few words** which may be read in about an hour.

13:23. **Brother Timothy** had been **set at liberty**, a phrase which might refer either to release from prison or to the completion of a mission. **With** him our author **will see** his readers **if** Timothy comes **shortly**. This verse is used as an argument for the Pauline authorship of Hebrews because of the close relationship between Paul and Timothy. We may wish such matters were clearly revealed, but in fact they are not, and no specific relationship is given here between the author and Timothy. It is generally assumed, however, that this is the Timothy of Paul's epistles and Acts, which gives an outward time limit for the date of the book. Again, however, we are unable to learn much from the fact, for we have no information at all about an imprisonment of Timothy--if that is the meaning intended by the phrase here.

13:24. The writer sends greetings to **all** the leaders and **all the saints**, indicating that the epistle would be read in a gathered assembly of the Christians to whom it was sent (see Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 5:27).

They of Italy are simply "the Italians." The Greek words do not tell whether they and our author were in Italy or away from Italy at the time. All we can know from this verse is that he was in company with some Italians, wherever he was. Those who argue for a Roman destination of the epistle use this verse as evidence, as do those who argue for a Roman origin.

13:25. The epistle closes with the familiar Christian greeting. **Grace be with you all. Amen.** A suggestive discussion entitled **The Grace of God** is available online by the author of this commentary.

The subscript in some Bibles concerning the author, origin and destination of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a later addition, not part of the original text.

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Revelation

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