

HOLDING ONTO

Faith

Understanding
The Book of Hebrews
For You Today



H.D. Shively

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Scriptures from the King James Version translated into modern
English when appropriate by the author.

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This book is lovingly dedicated
to every Christian who is
holding onto their faith in difficult times
and every day,
whether the sun is shining or the storms are raging.
You are blessed, treasured by our God and valuable.
Never let go and never give up!

Introduction

The book of Hebrews was originally written to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The purpose of the book was to reinforce their Christianity and prevent them from returning to Judaism in order to avoid persecution for their faith in Jesus, the Messiah.

The Christian church was subject to intense persecution from its inception. In our current day and age, Christians are the most persecuted group in the world. As the book of Hebrews was written to encourage believers in their faith, so its purpose remains the same today. The message of this book entitled “Hebrews” holds much relevance for all Christians in this present hour. It is designed to be a powerful reminder that there is no hope and no salvation apart from Jesus, our Redeemer and High Priest.

Gentile believers have been grafted into the Hebrew olive tree (Romans 11:17) and are also considered to be Abraham’s seed (Galatians 3:7,26,28,29). In Jesus there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Acts 15:9). Therefore this

epistle is speaking to all of us, not just the Jews as some have mistakenly assumed. The doctrine it contains is foundational and it is vital that every Christian understand the origins of their faith and its uniqueness, especially in the deceptive times we are living in now.

There has always been some debate as to the book's authorship. When Origen was asked who wrote the book of Hebrews, he replied, "Only God knows."¹

It is said that "The voice is Paul's, but the hand is the hand of another." While some attribute Hebrews to the Apostle Paul, (his name is used in the King James Version), in the earliest manuscripts that were discovered after the King James was written, no authorship is mentioned.

Some have suggested that it was written by the Apostle Paul and he left off his name deliberately. The book was written to Jewish believers in Jerusalem where Paul was not popular with the Jews there. He may have figured that his epistle would have wider distribution and more impact without him as the author.

Other scholars have pointed out that it was a characteristic of Paul, because of his level of scholarship and knowledge of the Hebrew, to correct or retranslate errors in the Septuagint, (the Greek version of the Old Testament). The author of Hebrews does not do this, thus casting some doubt on Paul's authorship.

Many attribute Hebrews to Luke because of similarities in style and the fact that it is written in excellent Greek. Others have suggested that it was written by Paul in Hebrew and then eventually translated into Greek by Luke.

Tertullian believed that Barnabas was the author because he labored in Rome where the epistle was written. Barnabas was also Paul's travelling companion and certainly shared his voice, but there still remains no positive evidence as to the epistle's authorship, we can only surmise.

Because of its references to the temple sacrifices, the epistle was most likely written before the destruction of the second temple in 70AD. If Paul was the author, it would place the writing at about 61-63 AD. The church was undergoing a severe persecution by Nero, and as we have previously mentioned, this epistle was written to reinforce the Jewish believers in their faith in order to keep them from returning to Judaism as a way of escaping persecution.

One of the great values of Hebrews is that it reminds us of the miraculous plan and pattern of our salvation in the Messiah Jesus that God has authored in His word throughout the Old Testament. This understanding validates the Christian faith for everyone, not only the Jew.

Some maintain that an understanding of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah has relevance only for the Jew. This false and ignorant position which I have heard parroted by some pastors, is an error that must be refuted tenaciously. We are instructed to follow the teachings of our founding apostles, and they clearly emphasized Christianity's relationship to the Old Testament. Jesus taught who He was from the Old Testament (Luke 24:27) and we are to follow this example. When we do not, to me, it is a further example of the church's descent into apostasy. When we understand the miraculous foundation of our faith, as foreshadowed through the writings of Moses and the prophets, it securely validates the Truth of the Gospel and makes it relevant to everyone.

The book of Hebrews affirms the transformation of the Old Testament's external religion to the New Covenant's miracle of the new creation through the Messiah Jesus.

The Jews in the church at Jerusalem were still surrounded by the remnants of the old covenant; the practice of animal sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. These rituals were designed to be merely foreshadows of the coming and purpose of the Messiah. Jesus said new wine could not be put into old bottles,

lest the bottles break and the wine spilled (Matthew 9:17). God through His foreknowledge of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, reminds His people through this epistle that the temple sacrifices are the “old wine skins” that have been replaced by something much better and everlasting.

Chapter One

The first four verses of the first chapter of the book of Hebrews, is actually one entire sentence. It's amazing how much the author has managed to convey before he finally added a period.

In the first verse we are told that God communicates with people.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, (verse 1).

I think it's awesome that the God of the universe communicates with His creation. How does God communicate? The Apostle Peter tells us.

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (II Peter 1:21).

God speaks through His Holy Spirit. God also communicates through His Spirit in “divers manners.” Some of those divers manners are described for us in the book of numbers, chapter twelve, verses six through eight. God spoke to Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

And He said, “Hear now My words: if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord, will make Myself known to him in a vision, and I will speak to him in a dream” (Numbers 12:6).

But in these same passages God makes a distinction between the prophets and His servant Moses.

My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all My house.

With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; (simply and to the point) and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold...” (Numbers 12:7,8).

This is very interesting. Here God shows us that He communicated with Moses more intimately than He had with other prophets in his day. Moses actually beheld the “similitude” of the Lord and heard an audible voice, like Abraham (Genesis 18). The dictionary defines a similitude as “a likeness; resemblance: a person or thing that is like or the match or counterpart of another.”

In the following verse two of Hebrews, we see that God is also communicating with people through a similitude of Himself; His Son who is His image (Colossians 1:15).

Has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He (God) made the worlds; (verse 2).

Can we assume that the similitude of the Lord that spoke with Abraham and Moses, is also the Messiah Jesus?

Whenever God appears as a person to anyone, this is also called a theophany. The image, similitude or theophany of God is made manifest to us in His Son.

This epistle was written for the Jewish believers, who understood that the term "Son of God" was also a title that was designated for angels.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them (Job 1:6).

Thus the writer of Hebrews takes this opportunity to reveal to us why Jesus is so much more than an angel. He has been appointed by God to be "heir of all things," and He is also the Agent of Creation through which God the Father has made the worlds - "*by whom He (God) made the worlds.*"

The Apostle Paul reiterates.

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the Majesty, which was from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 3:9).

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

The epistle of Barnabas, Paul's traveling companion, was originally found in the oldest most complete manuscripts of the Bible, the Codex Sinaiticus. Barnabas, explains to us that Genesis 1:1 is referring to a conversation with God and Jesus. "*Let us make man in our image.*"

And for this cause the Lord was content to suffer for our souls,

although He be the Lord of the whole earth; to whom God said before the beginning of the world, "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (Barnabas 4:7).

The ancient Jews believed that the Messiah pre-existed and recognized that "The Spirit of God" that moved upon the waters was the Spirit of the Messiah.² Barnabas is reiterating this fact. Thus the Hebrew followers of Jesus believed that God's Spirit is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father (Matthew 10:20) and is also Jesus' Spirit making the Father and the Son totally one. *-In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).*

I and My Father are one (John 10:30).

The Lord (Jesus) is that Spirit (II Corinthians 3:17).

Therefore in these first two verses of this amazing epistle, the reader is brought to the profound understanding that Jesus is the Divine Son of God and Creator. Thus Jesus is the Father of the angels, and is also the express image of God the Father. –

Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person ...

Here we see that God has not given His glory to another, but to the perfect image of Himself (Isaiah 42:8). The only begotten Son of God is not a second God, but the image or representative of the One True God of Israel. Jesus is the image of God, His character and Divine nature.

...and upholding all things by the word of His power, ...

Jesus upholds "all things by the word of His power," because all power has been granted to Him by God His

Father. - *All things are delivered to Me of My Father (Matthew 11:27).*

And the glory which You gave to Me (John 17:22).

...that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me: (17:24).

Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: (Philippians 2:9).

God put all things under Him (I Corinthians 15:28).

As the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life in Himself (John 5:26).

And, -

...when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the Majesty on high; ... (verse 3).

Here we are being shown the current ministry of the Messiah. He removed our sins and has been exalted to the right hand of the Father where He continues His role as High priest by making continuous intercession for His people (Hebrews 7:25).

Again, the writer of Hebrews affirms to his readers the status of the Messiah Jesus. -

Being made so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (verse 4).

Jesus is the direct heir of God for two reasons. He is the only begotten Son, birthed directly from the substance of the Father, and also, because Jesus alone has overcome sin while in His human estate. No angel has accomplished this, nor were any of them ordained for this purpose, nor were any of them ever classified as being "begotten" from the Father. -

For unto which of the angels said He at any time, 'You are My Son, this day I have begotten you?' and again, 'I will be to Him a Father, and He will be to Me a Son?' (verse 5).

Here the writer of Hebrews is quoting from a prophetic Psalm that is about David's coronation as king of Israel. David is used as a similitude of the Messiah in the Old Testament. While the Psalm is about David's literal coronation, the author of this epistle recognizes that the Lord is addressing the future Messiah represented by the prophet David.

The Messiah is the only one to be "begotten" directly from the Father. Anyone who is birthed or begotten must come from a pre-existing substance. Jesus was begotten from the pre-existing substance of the Father's Spirit in heaven prior to His incarnation. This was the orthodox doctrine of the early church which has for the most part been eroded. The early church believed that while Jesus always existed within the Father as the essence of His being, there was a specific point in infinity when His person, or soul was brought forth giving Him the title of the "eternal Son." This doctrine was taught by Wesley,³ and Calvin.⁴ By the second council of Constantinople in 553 AD,⁵ one had to believe that Jesus was begotten twice, once prior to His incarnation and again through the Virgin Mary, or you were anathema, which means 'cursed.'

Jesus' status of being the only begotten Son, puts Him on a level above that of any angel. His Spirit is God's Holy Spirit. They are the same Spirit, but Jesus' begotten person or soul is distinct from God's person. Because they are the same Spirit, Jesus can be worshipped and it is not idolatry for we are worshipping God through Him. - *Unto Him (God) be glory in the church by (through) Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Ephesians 3:21).*

And again, when He brings in the firstbegotten into the world, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him' (verse 6).

The author is quoting from an ancient document that is no longer in existence.

The writer of Hebrews continues in his exhortation of Jesus' Divinity, contrasting the angels with the Son. -

And of the angels He says, "Who makes His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire" (verse 7).

This is a quote from Psalm 104:4. Angels are agents of God's Holy Spirit, represented by the fire which is used in the Scriptures as a similitude of the Spirit, and that Spirit is also Jesus' Spirit. Therefore the angels minister with Jesus' Holy Spirit and are under His direction and authority that has been bestowed upon Him by His Father.

The angels are mere agents, but the Son is seen as being equal to the Father because He is the Father's only birthed or begotten Son.

But unto the Son, He says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom" (verse 8).

A more accurate translation reads - "God's throne is Your throne." ⁶ In other words, the Son of God is the same power and authority of the God of Israel; One God, one throne of power.

In the remainder of this chapter from verses nine through thirteen, the author continues to link together Scriptures from the Old Testament that illustrate Jesus' special relationship with God that sets Him distinctly apart from any angel. -

You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity, therefore God, even Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows (companions) (verse 9).

Jesus' begotten person/soul is subordinate to the Father's person (I Cor. 11:3), and this is why God is His God, even though they have the same Spirit. There is a distinction between the relationships of soul and spirit in the Scriptures and when we understand this, it's easier to grasp the concept of Jesus' divinity in relationship to the Father.

And, You Lord, in the beginning has laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Your hands (Psalm 102:25) (verse 10).

This again is referring to the Messiah as Creator.

They shall perish; but You remain; and they all shall wax old as a garment (verse 11).

Here the author contrasts this realm's temporality with the Messiah's eternity.

And as a vesture (garment) shall You fold them up, and they shall be changed: but You are the same, and Your years shall not fail (Psalm 102:26,27) (verse 12).

Someday the earth will be destroyed as prophesied, (Rev. 20:11), but Jesus will always be the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

But to which of the angels said He at any time, "Sit on My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool?" (verse 13 from Psalm 110:1).

This designated position of authority next to the Father's right hand is reserved not for angels, but for the Messiah. The author's readership would understand that no angel has ever

been seen as higher in status than the Messiah.

The author concludes with this. -

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (verse 14).

Here again the writer contrasts the Messiah's status with the subordinate role of angels. Angels were created to serve those whom the Messiah has been ordained to redeem.

We are being told not to confuse the Messiah with the angelic force. He is above them in status as God's only begotten or birthed directly from the Father's substance Son, and is never to be considered an angel. Some groups maintain even today, that Jesus is an angel making Him a created being, and in that sense they are putting Him on the same level as the devil who is a created entity.

As we have been shown, Jesus was begotten and everything was created by God through Him. Therefore Satan would had to have been created by the Messiah. It is probable that the devil could have been the firstborn angel, and that is why his glory before his fall is recorded in the Scriptures (Ezekiel 28:13-15).

We've reached the conclusion of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Sometimes the chapters are inserted at points that interrupt the continuity of thought. The first chapter and the second are unified in theme and I would like us to proceed as if the chapters are not there and continue with the original unbroken flow of thought as the writer intended. He is painting a portrait of the Messiah that begins with His glory and ends with His humble servanthood and so we will look at this portrait as one illustration and try not to divide it in our minds.

Chapter Two

In verse one the writer begins with a conclusion to the previous discourse. -

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (verse 1).

This begins the recurrent theme and purpose of the book which is to reinforce the believer's faith in the Messiah; and affirm the importance of holding onto that faith. There is no hope or salvation apart from the plan of salvation that God has instigated from the foundation of the world.

The writer goes on to show us that there are consequences for disobeying what God has ordained for our good. -

For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; (verse 2).

Angels are the designated messengers of God's word. There are consequences for disobeying the Lord's instructions. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). This principle is being negated in much of our modern day sermonology. But the truth of God's word is "steadfast" and indisputable. The author here is reminding us that there are consequences for abandoning God's plan of redemption.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation;...

We won't escape God's wrath upon the wicked if we do not hold fast to the Gospel which was revealed by the Lord Jesus.

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouable in His sight: IF you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister (Colossians 1:21-23).

The Gospel, -

...which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them that heard Him; (verse 3).

This Gospel was transferred by Jesus' original apostles who are "them that heard Him," and confirmed "to us."

The writer of Hebrews says here that he was the recipient of the Gospel through the ministry of the original apostles. Here we may have a clue that the writer is not Paul who received the Gospel by direct revelation from the Lord and then afterwards conferred with some of the apostles at a later

time.

The truth of the message of grace was substantiated by supernatural manifestations.

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will (verse 4).

The writer here is referring to the supernatural confirmation of the Gospel message that is recorded in the Book of Acts. This shows us that the purpose of signs and wonders is to confirm the Gospel. These manifestations and gifts of the Spirit are to enhance the sharing of the Gospel and to equip believers for the same purpose.

In the following verse, the author returns his readers back to the contemplation of the One who is the Author of our salvation. He again begins to contrast the superiority of the Messiah to the angels. –

For unto the angels has He not put in subjection (not subjected to angels) the world to come, whereof we speak? (verse 5).

The angels were not given the authority to instigate God's plan of redemption, nor were they given authority over creation. As we were shown in chapter one, verse fourteen, angels were created to be ministers to those who were "heirs of salvation." Which means that when God's kingdom comes, the angels will continue to serve in their capacity as servants to those whom God has appointed as heirs of salvation through faith in Jesus and that's us.

In the next three verses the author is quoting from Psalm eight, verses four through six to reiterate his previous statement, that the angels are not the ones to whom God has put over His creation.

But one in a certain place testified, saying, 'What is man, that You are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that You visit him?' (verse 6).

Again, this verse correlates to verse four in Psalm verse eight. What is man? What status do we have to desire Your kindness and Your visitation upon us? The only thing that qualifies us for God's devotion is the fact that we are solely a work of His hands and He honours what He has created for His glory.

You made him a little lower than the angels; You crowned him with glory and honour, and did set him over the works of Your hands -Psalm 8: 5,6 (verse 7).

Man was formed out of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7) and this lowly work of clay was exalted by God to be a son (Luke 3:38), heir and caretaker of creation (Genesis 1:28).

You have put all things in subjection under his feet. ...

Here the author reiterates the statement made in Psalm 8:6. God has put the physical realm under the care of the humans He has created.

...For in that He put all in subjection under him (Man), He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him (verse 8).

God put everything under man's dominion, yet the author sees that there are still some things that have not been put under mankind's dominion. Again, there is a distinction beginning to be made here between the two realms, the physical and the spiritual. The spiritual realm has not been

given to man for him to rule over. Man does not have the supernatural ability to keep alive his own soul after the death of the body.

In the next verse, the author now begins to contrast Jesus with Adam, the last Adam with the first, by paralleling Jesus to the Scriptures that were previously quoted in Psalm eight.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels...

Jesus was made like man, “a little lower than the angels” in His earthly estate in order to identify with man...

... for the suffering of death ...

... To redeem our souls through His death.

... crowned with glory and honour; ...

Jesus’ humility and obedience to the Father has earned Him this glory because, ...

...that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man (verse 9).

We saw in chapter one the portrait of the Messiah as creator, the only begotten Son of God, the heir of all things, upon Whom God has bestowed all power. Now we see Him identifying with man and being brought to a place of extreme humiliation for the benefit of those who have, like the first man, failed miserably.

Mankind was made a little lower than the angels. As we have seen in chapter one, verse fourteen, the angels were made to serve these little lumps of clay; creatures that were made a little lower than they were.

I can imagine the scene in heaven when God broke the news to the angelic host that the purpose of their creation was to serve these created beings that the angels may have viewed as being beneath them in status. It is my belief that at that moment the angels were being tested. God knew that there was an element of pride that had infected some of them, including God's firstborn angel Lucifer. Those among them who could not handle servanthood to something that was viewed as inferior and so far below their elevated estate, would fail the test.

At that moment, the devil who could not humble himself to obey God and serve, began to make his plans for humanity. His goal was to subvert and dupe mankind to worship him instead of God. He succeeded in gaining control of the planet by the deception he instigated in Eden. God permitted this event to happen because He was also testing the little clay people to see if they would be faithful to Him alone by obeying His command not to eat of the fruit of a certain tree. We all know the outcome of that test. We failed and have been reaping the consequences of that bad choice ever since. We lost our longevity, our perfection and over all wellbeing. We all may not have been in Eden, but we are all standing on those same feet of clay.

Those of the angelic host that rebelled against God because of their pride, would eventually be rooted out of God's kingdom by the Messiah's magnificent act of humility and obedience.

For it became (beautified) Him, for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect though sufferings (verse 10).

This verse is referring to God the Father's plan of redemption to bring us into glory by making Jesus, our

Captain, perfect, or mature, though sufferings. This became Him, meaning this beautifies or glorifies God for the means by which He has orchestrated our salvation.

Jesus was “perfected” by His sufferings. Now we know that Jesus was born the sinless image of God and was already perfect in that sense. But He was born into a fallible human body and subjected to its currents of influence as we all are. We’ve all experienced those lusts and we all have failed at one time or another by allowing ourselves to be led by lust instead of the Spirit of God.

Jesus experienced those same currents or lusts of the flesh in their fullness. He had to continuously resist them in order for the Captain of our salvation to accomplish His mission in total victory or mankind would be lost. Jesus overcame His flesh and suffered this way, by continuously and successfully resisting those lusts in His earth life. He was the only human being to accomplish this, thus He was perfected as a man, by His obedience to resist and overcome the desires of His flesh.

We see a graphic illustration of His struggle to obey God and resist His own desires in Gethsemane. His suffering to fulfil the will of God resulted in blood emanating from His sweat, as the result of His extreme stress (Luke 22:44). This shows us the great duress He was experiencing, as His spirit and His flesh clashed and warred within His being. Jesus was fully aware of the weakness of His flesh (Matthew 26:41). He was able to overcome that weakness which was His perfection as a man. This is what makes Him one with us, He can fully identify with our weaknesses and sufferings.

For both He that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He (Jesus) is not ashamed to call them brethren (verse 11).

This is amazing. We have the God of the universe, who

is indwelling His Son (II Cor. 5:19) through His Spirit, making Himself one with His creation for the purpose of their redemption; the Highest identifying with the lowest to make them one with Him. Thus the Messiah is not ashamed to call them brethren, His family. -

Saying, "I will declare Your name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee" (verse 12).

This is a quote from Psalm 22:22, which is a prophetic messianic Psalm depicting the Messiah's sufferings. Jesus' cry from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" is found in verse one of this Psalm. In Jesus' profound agony, the Holy Spirit was directing those who heard Him to this Psalm which contains the prophetic details that Jesus was fulfilling right before their eyes.

The identification of what it is like to suffer extreme physical torture is the miracle that God has designed to embrace the Divine with humanity. We are united with God through the Messiah, and made one with them. We have been "adopted" and are made brethren with the Lord. Thus the word brethren applies to all who are brought to God through Jesus: Jews and Gentiles. There is no distinction. We are unified and made one by Messiah's sacrifice.

And again, "I will put my trust in Him." And again, "Behold I and the children which God has given Me" (verse 13).

The author of this epistle is quoting from the Old Testament prophecies that record the Messiah's voice. He is verbalizing His trust in God the Father through His sufferings and His reference to the children that are given to Him by God through His sacrifice (Isaiah 8:17-18). The children are all those who obey God's plan of salvation and believe the

Gospel.

For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (verse 14).

Jesus' identification with man is reiterated. Jesus, the highest, identifies with the lowest, - us, and the purpose of it all is defined for us; the Messiah will destroy death through His own death, thus destroying the devil's hold on mankind.

The devil's reign of pride is destroyed by one mighty act of submissive humility. We destroy the devil in our own lives when we believe the Gospel. The devil's hold on us is broken as we receive the gift of eternal life. We continue to defeat the devil by following Jesus' example of selfless humility on a daily basis.

And delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (verse 15).

Jesus gives us the gift of hope. We can stand with the disciples at the door of His empty tomb, and realize that we have been given a boundless entrance into eternity. We are assured that our lives will not end with the grave. There is a whole new dimension waiting for us where there are the exquisite pleasures and joys of knowing God at our place with Jesus at His right hand (Psalm 16:11).

In the last three verses of this second chapter of Hebrews, the author reminds us again of the uniqueness of Jesus' identification with His creatures.

For truly He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham (verse 16).

Jesus was birthed into the Hebrew lineage. There would be no purpose for Him to identify with angels. The Jews were designated by God to be the lineage through which redemption would be made available to all of mankind. This is why they are referred to as the 'chosen people.' They were chosen by God to be the womb through which He would birth salvation for the entire world in Messiah Jesus. The plan of redemption was instigated in Eden and prophesied throughout the Old Testament in typology, prophecies and similitudes.

Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God; to make reconciliation for the sins of all people (verse 17).

The Messiah was made one with His people to identify with their sufferings and thus He is qualified to be our merciful and faithful high priest. He alone is the only priest that can reconcile us to God the Father; for only Jesus has been ordained by God to remove our sins and be the propitiation for them. The system of the Levitical priesthood has been replaced by One High Priest for all time. –

For in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to succour (strengthen) them that are tempted (verse 18).

The Messiah Jesus has suffered and identified with His creation. In other words, He knows what you are facing in this life, and He is equipped to help you supernaturally. Through Jesus' Spirit, which is the Holy Spirit, you have access to Divine help and power to overcome sin in your life anytime you need it.

Looking back over chapters one and two, we see the

amazing transformation of the highest only begotten Son of God, humbling Himself to identify with humanity and suffer for His creation for the purpose of redeeming their souls. The writer of Hebrews wants us to grasp this magnificent fact and never let it go. It is a portrait of Divine love exemplified and an example of selflessness for us to emulate.

As we contemplate the transition from glory to humility, let's keep this principle alive in our hearts. - Pride and arrogance have no place in the hearts of God's people. We are to follow the example of our High Priest and serve others as examples of His selfless love in us. -

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name:

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

In summary – Jesus is not an angel, but the only begotten Son of God, who left His grand estate to identify with the sufferings of man, overcome those temptations common to man, and be the propitiation for our sins. Thus Jesus alone is qualified to be our one and only merciful and faithful High Priest.

Chapter Three

In the first two chapters of this epistle to the Hebrews, we saw a portrait of the Messiah Jesus leaving His grand estate to don the clothes of a servant in order to redeem mankind. –

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Messiah Jesus; (verse 1).

Because of Jesus' sacrifice for us, we are made holy brethren of the Messiah who is the Apostle of our faith. Apostles are church planters and overseers. As our founding Apostle, Jesus has birthed His church by His sacrifice and oversees her development. God has appointed Him head of His church (I Cor. 11:3, Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 5:23).

In verse two, the writer begins to compare Jesus with Moses.

Who was faithful to Him (God) that appointed Him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house (verse 2).

The word faithful is used twice in this verse. Being faithful is what this chapter is all about as we shall see.

We have been shown, that like Moses, Jesus was faithful, yet the writer shows us in the following verse Messiah's superiority to Moses.

For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who has built the house has more honour than the house (verse 3).

Jesus has "built" the house through His faithfulness and His sacrifice, and that house is God's church.

For every house is built by some man; but He that built all things is God (verse 4).

Therefore we see that God Himself has built the house through His Son. - *For God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19)*. Thus what we are being told here is that the honour Jesus receives as the builder of the house is because the construction of the house is a work of God.

And Moses truly was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after (verse 5).

Here we are being shown that Moses was a foreshadow of the Messiah; his life was a testimony of the things that were to come. God speaks in Deuteronomy 18:18,19 - *I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto you ...*

The Messiah would be like Moses, a Jew and a worker of miracles.

...and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto

them all that I shall command Him.

A characteristic of the Messiah would be that He would acknowledge that the words He speaks are not His own but that of God the Father. Jesus said that words were given to Him by God. -

For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak (John 12:49).

Believe thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwells in Me, He does the works (John 14:10).

For I have given to them the words which You gave Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from You, and they have believed that You did send Me (John 17:8).

The purpose of these verses is to again affirm Jesus' identity in order to reinforce the faith of the author's readership. Jesus is the fulfilment of God's prophecy to Moses.

But Messiah as a Son over His own house; whose house we are...

We are being reminded here again of what was shown to us in the previous chapters. Jesus is more than a prophet, He is the only begotten Son, the builder of the church, His people; the dwelling place of God.

Now here we come to the emphasis of this book, - we are His house only; -

...if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (verse 6).

Jesus said that if we deny Him, He will deny us. -

Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven (Matthew 10:32,33).

Jesus is the only way to God the Father. -

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me (John 14:6).

All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them (John 10:8).

When we capitulate to the growing New Age, one world religious philosophy that all religions are true or valid, we negate Jesus' statement, deem Him a liar and have denied Him.

Jesus is the fulfilment of over two hundred Old Testament prophecies. God has ordained the plan of salvation and there can be no salvation apart from what God has ordained.

As we have already been shown so far, Jesus is unique; He is the only begotten Son of God, Creator, our Apostle and High Priest. No one before or since can claim the same status and authority.

With these facts in mind, we continue. -

Wherefore (as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you will hear His voice,' (verse 7).

The author is quoting here from Psalm 95:7, and he continues to quote this Psalm through verse eleven, which coincides with verses seven through eleven of the epistle.

We see that the Holy Spirit is speaking. The Spirit speaks what He hears (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is the means by which God the Father communicates with His people. The Holy Spirit is the voice of God. If we hear this voice, we are warned not to follow the example of those who fell in the wilderness under Moses' leadership. -

Harden not your hearts, as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: (verse 8).

The people then were enduring some God appointed hardships in that desert. The Lord tests the righteous (Psalm 11:5). He was seeing if His people would remain faithful to Him, in spite of those adversities. -

When your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years (verse 9).

For forty years God's people witnessed many miracles and miraculous deliverances. God used those events to help build their faith. Yet, they continually backslid, complained and yearned for their old lives of slavery under a system that abused them, but provided a measure of material security. This was a great blasphemy in view of all the wonderful supernatural provisions that God had made for them, so He says:

Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, "They do always err in their hearts, and they have not known My ways" (verse 10).

Likewise, God deals the same way with His people today. He provides for us and helps us through our various trials and these deliverances also serve to help build our trust in Him.

We can learn from the examples of those who went before us and failed so miserably. These ones who hardened their hearts and refused to trust, earned their condemnation.

So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter into My rest") (verse 11).

This is a horrible indictment and one that must be avoided at all costs. The writer of Hebrews is reminding us of the consequences of refusing God's plan of salvation.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the Living God (verse 12).

When we turn away from faith in the Messiah Jesus for any reason, we are severing ourselves from God, and this is 'evil.' And we, like those who died in the wilderness as the result of their unfaithfulness, will share the same fate and be excluded from the "rest" which is eternal life with our Creator.

Today we face even greater challenges to our faith. The pressures to compromise are increasing. The Hebrews who are being addressed by this epistle were facing severe persecution and ultimately the destruction of their city. We are also being subjected to those same temptations to renounce our faith and seek an easy way out to avoid persecution. We are told in the book of Revelation, that there will come a time when every human on the planet will be forced to be branded by the one world government or we will not be able to buy or sell (Rev. 13:16,17). God says that those

who disobey Him and take that mark, will be excluded from His rest as well (Rev. 14:9,10). The book of Hebrews warns us that any route other than that which has been ordained by God, will only lead to eternal death. Whatever we have to endure to hold onto our faith is worth the sacrifice.

The writer then proceeds to show us the importance of fellowship with other sincere believers.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; (while we still have life and breath) lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (verse 13).

Here we are reminded of the importance of this fellowship to help us stay strong in our walk with God. We build each other's faith through fellowship with other believers, prayer, worship and the study of God's word. Remaining in a close community of believers is a protection from the deceitfulness of sin. People need accountability and a support base. We need prayer from other believers.

I've known two other Christians who fell into sin, and as a result fell away from God. In those cases, neither one of those believers were part of a strong community of believers to help support them.

For we are made partakers of Messiah, IF we hold the beginning of our confidence (faith) steadfast unto the end; (verse 14).

We are again reminded, as we were in verse six, that we are only saved or made "partakers of Messiah" if we remain in the faith. This fact is reiterated by the Apostle Peter who affirms that; -

We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation

ready to be revealed in the last time (I Peter 1:5).

Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (I Peter 1:9).

We are kept by the power of God through faith. We cannot be kept when there is no faith, and therefore we cannot receive the salvation of our souls. We must “hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”

With this, the writer again returns us to those who followed Moses into the wilderness.

While it is said, “Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation” (rebellion) (verse 15).

This quote is from Psalm ninety-five, verses seven and eight, and is referring to the incident recorded in Numbers chapter fourteen.

Again, God tests the righteous. Those who were being tested could not endure and their hearts became hardened against God.

The believer must recognize the temporality of our existence in this sinful world. This is not our home, it is the wilderness of our testing. We are on a journey to receive the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls. We are traveling to our permanent residence with God our Father. If we do not place the importance of that goal above everything else, we can fail like our predecessors who were following Moses to the Promised Land.

Hudson Taylor was a missionary to China. During the course of his ministry in that land, he lost his wife and two children.⁷ Yet in spite of his losses and many other testings, his faith remained strong and he was rewarded with much success in his ministry. As a faithful servant of God, this is all that really mattered. He knew his wife and children were safe

with the Lord and were waiting for him, at his homecoming. His sacrifices for the kingdom of God serve as an inspiration for many who have also endured great losses during their service for the Lord.

We compare Hudson Taylor's faith to those who were being tested in the wilderness. -

For some, when they had heard, did rebel: howbeit not all came out of Egypt by Moses (verse 16).

In other words, the hearts of the people were not fully committed and they had never fully separated from their old lives in Egypt.

Number 14:1-3 -

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night (verse 1).

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation and said to them, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness!" (verse 2).

And wherefore has the Lord brought us into this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a pray? Were it not better for us to return unto Egypt?" (verse 3).

The people in this instance were on the verge of entering the Promised Land of milk and honey. But the spies that had been sent out to scout the land, returned to report that while the land was indeed a good land, it was filled with walled cities and giants (Numbers 13).

In spite of Joshua's and Caleb's exhortations that God would help them overcome their enemies as promised, the people's lack of faith in their miraculous God and their rebellion against Him, prevented them from entering. God

allowed that generation to die out in the wilderness. Only their children were eventually permitted to take the land.

The writer of Hebrews continues using this example to make his point.

But with whom was He grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? (verse 17).

These people had seen God part the Red Sea for them and were the recipients of His continuous provisions for them in the wilderness. Their lack of faith in God could not be rewarded.

And to whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not? (verse 18).

We can reap the fruit of unbelief. God is a just God and He cannot reward unfaithfulness.

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief (verse 19).

We have just been given a vivid foreshadow of the principles that underline the Gospel. It is only activated by faith, and that faith must be maintained at all costs, or we will not be able to enter into our promised land of eternal life.

Chapter Four

The first verse of chapter four contains a warning that summarizes the point of the previous chapter. –

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 (verse 1).

In chapter three we saw the Israelites condemned by God to die in the wilderness because of their unbelief. Here in verse one we are being told not to follow their example. There is much at stake. We cannot inherit eternal life unless we obey God's plan of redemption.

For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them:...

How was the Gospel preached to them before Jesus actually came and died for our sins? The purpose of the Gospel is to give us rest from our labors. That is, through faith in the atonement we have rest. Our salvation is not contingent on our frail abilities to keep all of God's commandments

perfectly all of our lives; especially when we consider that the tenth commandment, “Thou shalt not covet” deals with the heart and our thought lives.

Jesus is the only one who did keep God’s commandments perfectly and His righteousness is imparted to us. God receives us as He receives His own Son. Therefore we do not have to work for our salvation, it is a Divine gift, and Jesus gives us rest from that labor. - *Come to Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).*

That rest is foreshadowed in the fourth commandment. God commanded His people to rest on the seventh day, as God also rested after He finished creation (Genesis 2:2). Thus this scenario shows us God’s plan of redemption through the Messiah. In Jesus we rest from our own works and rely on His work for us. So the Gospel was preached in a form through the fourth commandment. There would be a rest from our works. This is the principle the writer of Hebrews is communicating to us.

...but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it (verse 2).

Faith is the ingredient that applies salvation to our hearts. Like many today who hear the Gospel and reject it, they are lacking the simple child-like faith God requires to enter His kingdom.

For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said, ‘As I have sworn in My wrath, if they shall enter into My rest:’ although the works were finished from the foundation of the world (verse 3).

God’s plan of redemption for the human race was established “before the foundation of the world.” Here the writer is again referring to Psalm 95, specifically verses ten

and eleven. –

Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known My ways:

Unto whom I swore in My wrath that they should not enter into My rest (Psalm 95:10,11).

God provided for His people in the wilderness a similitude and a foreshadow of the Gospel through the establishment of the Sabbath rest, which was instigated from the foundation of the world, - because Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

For He spoke in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all His works (verse 4 from Genesis 2:2, Exodus 20:11, 31:17).

God is a Spirit (John 4:24) and obviously does not need to rest physically. The Sabbath was instigated to benefit man. Besides being a foreshadow of the Gospel, it was also designed to be a day of physical rest and contemplation of God. As Jesus said,

The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).

Frail human beings need physical rest, and God is setting the example for the benefit of His children. He has set aside time to rest our bodies and commune with Him. At the same time we are shown the application to rest from our labors or self-effort in trying to obtain our salvation or establish our own righteousness. Again - the purpose of the Sabbath in the Old Testament is the preparation for our rest in Jesus. The

Sabbath is described as a “sign” in Exodus 31:17.

And in this place again, If they shall enter into My rest (verse 5).

“If” they shall enter. It is a free choice, and this divine rest cannot be obtained unless it is entered by faith.

Seeing therefore it remains that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief (verse 6).

We have a vivid picture in our minds of multitudes of carcasses strewn across a desert wilderness because of a lack of faith in the promises of God. Again, the writer is warning his audience of the consequences of rejecting the only eternal rest that is found in the Messiah alone, our Sabbath rest.

Again, He limited a certain day, saying in (or through) David, Today, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts (verse 7).

Here the writer is referring to Psalm 95, verses 7 and 8. God warned His people not to harden their hearts. God requires His people to remain humble and receptive to His words. We can observe the vultures circling the remains of those who fell in the wilderness testing ground, and hold onto the faith that will keep us from becoming food for scavengers.

Jesus is our Sabbath rest if we abide in Him as we are instructed in John chapter fifteen. We will not wither away from the Source of our life and be carried away and destroyed by the whims and doctrines of men.

If a man abides not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they

are burned (John 15:6).

Getting back to verse seven, - the verse in Psalm 95:7 that is being quoted is referring to Today; that is David is making a distinction between his day and the previous days of failure in the wilderness (Psalm 95:8-11). "Today if you will hear His voice." In the next verse of Hebrews chapter four, the writer shows us that David is referring to "another day."

For if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest, then would he (David) not afterward have spoken of another day - "Today" - (verse 8).

Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, but after finally reaching that goal, as indicated in David's Psalm, that was not the rest that God intended for His people.

The writer of Hebrews thus concludes that; -

There remains therefore a rest to the people of God (verse 9).

The rest that is promised by God to His people is spiritual.

For he that is entered into His rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from His (verse 10).

Again, the Sabbath is the similitude of the Gospel, the rest we have in Jesus who obtained our salvation for us. We can rest from our own efforts; our salvation has been imparted to us through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the rest that has been prophesied in the Old Testament symbolically through the Sabbath as we have been shown.

We can look back on those fallen carcasses in the wilderness and leave them far behind us as we follow Jesus onto the Promised Land of eternal life.

There are many today who observe the Sabbath or go to

church on Saturday, the seventh day, instead of “The Lord’s day” on Sunday. There is nothing wrong with attending worship services on Saturday, but sadly many who follow this practice do so without fully recognizing the significance of that day. They fail to recognize that the Sabbath is symbolic of the Gospel, and view Saturday worship as merely fulfilling one of the Ten Commandments. Many also make the mistake of making Saturday worship a requirement of salvation, thus negating its true meaning and violating the principle of salvation by grace.

The Apostle Paul dealt with this issue. –

But now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage?

You observe days, and months, and times, and years (Galatians 4:9,10).

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days,

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ (Colossians 2:16,17).

Notice that Paul refers to the Sabbath “days” as plural. That is because there was more than one Sabbath day in the Old Testament. The “eighth day,” Sunday, was also a Sabbath. Acts 20:7 clearly says that the church came together on the first day of the week which they called “The Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10).

The epistle of Barnabas, Paul’s traveling companion, was held in very high regard by the early Christians and was actually included in the canon for many years. It was found as part of one of the oldest manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus and was cited by Jerome, Origen and many others.

In his epistle Barnabas says, *Lastly, He says to them: ‘your*

new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot bear them' (Barnabas is quoting from Isaiah 58) - Consider what He means by it; the Sabbaths, says He, which you now keep are not acceptable to Me, but those which I have made; when resting from all things I shall begin the eighth day, that is: the beginning of the other world for which cause we observe the eighth day with gladness, in which Jesus rose from the dead; and having manifested Himself to His disciples, ascended into heaven (The Epistle of Barnabas, Chapter 12: 9,10).

The early church came together on Sunday to acknowledge the New Covenant and make a clear distinction between the Sabbath of the Old Covenant and the rest that God has chosen; the rest we have in Messiah Jesus, which brings us rest and liberty from legalistic law keeping for our redemption.

The eighth day is mentioned in Leviticus as a foreshadow of the rest to come. There were actually two Sabbaths observed during certain occasions. -

Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a Sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a Sabbath (Leviticus 23:39).

Seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and you shall do no servile work therein (Leviticus 23:36).

On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly: you shall do no servile work therein (Numbers 29:35).

We can see how the Apostle Paul and the other Apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were moved to understand the

prophetic significance of the eighth day in the Old Testament Scriptures and applied it to the celebration of Jesus' victory as the day of their assembling in the New Covenant.

The transition from justification by law to salvation by grace was quite an adjustment for the Hebrew believers. Thus grace needed to be reemphasized, as it does for us today when legalism threatens to enter through the door of any church. Our "labor" of entering into our promised rest is a labor or work of faith alone. It is the continuous work of holding onto our faith in the Messiah's work for us.

We assure ourselves of our rest through the Scriptures' exhortation that we are saved by grace alone. –

For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit;

Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Messiah our Savior;

That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men (Titus 3:5-8).

The word of God severs our dependence on our own

righteous works, and replaces it with dependence upon Him alone, trusting in His grace to work in us to change us into the people He wants us to become.

Pride labors in vain thinking it can by its own efforts make itself righteous enough to stand in the presence of a holy God.

Those who attempt to justify themselves by pointing to their own works will be rejected.

Not everyone that says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name have cast out devils? And in Your name done many wonderful works?"

And then will I profess to them, "I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22-24).

It is a devastating thing to be rejected by the Lord and He says there will be many that will have this experience. It is vital for our spiritual health that we understand what is happening here.

Jesus sees the works of these ones who are attempting to justify themselves by what they have done in His name as works of iniquity. These works were then obviously not done by the Holy Spirit through them. We must conclude that they were operating under the auspices of another spirit.

The goal of the Christian life is to be conformed into Jesus' image. It is the natural result of a genuine relationship with Jesus. No Christian deliberately or willfully continues to practice sin, as the Apostle John taught (I John 3:6-11). We can fail because of human weakness, and be restored by repentance, but it is not the intention or desire of a disciple of Jesus to continue in sin.

Holiness cannot be produced without an intimate union

with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is only appropriated through repentance and faith in the atonement. Apparently repentance and faith in the atonement are the missing ingredients in the faith of these ones who have been relying on their own works to generate the Lord's favor and their entrance into His kingdom. Salvation by grace has been subtly eliminated from their theology. They have not done the will of God and rested in His grace. Thus by circumventing the atonement, Jesus "never knew them." And because they do not have a union with God's Holy Spirit, they most likely have unrepented sin in their lives, and are not producing the fruit of a genuine salvation.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:24, *"Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock."* Jesus is that rock, the totality of Him as the Messiah, the Redeemer of mankind, which must include the atonement.

The word "wise" is repeated in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25: 1-13.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom. And five were wise and five were foolish (verse 1-2).

The five wise virgins were prepared for the long wait for their Bridegroom, (Jesus' return) and brought plenty of oil for their lamps, the foolish virgins did not and their oil supply ran out.

In the Scriptures oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13) which is the Spirit of Jesus (Romans 8:9-11, II Corinthians 3:17,18, Philippians 1:19) who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life," the Only Way to the Father (John 14:6).

When Jesus comes for His bride, His church; the five wise

virgins are accepted. The five who were unprepared and realized their error of neglecting the Truth when it was too late, were rejected by the Lord. Jesus tells them the same thing He tells those who thought they were serving Him, "I know you not" (verse 12).

I liken these unprepared ones to the spiritual condition of the church in Sardis, (Rev. 3:1-5). This church is warned to "Remember therefore how you have received and heard" because there is something in her that is ready to die, which can ultimately lead to having her name blotted out of the book of life. This is a liberal church that has forgotten the basics of her faith and is unaware that she is tumbling into apostasy.

I have heard some Christians say, "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you have Jesus." This theology is filtering its way into the church through teachers who are involved in the emerging church movement. In the early days of the church, the Gnostics also believed in Jesus. What was the difference between their Jesus and the true Jesus that our founding apostles represented? To the Gnostics there was no atonement, no grace. To them heaven was obtained by their own attempts to achieve an elusive pinnacle of higher spirituality.

Many professed Christians will fall victim to this deception in the last generation before Jesus returns. We are seeing the fruit of this now as more and more "evangelical" pastors and teachers reject the atonement and Jesus as being the only way to heaven.

The apostles prophesied of a last days apostasy, a falling away from the faith that would be characterized in part by an inability to endure sound doctrine (I Timothy 4:3). Doctrine, as it is taught by Jesus and the apostles, is vitally important. Beware of any teacher that downplays the need for sound doctrine and rejects or minimizes the Biblical means of salvation.

Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (verse 11).

The writer of Hebrews has taken us on a journey though time back to a wilderness of human failure. We stepped over the carcasses, the victims of God's righteous decree that only those who have faith in His plan of redemption will enter into the promised land of eternal rest. Let us work to retain the faith that provides that beautiful rest, so we will never fall like those who failed in the wilderness of their testings.

We have beheld the goodness and severity of God (Romans 11:22), exemplified in His word and felt its constructive chastening upon our souls. –

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (verse 12).

As we look into the mirror of God's word, we see ourselves reflected by the image it portrays. We are contrasted by its portrait of perfection. It is designed to separate our chaff from our wheat. It brings death to our sin natures and shatters our illusions of who we pretend to be or think we are in the light of His perfection. It breaks the bones of the stony soul, like a shepherd deals with a stony sheep. If we are truly His, we will look into our reflection in His word and be willing to allow Him to adjust us accordingly. We will let the truth change us and not attempt to change the truth to suit ourselves. When conviction begins to mar the image of who we think we are in its light, we will let it have its perfect work in us and not run away. For conviction is like a grain of sand in an oyster shell; it is the necessary irritant that grows the pearl.

If we don't like what our image reflects in the mirror of God's word, it's vain to try and camouflage our defects though the façade of our own make-up. It won't work as we are assured in the following verse. –

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (verse 13).

We can't hide our imperfections from God, or like the Pharisees, try and appear righteous on the outside, when inside He can see the mess we are. Here we are reminded that God sees beyond our religiosity. He desires to reform the inner man. This is what He has saved us for, to be conformed to the image of His Son. –

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29).

We are told to abide in Jesus (John 15:4). The Holy Spirit sap flows from Him into us for this purpose; to produce the fruit of a holy character. We know that this cannot be accomplished in our own strength, for without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). He knows we will fail without Him. We cannot pull ourselves out of the murky swamp of who we really are without His help.

The next three verses serve as an introduction to the following chapter, the main theme of which is Jesus as our high priest. We are being assured of the help we have in Jesus.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession (verse 14).

Look at all that has been accomplished for us in Jesus. Because of the sacrifice of Himself for us, we now have a great High Priest who is continually making intercession; praying for us before the God of all creation. This truth is our treasure and we are encouraged again to hold fast to our faith.

For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (verse 15).

We are again reminded that we are never alone in our struggles. Our great High Priest has experienced temptation on our behalf, endured it and never succumbed. He understands our frailties completely. Because of His identification with us, we can approach Him without any condemnation.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, ...

We are approaching Someone who is the full embodiment of God's mercy.

...that we may obtain mercy...

Forgiveness...

...and find grace to help in time of need (verse 16).

Jesus' love is always there for us, like that of a loving and supportive parent. We will never be turned away when we come to Him with a humble, repentant heart. His grace strengthens us in those times when we have failed.

As in any relationship, communication is so important and this factor is no different when it is applied to our relationship

with God. He wants us to bring everything to Him in prayer. As we have seen in the previous verses, He knows everything anyway, nothing can be hidden from Him. Honest confession is healing and opens the door for the restoration His mercy provides.

I heard the testimony of a man who was experiencing some conflicts in his faith, which caused him to stop walking with the Lord for a while. Then one day he began to vent his anger at God in a tirade that expressed everything that had been bothering him. When he was finished, in the moment of silence that followed, he heard the Still Small Voice of the Lord say, "Now you are finally being honest with Me."

That wonderful one liner brought the man back into his relationship with the Lord as he realized all his complaints were unfounded. God was real and had everything under His control, no matter how things appeared in the world.

We have reached the conclusion of chapter four. And again, these last verses have reiterated Jesus' special role as High Priest. The significance of this is explored in more detail in the coming chapters. This is where we will be brought to an understanding of the uniqueness of God's plan of redemption that has been so skillfully orchestrated throughout His miraculous word.

Chapter Five

Before we begin, it's important for us to understand again, that the writer is addressing Jews who have received Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. For this they are persecuted by their Jewish brethren, and also the Roman government.

The epistle was written to encourage them to hold onto their faith, and to not return to their previous religious system that was only intended to be a foreshadow of its fulfillment in Jesus.

In the first century church, there were no priests, but one high priest, and that was Jesus. The leadership was plural. There were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11,12). Each individual was viewed as a priest who ministered to God through their worship and service. *And you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6).*

God told Moses that it was His desire for all of His people to be priests. Moses must have wondered how that could be when God said only those from the tribe of the Levites were permitted to minister before Him in the holy order of the

priesthood. Was God contradicting Himself? No, He was prophesying of a time when there would be a change in the priesthood which was fulfilled through Messiah Jesus.

We are a royal priesthood and a chosen generation (I Peter 2:9) and we are admonished to walk worthy of our high calling in Jesus (Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 1:10.)

Because the first century church understood that the old Levitical priesthood was now deemed by God as obsolete, to refer to anyone in leadership as a priest over them, or a middle man so to speak, was contrary to the faith of the New Covenant. If we are truly practicing the faith as it was once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3), then we also can acknowledge only one high priest over us and that is Jesus.

Because the writer of Hebrews did not insert chapters to intercept his chain of thought, he continues his discussion of Jesus as our High Priest, which he has introduced to us in the previous segment of his epistle. -

For every high priest taken from among man is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins (verse 1).

The Levitical priesthood the author is talking about here, was instigated by the Lord through His servant, Moses. Moses had been given the Ten Commandments written in stone, directly by “the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18). But before Moses was able to present the commandments to the people, the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me” had already been broken by the Israelites through their worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32:16). As a result, Moses broke the stones (Exodus 32:19) showing us symbolically, that if we break one commandment, we have broken them all.

Moses then was instructed to construct the tabernacle. The plan for the tabernacle was given to him when God gave him

the commandments. The Lord knew that the people were incapable of keeping His word perfectly all the time, so He already had plan "B" in place.

The instructions for the construction of the tabernacle included the instigation of the priesthood and the initiation of the forgiveness of sins through animal sacrifice.

I will be reiterating about more of this as this study progresses. For now we will return to the author's description of the high priest. The Old Covenant priests were to be men chosen from his brethren; that is they were also like their brethren who are all standing on the same feet of clay.

Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity (verse 2).

This shows us that there is no such thing as a sinless priest, and woe to the Pharisee who places himself above another, because - "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) with no exceptions. The priest is equal with the sinner in this respect.

And by this reason (for this reason) he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins (verse 3).

Because of the priest's own sinful nature, when he offered the blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin for the people, he also was required to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well.

You might ask, "But those priests in Moses' day were not actually committing sin." Not obviously, but sometimes we forget that the tenth commandment that lay shattered on the ground at Moses' feet, is - "Thou shalt not covet." This deals with the sins of the heart and thought life. Jesus reiterated this fact in His sermon on the mount. -

You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say to you, That whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:27,28).

Jesus is showing us that God's holy standards are so high, no one can attain to them on their own. Thus the holiest of men still require God's forgiveness.

We continue on to see that no man could choose to be a priest back then, he had to be appointed by God. –

And no man takes this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron (verse 4 from Exodus 28:1).

Aaron was of the house of Levi, and God chose this house to be the lineage through which all the priests were to be chosen. If you were not of the house of Levi, then you could not enter the priesthood.

So also Messiah did not glorify Himself to be made a high priest;...

Jesus did not appoint Himself to be made High Priest...

...but He (God) said to Him, "You are My Son, today have I begotten You" (verse 5).

In other words, God Himself appointed Jesus to be our High Priest through His lineage to God, an obviously much higher lineage than that of Levi.

Because the Jews that the writer is addressing understood that in previous times the priests were only allowed to be from the tribe of Levi, the writer continues to reiterate the change in the priesthood lineage that was actually prophesied

symbolically. –

As He says also in another place, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec (verse 6).

Here we are being introduced to a prophetic figure in the Old Testament that was designed to represent the priesthood of the future Messiah, who is to be a priest forever, an eternal priest. The author is referring to Psalm 110:4, which is a prophecy of the coming Messiah. – *The LORD has sworn, and will not repent (change His mind) You are a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec (Psalm 110:4).*

God says in His word that He uses similitudes (Hosea 12:10). Similitudes are meant to be a representative of something else. The priest Melchisedec, in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:18-20) is used as a similitude of Jesus in His role as our High Priest, “an eternal priest.”

A pastor I know shared this insight with me. He said that in the Old Testament the Levitical priesthood would represent the people before God, but Jesus is a priest of a different order, a priest after the order of Melchisedec, who represents God to the people. Melchisedec came to Abraham offering him bread and wine. Jesus came to earth representing God the Father; He is the image of God, (Hebrews 1:3.) When Jesus offers us His bread and wine, He is inviting us to partake of His royal priesthood and we are also called to represent God before the people; we are “Ambassadors of Christ” (II Corinthians 5:20.)

When we receive the bread and wine of His sacrifice for us, then we too are clothed spiritually in fine linen, the clothing of the priests which represents our God bestowed righteousness (Revelation 19:8).

The writer of Hebrews has just shown us Jesus’ prophetic

relationship to Melchisedec, now he takes us to Gethsemane where we witness the agony our Lord experienced prior to His crucifixion.

Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; (verse 7).

Here we see Jesus as a man who did not appoint Himself to this suffering, writhing in His fleshly container, experiencing the agony of knowing He must endure extreme torture and an excruciating death, begging His Father to find some other way. – “Abba, Father, all things are possible to You; take away this cup from Me: nevertheless not what I will, but what You will” (Mark 14:36).

Jesus was “heard in that He feared.” God heard His Son’s fervent prayer for deliverance, but would answer as Jesus had feared. God would not deliver His only begotten, beloved Son from death on the cross. Jesus was ordained to identify fully with the suffering of mankind, and fulfill His mission to be the propitiation for the sins of the world. For this reason He would not be released from His suffering.

Though He were a Son, yet, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered; (verse 8).

Jesus was perfect and Divine, but contained in His limited flesh, He experienced the pain of being in that flesh to its fullness. By this obedience of enduring, He achieved perfection on a human level.

And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him (verse 9).

This obedience enabled Him to procure our salvation and fulfill the many prophecies of His coming and purpose, some of which are exemplified in the fifty-third chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. -

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief: when You shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, (a reference to the resurrection) and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand (Isaiah 53:5,6,10).

The author of Hebrews now returns us to the comparison of Jesus with Melchisedec, like a bookend that completes the picture of our suffering Messiah.

Called of God a high priest after the order of Melchisedec (verse 10).

This is Melchisedec, symbolic of one of a divine lineage chosen by God alone to suffer for the sins of humanity.

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing you are dull of hearing (verse 11).

Here the writer is allowing us to see his frustration with the level of spiritual development of his audience. He wants to delve into this subject in more depth, but he is afraid it will be over the heads of his listeners. I am sure there are many pastors and Bible teachers that share this same frustration

today.

For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat (verse 12).

He is reproaching them for their lack of spiritual maturity. Apparently enough time had passed in their walk with God that they should be teachers and ministers themselves. But because there were indications that they were having trouble discerning the distinctions between the new covenant and the old, they needed to be reinstructed all over again.

For everyone that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe (verse 13).

I sure wouldn't want anyone to say that to me. Too many of today's church congregations would fit into the category the author is describing.

We live in a world that desperately needs to hear the Gospel and repent. Yet, the massive army of believers that should be active and working in this area, just attend church each week thinking that's enough, when we are being told here that God expects every one of us to become skilled in God's word and able to minister to others.

But strong meat belongs to them that are of a full age (spiritually mature) even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (verse 14).

The mature who have recognized that their faith is a growing process and have been actively seeking the Lord, walking with Him and abiding in Him (John 15), will have

gained the insights needed to protect them from falsehood. By learning to discern the subtle deceptions of evil, they can avoid those entrapments.

Jesus warned that there would be many false prophets who would deceive many away from the faith (Matthew 24:11,24). The people being addressed in this epistle were facing the same challenges and they were apparently still unprepared. Multitudes of God's people today need the same reinforcement. In other words, if you are one of those pew sitting babies, you are being told through this epistle, to recognize your need and start seeking a deeper relationship with the Lord for your spiritual protection.

Today we are being inundated with philosophies that are designed to undermine Christianity. The danger a babe on milk faces, is that their lack of discernment and knowledge of God's word could inadvertently propel him out of the light of his true faith into the darkness of the lie that all religions are true or valid, thus denying the Lord that died to save his soul.

Like the Hebrews who were not discerning the distinction between the old and new covenants, so our modern believer is in danger of not discerning the distinction Jesus makes between Himself and every other religion in the world. -

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no one comes to the Father but by Me (John 14:6).

Chapter Six

The writer continues his exhortation to Christian maturity in chapter six, before he resumes his discussion of Jesus as our High Priest.

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Messiah, let us go on to perfection; (maturity) not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, (verse 1).

He is telling them and us, that we shouldn't have to keep going over the basics of the faith. These truths should already be deeply engraved in our beings. We are saved by faith and not by "dead works" or our own efforts. We have repented from them; that is we have turned from the works of the old covenant to be reconciled to God by faith in the Messiah Jesus alone.

Unfortunately, as is evident by Paul's epistle to the Galatians, the observance of ordinances was intruding into the faith of those believers as well. A mature Christian has fully embraced the principles of the faith and is continuing to seek

the perfection of character that is produced by yielding to the inner workings of the Holy Spirit to conform us into Jesus' image as revealed in God's word. In view of this principle, the previous "works" are truly "dead" and incapable of producing the inner transformation God is seeking to create within His people.

The writer goes on to list a few other things that apparently are popular topics in this group that are being constantly rehashed at the expense of their spiritual development.

...of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment (verse 2).

I imagine if they had online forum boards like they do today, each one of these topics would be generating massive discussions and debate. We will accept what the word of God teaches on these subjects and not permit ourselves to be distracted from what is truly important – the salvation of our souls and our spiritual maturity.

And this we will do if God permits (verse 3).

We will stand on the truth we have received, and continue to grow upon that foundation.

In the following three verses, we are again reminded of the importance of remaining in the faith. Because these verses are one sentence, we won't break the thought, but read them in their entirety before examining the content. –

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, (verse 4)

And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, (verse 5)

If they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame (verse 6).

Once again we are reminded that this epistle was written to prevent the Hebrew believers from abandoning their faith. They and all believers are being given a solemn warning that if we have had a full understanding of the Gospel and have experienced the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, if we fall away, we cannot be restored to the faith. We must remain in the faith to receive the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls (I Peter 1:9).

This is not talking about a prodigal who still believes, but has for a time not been walking with God. We have this example in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The son in this parable, never renounced his father, he just went his own way and stopped serving him. God used the young man's uncomfortable circumstances to engineer his return and he was accepted back with great joy by his father, who is a similitude of God in this parable.

The people the writer of Hebrews is referring to are those who completely abandon their faith, preferring something else in its place, even after having had full knowledge of the truth. When this happens, then these ones cannot be restored, because they will not return; you cannot get them back into the faith. They have made their final decision, they have committed the ultimate blasphemy, which is what is being referred to in verse six as "putting Jesus to an open shame," and God has rejected them.

When someone professes Jesus, and then publically rejects him in preference to another religion or philosophy, he puts Jesus to an open shame by his testimony that his Christian faith is not valid and Jesus' death means nothing, thus shaming the Lord.

I know an individual who is a sample of this sin. He was at one time a strong believer. He even had demons cast out of him when he confessed the Lord as his savior. He had experienced Jesus in His fullness. He ended up committing adultery and left his wife and two children. He was an entertainer and publically declared in an interview that he was no longer a Christian and he had found something better, which was a New Age occult philosophy. He had led his brother to the Lord in the past, and no matter what his family did to try and get him back to his faith in Jesus, he absolutely refused to return, and rejected his brother in the process.

Like the Scriptures show us, he could not be restored which is the resulting judgment upon one who is so foolish as to abandon the truth after having had full knowledge and experienced a relationship with the Messiah Jesus. Sadly, his only future now, as Jesus has warned, is an eternal existence in a cold outer darkness experiencing the tormenting flames of eternal regret (Matthew 8:12).

I'm going to skip ahead here for a moment to chapter ten, and include the writer's reiteration of this principle to help enlighten the previous passages. -

For if we sin willfully after that we have received knowledge of the truth there remains no more sacrifice for sins,

But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries (10:26,27).

We have just been shown that when we have embraced the Lord, if we turn away from Him after having experienced the riches of His love, there will be no forgiveness for that adultery.

This sin of rejecting Jesus after having full knowledge of the Truth, is sometimes referred to as the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I've met people wanting to return to the Lord and

fearing they have committed this sin. I assured them they have not. These are prodigals, they want to return. Those who have committed the blasphemy, do not want to come back, and they refuse to return. Their hearts have been hardened by God because He has judged and rejected them.

Those who reject God's only provision for their salvation in this manner are viewed as His adversaries and deserving of His rejection. God is merely responding to their own choices.

In the next two verses, the writer summarizes the contrast between the faithful and the apostate.

For the earth which drinks in the rain that comes upon it, and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God (verse 7).

The believer who receives the rain, which is symbolic here for the Holy Spirit, grows in the faith and produces fruit: service and a holy character. These believers are abiding in Jesus as illustrated for us in John chapter fifteen. We "abide," which means we remain in the vine of the Messiah; resting and trusting in Him to work in us. Then the sap, which represents the Holy Spirit, flows into us, producing over time, the fruits of this continuing relationship which are; love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and temperance, which is self-control (Galatians 5:22,23). These are the fruits or produce of the Holy Spirit and an illustration of the character of Jesus we should all be desiring. We cannot produce these fruits by our own efforts, they are produced in the believer by Jesus' Holy Spirit, but He works through our will and desire. We must want to be changed. In the next verse we see a description of those who do not want this transformation.

But that which bears thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh

unto cursings; whose end is to be burned (verse 8).

Jesus shows us in John chapter fifteen, verses one through six, that those who are not producing fruit, are “pruned” by the Father, who knows those who are not fully committed to Jesus. These ones are gathered by men and burned. That is; they are taken away and deceived by the doctrines of men, because they have preferred the precepts of men above God’s word. The burning represents their future in hell.

If a man abides not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (John 15: 6).

If we do not hold fast our profession of faith, we cannot be formed into Jesus’ image, and we can become victims of other philosophies and the doctrines of man-made religions. These are the men who carry away the branches that are burned, or destroyed for rejecting God’s truth.

We can understand this principle a little better by examining Jesus’ parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-20). In this parable, the seed of God’s word is cast into different soil types. The seed that falls on the stony ground represents those who embrace the Lord for a time, but when temptation comes, no matter what form it takes, these ones have no root and fall away. The seed that falls on the good soil are the genuinely saved who remain in the faith and produce the fruit of a holy character over time.

We have just been shown a graphic illustration of the fate of those who fall away from the faith. As the author’s audience is trembling at the prospect, which I am sure is the writer’s intention, he now offers them the assurance that they will not be among those who are to be rejected and burned.

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak (verse 9).

Those things that accompany salvation as we previously mentioned, are the fruits of a holy character that are only produced by abiding in Jesus.

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister (verse 10).

Their service, and ours, which is the result of abiding in Jesus, will not go unrewarded. We are shown here that while we are saved by grace alone, our works, which are the natural fruit of a genuine salvation, are well pleasing to God. He is always aware of the good that we do to everyone, especially to those who also reside in the household of our faith.

And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: (verse 11).

They are being told again to maintain their faith and service to the end. They are currently operating in “the full assurance of hope.” It is this hope of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus, that is propelling them on and they are operating in and through that hope. Without this hope, which must be maintained, their faith would be meaningless and have no purpose. To abandon the faith, is to abandon all hope.

That you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (verse 12).

He is beginning here to direct us to the previous examples of faith and patience recorded in the Old Testament. We are

reminded of the importance of reading those Old Testament scriptures to encourage us in our New Testament faith. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy *...that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Messiah Jesus (II Timothy 3:15).*

There are those who mistakenly separate the Old Testament from the New, discarding the necessity of understanding the previous Scriptures and how they relate to Jesus. This is a horrendous error. Here we see Paul instructing Timothy to read the Old Testament Scriptures in order to strengthen his faith in Jesus. The New Testament had not been formed in Timothy's day, and the scriptures that were used to learn about Jesus, apart from the eyewitness accounts of those who were still living at the time and had seen the Lord, were found in the Old Testament.

Jesus set the example of how to validate who He is and God's plan of salvation. We see Him on the road to Emmaus, expounding the Gospel from the Old Testament Scriptures. –

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27).

It is important for every Christian to know how to find Jesus in the Old Testament, for this knowledge validates the Christian faith in the face of the coming storm of apostasy. The world would like us to believe that Jesus is just one of many prophets and that Christianity is just another religion and not a unique plan for the redemption of mankind instigated from God from the beginning of time. This knowledge makes Jesus stand out among all other prophets and religions as the Truth He proclaims Himself to be. Knowing that our faith is the fulfillment of a miraculous Divine plan, we can't be fooled into the New Age deceptions and the coming false one world

religion that is the product of man's rebellion against the Truth of the Gospel. It is wisdom to take the Apostle Paul's advice to Timothy and study those Old Testament scriptures.

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15).

We are to be diligent in this, and not slothful as the writer of Hebrews has exhorted us.

He now returns us to one of those Old Testament examples he is encouraging us to follow.

For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself (verse 13).

Out of all the Old Testament examples of faith and perseverance, we are being directed to consider Abraham. The author here is referring us to a faith that was so strong, that he was willing to sacrifice his beloved son, simply because God told him to. God stopped him from making that father's ultimate sacrifice just in time. (Genesis 22:12). Abraham was being tested and he passed the test, which prompted God to "swear by Himself."

Saying, Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you (verse 14).

Abraham's faith and obedience was rewarded by a great blessing from God. And because God made this oath to Abraham, swearing by Himself, who is all truth and is no lie, this promise would be abundantly kept. Abraham's seed would multiply greatly and he would become the father of many nations (Genesis 17:4). Through Abraham's lineage, the

Messiah Jesus would be born and through faith in Him any who believed would then be counted as Abraham's seed, as the Apostle Paul taught, (Romans 4:16, Galatians 3:29); fulfilling the prophecy that Abraham would be the father of many nations, all united as one in the Messiah. Believing Jews and Gentiles would be made one, and there would be one fold and one Shepherd (John 10:16).

And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise (verse 15).

God tests the righteous (Psalm 11:5) and as we have just been shown, there is great reward when we pass those tests.

I was having lunch at a restaurant and there were a couple of young men sitting at the table next to me. One of the men got up and went to the rest room, and I watched as his companion reached over and helped himself to some of the other man's French fries.

I immediately came up with this scenario. What if these men were both about to apply for a job and were having lunch together before their interviews? And what if I was the boss of the company that was conducting those interviews? Which of those two men would I consider hiring? The one I saw stealing the other man's food? Of course not, he wouldn't be considered for an instant. If he was that dishonest in a little, he could not be trusted with much. The other man would have gotten the job. Likewise, God sees our actions and we are rewarded accordingly. - *His Lord said to him, "Well done, you good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of the Lord"* (Matthew 25:21).

The Hebrews that are being addressed in this epistle were also experiencing great tests of their faith like Abraham. They were facing the possibility of losing their lives, and the lives of

their believing loved ones. They were surrounded by the fiery trials of persecution as many are in this current day and age.

God's promise to faithful Abraham is also our own. When we faithfully endure the sufferings of this life, holding onto our faith no matter what, we will receive the outcome of our faith as God has promised. The temporality of this frail existence will be replaced with the grandeur of an eternity with Him.

For men truly swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife (verse 16).

Back in the old days when a man's word counted for something, when an oath was made in God's name, "the greater," then that settled the matter. So if a man's oath was taken seriously, then how much more God's word spoken by Himself?

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show the heirs of promise...

The heirs of promise is referring to Abraham's seed; all those who have placed their trust in the promise – the Messiah.

...the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath (verse 17).

God has made an oath to Abraham that his seed would multiply and be blessed in the Messiah.

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope before us: (verse 18).

Those “two immutable things” are God and His word. We have been promised by the totality of God, that the refuge we have sought in Jesus is secure and true, for it is impossible for God to lie.

We have laid hold upon the hope set before us. –

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, ...

We have been brought into a bit of a nautical mode here, and I would like us to stay here for a moment. I want us all to imagine that we are taking part in a Bible study on a luxurious cruise ship. We are sitting in a beautifully appointed lounge sipping our tea as we contemplate the texts we are studying.

It’s a lovely, star-filled evening. We gaze out through the windows viewing a calm, moon lit sea. It’s a bit chilly out there we know, but we’re currently warm and dry, sheltered by the sturdy walls of this well constructed man-made vessel. Its builders have assured us that it is unsinkable and we purchased our tickets with confidence.

We are contemplating the words we have just read. And we have laid hold on the hope set before us. It is the anchor of our souls, securing us to God’s domain, the world above this sea. We know that the waters our man made ship is sailing on, harbors dangers that cannot always be seen or anticipated. We’re not always informed ahead of time that there is an iceberg floating in those waters that just might put an end to our comfortable surroundings, plunging us into a cold, merciless ocean.

This is when our anchor doubles as a life raft. When our expectations sink like the Titanic, and we suddenly find ourselves adrift in the darkness, hope is the only thing that is going to keep us from drowning. Your circumstances can change in an instant. Your faith, which connects you to your

anchor of hope is your only lifeline.

You hear the Captain's orders. You thumb through your Bible and read your Savior's words telling you to prepare. This world is not your home. You already have your life jacket, the Gospel, wrapped securely around your heart. Your anchor is severing you from these dark waters and it's going to pull you all the way up, if you don't let go. That's the promise.

...and which enters into that within the veil; (verse 19).

In the last few words of verse nineteen, we are told that our anchor of the soul, our hope, "enters the veil."

This is a reference to the inner court of the tabernacle, the place where only the high priest was allowed to enter in order to make atonement for the sins of the people. Our faith now permits us entrance into that holy, intimate place with God.

Wither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec (verse 20).

We can enter the holy place because Jesus, as our high priest, has gone before us, making our entrance into God's presence possible by His sacrifice.

This last verse of chapter six, serves as an introduction to the theme of the next four chapters, seven through ten. Our instructor is taking us back again to contemplate the miraculous typology God has woven into His word that was designed to prepare the Hebrews and all of us for the coming and purpose of the Messiah Jesus.

Chapter Seven

The first verse of chapter seven returns us to the Old Testament foreshadow of the Messiah Jesus; the high priest Melchisedec. –

For this Melchisedec, King of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; (verse 1).

Melchisedec appears out of nowhere to bestow a blessing upon Abraham for his victory in destroying some of the pagan kings who had captured his brother Lot (Genesis 14:17-20).

Abraham had exhibited a tremendous amount of courage, and I am sure his faith in God enabled him to gain the victory over the armies of those powerful kings with only three hundred and eighteen of his trained servants.

Abraham apparently knew who Melchisedec was and responded to the blessing he received from this priest by giving him a tithe from the goods he had taken from the enemy.

To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; (verse 2).

The author tells us that the title “King of righteousness” is by his interpretation. In other words, the Holy Spirit has revealed this interpretation to him. The literal title of Melchisedec as referred to in the text of Genesis 14:18, is King of Salem, which means King of peace. Both of these titles also aptly apply to the Messiah Jesus.

The author continues to apply the spiritual interpretation to this likeness of Jesus in Melchisedec. –

Without father, without mother, without descent; ... -

There is no recorded genealogy of this priest, which sets him apart from the priests of the future Levitical priesthood that was established by God through Moses. The author sees the significance of this omission as being intentionally designed to apply to the Messiah. –

...having neither beginning of days, not end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abides a priest continually (verse 3).

As the author is shining the light of interpretation upon Melchisedec as a foreshadow of the eternal priesthood of the Messiah, we are also being focused on the practice of God to install this typology in the Old Testament to validate Jesus as the fulfillment of those typologies. No one else matches these foreshadows and descriptions which are numerous and varied.

Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the

patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils (verse 4 from Genesis 14:20).

The author is directing his readership to “consider” the greatness and uniqueness of this priest who predates the Levitical priesthood. Melchisedec received tithes from Abraham long before tithes were appointed to be given to the Levitical priests.

And truly they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they came out of the loins of Abraham: (verse 5).

Here the author is preparing his readership for the revelation he discovered by reading the Torah. Through the Holy Spirit’s leading, he correlates the messianic Psalm 110:4, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec,” to validate the faith of his readers by asserting that Jesus is foreshadowed by this typology. Why would there be a priest so great, that Abraham, the father of the priests of the Levitical order, would submit to Melchisedec by tithing to him? He wants us to see the amazing significance of this prophetic illustration.

But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises (verse 6).

Melchisedec’s descent was not from Abraham, who was the father of the Levitical priesthood. Tithing was only to be given to the tribe of Levi for the Levitical priests, yet he received tithes, predating the priesthood, and blessed Abraham, who by God, had been ordained to those “promises.”

And without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better (verse 7).

Abraham was great, but here, I assume, the writer uses a proverb of his day to illustrate the fact that even though Abraham was so great, who was the promised father of Israel, and the progenitor of the lineage through which the Messiah would come; even Abraham was blessed by a priest that was viewed as someone even greater; a similitude of the Messiah Himself.

And here men that die receive tithes; but there he (Melchisedec) received them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives (verse 8).

Here the author is again referring to the prophetic Psalm that tells us of the symbolic significance of Melchisedec, "a priest forever," who "lives."

The Levitical priests were mere men who received tithes, and died, but Melchisedec represents the eternal priesthood of the Messiah who lives forever.

I can picture the Hebrews reading this for the first time, saying, "Oh, wow! I never saw this before!" It took a scholar, sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to correlate the prophecy in Psalm 110:4 to the Messiah Jesus, for the purpose of reinforcing, validating and encouraging the church. This is an example of a prophetic teaching gift we should all desire to have for the same purposes.

To the author's Hebrew audience, there would be no one greater than Abraham, except for the Messiah. They have been led to contemplate here that there was someone even greater than Abraham - Melchisedec. This would be to them a stunning revelation. With this, the author continues. -

And as I may so say, Levi also, who received tithes, payed tithes

in Abraham (verse 9).

What? Even the tribe of Levi, the only tribe designated to receive tithes, also paid them?

For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him (verse 10).

Levi paid tithes symbolically through his father Abraham; this entire lineage of the priesthood was submitted to the greatness of Melchisedec. This again would be a tremendous revelation to the Hebrews that the author is addressing. He has just shown them and us that the Levitical priesthood is subordinate to the figure of Melchisedec.

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should arise "after the order of Melchisedec," and not be called after the order of Aaron? (verse 11).

Aaron was the first Levitical priest ordained by God through Moses, who in this reference is being used to represent the Levitical priesthood. The author here is making the point that there is no longer any reason to depend on the imperfect sacrifices made through the Levitical priesthood for the forgiveness of sins, when the prophecy has stated that there would be another eternal priesthood that would take its place.

This priesthood would not be after the order of Aaron, the Levites.

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law (verse 12).

This law he is referring to that was changed, is the law that

required all the priests to be from the tribe of Levi.

For he of whom these things are spoken pertain to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar (verse 13).

Melchisedec therefore having no record of descent, is symbolic of a priesthood that is from another tribe, other than Aaron's, that never ministered at the altar that was established by God through Moses.

For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning the priesthood (verse 14).

Thus we see the Levitical priesthood being changed to a priesthood coming from another tribe, the tribe of Judah, not mentioned by Moses, but foreshadowed by Melchisedec.

And it is far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there arises another priest (verse 15).

That priest is the Messiah Jesus. –

Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life (verse 16).

This new priest was not ordained through the “carnal commandment” or the earthly commandments concerning the priest's office and service in the tabernacle; because the prophecy concerning Melchisedec states that this new priest's office is eternal. –

For he (David) testifies, “you are a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec” (verse 17, from Psalm 110:4).

The office of the priesthood now held by Jesus, is the fulfillment of David's prophecy; - Jesus' priesthood is eternal, foreordained by God and has nothing to do with the "carnal commandments" associated with the tabernacle services.

For there is truly a disannulling of the commandment going before...

The previous commandment concerning the priesthood has been discontinued; -

...for the weakness and unprofitableness of it (verse 18).

The Levitical priesthood was discontinued because it was inferior to the new priesthood of the Messiah Jesus.

For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by which we draw near to God (verse 19).

Let's take a look at Romans 8: 3-4 for some further clarification. -

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (verse 3).

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh; but after the Spirit (verse 4).

The law was incapable of permanently removing sin and transforming the inner man. The "better hope" consists of a new menu for the believer, a diet of faith that is spiritually ingested, resulting in an eternal and changed life. This removal of sin, obtained only through the Priest of the New Covenant, enables the believer to draw near to God,

something the previous system was not designed to accomplish. That system was only a foreshadow and a preparation for its fulfillment in Messiah Jesus.

Through the Messiah we receive the Holy Spirit which is the means by which God enters the believer and communicates. We were designed for communion with God. We are the temple that He resides in through His Spirit. Again, this union was not possible under the previous covenant.

And inasmuch as not without an oath He was made a priest (verse 20).

To further distinguish the uniqueness of Mechisedec, the writer notes that he was established by an “oath” directly from God Himself.

(For those priests were made without an oath; ...

The priests under Moses were not established by an oath, but through their lineage.

...but this with an oath by Him that said to him, ‘The Lord swore and will not repent, (change His mind), You are a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.’) (verse 21).

The Messiah is ordained by an oath from God, “after the order of Melchisedec;” a priesthood set apart from the Levitical priesthood, “a priest forever.” We are being reinforced in this unique Biblical precedent. Melchisedec, a mere man, obviously cannot be a priest forever; death would claim him eventually. Thus we see again the similitude of the Son of God that Melchisedec was ordained to represent: a priest who would live eternally.

By so much was Jesus made a surety (guarantee) of a better testament (verse 22).

Jesus died, rose from the dead, thus guaranteeing an eternal priesthood through His everlasting life. This assures us of a better testament, an eternal one, far superior to the previous order that had to be continually maintained through the frailties of the previous priesthood.

And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered (allowed) to continue by reason of death; (verse 23).

The previous system required multiple priests to keep it continuing because each one of them died and had to be replaced.

But this Man, (Jesus) because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood (verse 24).

This is the glorious priesthood of the New Testament. We have one Priest who reigns eternally, who cannot die and needs no replacement.

Hopefully, by now the author's Hebrew readership was beginning to grasp this primary distinction between the covenants and why the New Covenant is so much better than its predecessor.

We have an eternal Priest: -

Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them (verse 25).

Priests were designed by God to be intercessors for the people and to minister to God on their behalf. These frail,

imperfect men were foreshadows of the eternal priesthood of the Messiah. Only the Messiah guarantees our salvation; first by His sacrifice and resurrection from the dead, which makes our salvation possible, and secondly by His continuous intercession for us at the right hand of the Father. How can God the Father refuse the prayers of His Son that He makes for us? Would not the Father grant His only begotten Son anything He asks for the church He loves and died to save? We can be assured that Jesus' prayers for us are heard and answered.

I believe that the bulk of Jesus' prayers for us are centered on our spiritual development, and our being strengthened in Him to remain in the faith and also for the unity of His people.

For such a High Priest became us, (or 'this is the high priest we need') who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; (verse 26).

We need a high priest who is perfect, not subject to human imperfections; totally set apart for God, holy, who would never hurt us, *harmless*. How many people have been hurt by people in religious leadership? Multitudes! Jesus is the only priest we can trust completely. Our high priest is pure *undefiled, separate from sinners*, which means He has never sinned and we are restored through His perfection.

He is the only priest who is higher than the heavens, or this physical realm. Jesus functions as a heavenly priest operating on a level much higher than any human priest. In other words, we have a supernatural priest with unlimited capabilities operating on our behalf. He knows our weaknesses, shortcomings and knows exactly what we need to change us into the people God wants us to be. He is therefore able to ask God specifically for the things we need individually.

How can He do all this while He is seated at the right hand of God? His Spirit, which is distinct from His begotten soul or person, is God's Holy Spirit who is omnipresent. This same Spirit of the Father (Matthew 10:20) which is in the Son (Romans 8:9) operates in the plural as illustrated for us in the second chapter of Acts (Acts 2:3). We can never be anywhere without the comforting presence of God's person and Jesus' person united to us by their one Holy Spirit (John 14:23).

Because we have a supernatural high priest, -

Who needs not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this He (Jesus) did once when He offered up Himself (verse 27).

The priests had to offer sacrifice for their own sins as well as for the people; and it had to be done every day as people are prone to sin every day. If we think we can get through the day without doing something that displeases God, remember that our imperfect thought lives are also under God's scrutiny.

Jesus made the ultimate selfless, supreme sacrifice and received the sins of the entire world onto His soul (Isaiah 53). As the last priest and the final sacrifice ordained by God the Father from the foundation of the world, this sacrifice by the only perfect priest, just had to be done once.

Thus Jesus' cry from His cross, "It is finished!" has a profound meaning. The plan of redemption that God birthed in Eden to restore the human race, and had taken centuries to complete, was declared finished through the lips of the dying Lamb of God, the last sacrifice.

For the law makes men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since (or prior to) the law, makes the Son (High Priest) who is consecrated for evermore (verse 28).

Here the writer returns to contrast the law with the oath that precedes the law. The law ordained priests solely from the tribe of Levi. God through His oath ordained a new priesthood, one fashioned after the order of Melchisedec, a priest not from the tribe of Levi, but who was designed to be a foreshadow of the priesthood of the Messiah Jesus.

We have been shown that the eternal priesthood of Jesus, is so superior to the previous order which had to rely on priests which had “infirmity” and were limited by human flesh and subject to death and sin. We are assured that our perfect eternal high priest, Messiah Jesus, serves forever “after the order of Melchisedec.”

Chapter Eight

Chapter eight is the second chapter of four that focuses on the priesthood of the New Covenant. The author begins by summarizing what he had covered in the previous chapter.

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: we have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens (verse 1).

Jesus died for our sins, was resurrected from the dead, and is seated on the right hand of God the Father where He represents us to the Father, making intercession for our needs (Romans 8:34). This is where Jesus operates as our High priest, residing in the Holiest of Holies, God's actual presence. We have to remember that we have this help operating on our side through every situation we face in this life.

A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man (verse 2).

The sanctuary, the true tabernacle, is the plan of salvation that God ordained from the foundation of the world that was only foreshadowed by the temporary tabernacle that was constructed by Moses. The true tabernacle represents the New Covenant.

For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this Man has somewhat also to offer (verse 3).

As we have been shown, Jesus had offered Himself for our sins, and He is continually offering prayers on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary at the right hand of the Father.

For if He were on earth, He should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: (verse 4).

Jesus' priesthood was designed to function in another realm, not on earth and not according to the format of an earthy priesthood.

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when He was about to make the tabernacle: for, 'See, says He, (God) that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount' (verse 5).

The author here is quoting from Exodus 25:40.

It's so important that we understand how God uses these examples of the old covenant to foreshadow what He has fulfilled in the New Covenant. The Old Testament is interlaced with these examples and typologies and they are meant to validate our New Testament faith.

The pattern of the tabernacle that God gave to Moses, was a figure of the spiritual tabernacle of the New Covenant where

Jesus now serves as our High priest. Likewise, everything associated with the tabernacle services is designed to be foreshadows of the new covenant, the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah.

Let me give you this example from one of the tabernacle rituals. The fourteenth chapter of Leviticus, verses one through seven, describes a ritual for the cleansing of a leper. The priest commands that two birds be taken. One is killed in an earthen vessel over running water. Then a cedar stick with a scarlet cloth and hyssop are dipped in the blood of the bird, and so is the living bird. Then the priest sprinkles the leper with the blood on the cedar scarlet hyssop pole seven times and releases the living bird to freedom. Then the leper is pronounced clean.

In this parable, we see that the first bird is killed in an earthen vessel because someday the Spirit of God would be in a man; the Messiah, to save His creation. He would enter an earthen vessel and be killed and the water of His Holy Spirit would flow. The scarlet hyssop pole is symbolic of the cross He died upon in order to sprinkle His blood upon many nations, cleansing them from the leprosy of their sin. And covered by the blood of the Messiah, the captive soul is set free and can rise into new eternal life because of the other's sacrifice.

The pattern God gave Moses for the construction of the tabernacle was to be followed precisely with absolutely no deviations; because this pattern was designed to be a foreshadow of the new covenant. There could be no variations or the symbolism God was creating to illustrate our redemption would be marred.

When Aaron's sons decided to get creative and invent an offering of their own, they were struck dead, and their charred corpses were carried out of the tabernacle, as a vivid example of what will happen when anyone deviates from the pattern

(Leviticus 10:1,2). This is a graphic illustration of the fact that there can be no salvation apart from the plan that God has ordained and designed Himself.

Any man-inspired theology that attempts to circumnavigate the cross, will have the same eternal ramifications as that which was bestowed upon Aaron's unfortunate offspring.

But now has He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises (verse 6).

The New Covenant is the "better" covenant. This covenant needs only one priest who lives eternally, which is a more excellent ministry, because it has no end. We now reside in a covenant of the "better promises" of eternal life and all the benefits of an intimate, abiding relationship with God.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place been sought for the second (verse 7).

Again, the first covenant was designed to be a temporary foreshadow and preparation for the New Covenant. The sacrifices that were made by the earthy priesthood could never accomplish what God had ordained for His people; the permanent removal of sin and the gift of eternal life.

In the next four verses which takes us to the conclusion of this chapter, the writer reiterates this point by directing his audience to the prophecy of this new covenant that was made by the prophet Jeremiah.

For finding fault with them, he says, "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:"(verse 8 from Jeremiah 31:31).

The Jews who reject Jesus as their Messiah, have completely negated this prophecy to their own detriment. There would be a new covenant that would replace the old covenant.

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord (verse 9 from Jeremiah 31:32).

The old covenant was not without fault because it was based on the efforts of the people to keep the law for their salvation. They proved over and over that keeping God's commandments perfectly was impossible for them to do. Remember that Adam and Eve only had to keep one commandment and they failed. The Hebrew people were required to keep ten with the same results, thus there had to be a change to something better.

The failures of the past were orchestrated to be examples that would lead God's people to the new covenant.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and I will write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: (verse 10 from Jeremiah 31:33).

While God's moral law never changes and is eternal, the method by which the law would be fulfilled would be changed. We are seeing a transformation from external law keeping for salvation to the internal reformation of the soul.

This is the point that the Apostle Paul was making when he spoke about our being made into a new creation (II Cor. 5:17). This transformation can only be accomplished when the Holy Spirit is received into the life of a believer through faith in the

death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus. The Holy Spirit, which is Jesus' Spirit, enters the believer and begins His transforming work.

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, His righteousness is imparted to the believer and salvation is no longer contingent on external law keeping or self-effort. We are justified by grace and not the law, which as Paul said, was a "schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:24), or instructor that would guide us until the new covenant was introduced.

However, when a believer is walking in the Spirit (Galatians 3:24,25), the good works of the law are fulfilled naturally as the believer yields his life to the inner workings of the Holy Spirit resulting in a "new creature." This is what it means to be born again; old things pass away and all things are made new.

And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest (verse 11 from Jeremiah 31:34).

This verse is a prophecy of the evangelism that would take place after Jesus' resurrection. The whole world would have this witness before Jesus returns at His second coming. As Jesus said, the Gospel would be preached to every nation (Matthew 24:14).

At that momentous occasion when Jesus returns supernaturally (Rev. 19), the entire world will know the Lord and also during the millennial reign of the Lord prophesied in Zechariah 14, and by the Apostle John (Rev.20:1-7).

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (verse 12 from Jeremiah 31:34).

This is a glorious prophecy of the grace that is bestowed

upon us through Messiah Jesus' sacrifice.

In the next and final verse of chapter eight, the author reiterates the fact that Jeremiah has prophesied of a New Covenant. –

In that he says, "a new covenant,"...

If there were any in the author's audience that were still clinging to, or would return to the old covenant for their justification, they are reminded that there is a New Covenant which has rendered the old covenant obsolete. –

....He (God) has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away (verse 13).

Something that decays is dead, and lifeless – not the law itself, but the justification by law keeping, the method that is being likened here to a rotting corpse. This system is vanishing away and this also contains a warning not to cleave to something that God is removing or you could vanish with it; for only under the New Covenant is eternal life obtained.

We are about to continue on to chapter nine, where the author will continue to detail for us the principles of this wondrous transformation from the old covenant to the peace and freedom of the new.

Chapter Nine

Chapter nine begins with a review of the ordinances of the first covenant. Again here we need to understand the importance of the typology that has been woven into God's word. The Old Testament was designed to prepare God's people for the coming Messiah. The symbolism that the author of Hebrews is exploring in this chapter is again referring us back to this pinnacle of foreshadowing found in the old covenant; which is the first covenant.

Then truly the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary (verse 1).

Ordinances and a physical sanctuary that are designed to represent the new covenant of inner reformation and an eternal sanctuary.

For there was a tabernacle made; the first; ...

The tabernacle was divided into two parts. The author lists

what was found in the first part which is called the sanctuary.

...wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread; which is called the sanctuary (verse 2).

The candlestick represents God's church, His people. This symbolism is carried over to the New Testament where we see in the book of Revelation that the church is again being referred to as a candlestick (Rev. 1:20).

The candlestick rests upon a table which represents God's support and provision for His people.

The showbread, which was only permitted for the priests to eat at that time, represents God's word, which is the sustenance for His people. It is given to the priests, and the priests in turn feed it to the people.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus feeding the five thousand (John 6:1-13). He takes the bread, gives it to His disciples, and they in turn distribute this representative of God's word to the people.

Ideally, the people are nourished and can grow into distributors of God's word themselves, as we are all called to be disciples.

And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the holiest of all; (verse 3).

The second tabernacle was separated from the first by a thick woven veil. It is said to have been about a foot thick. This tabernacle was called the Holy of Holies.

Which had the golden censer, and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid around it with gold, where inside was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; (verse 4).

Moses was instructed to build this ark after the people had failed to keep the commandments; breaking the first one by their construction and worship of the golden calf. In response to the people's disobedience, Moses broke the first set of commandments that God had engraved in stone, symbolizing the fact that if you break one commandment, you've broken them all. The "tables of the covenant" was the new copy of the laws that God gave to Moses after the first tablets were broken. These stone tablets of the law were placed into the ark along with an actual sample of the miraculous manna that God fed His people with in the wilderness. The manna in the golden vessels represents God's provision for the people.

Aaron's rod that budded is symbolic of the priesthood that God had chosen to represent His people. This rod was also placed in the ark along with the tablets and manna. The ark itself represented God's tangible presence among the people, which would eventually manifest in the Messiah.

Thus this typology is designed to represent the Messiah, who would come as a man, symbolized by the wooden box, and the gold that covered it represents His divinity, purity and anointing. Inside the box, those three things that represent God's word, His provision and His chosen priest also describe the Messiah; He is the word of God, (John 1:1) the manna, (John 6:31-35); God's provision for the people, and the high priest of God's choosing. Because the ark itself represented God's presence among the people in the Messiah, the second set of stone tablets that were placed into the ark, represents the word of God that is to be ministered under the covenant of grace.

And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly (verse 5)

The author had much to say about the mercy seat and all it

represents, but he wants to get on with the point he is making and does not want to distract from it.

Briefly, the mercy seat represents the place where the invisible God resides symbolically. He is seated above the ark which also represents the physical manifestation of the Messiah who is the image of God (Colossians 1:15), and in whom the invisible God of the universe would eventually inhabit. – *God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19)*. This is the main reason why the ark is viewed as God's presence among the people.

The Messiah, His divinity, and the intimate union that God would eventually make with His people through the Messiah, is foreshadowed in this mighty symbolism.

Now that these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God (verse 6).

This tabernacle was used on a regular basis to fulfill the various ordinances that were established by God through Moses, like the ritual for the cleansing of lepers.

But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: (verse 7).

The holy of holies, this second sacred inner chamber, which symbolically is designed to represent the presence of God, was only entered once a year by the high priest who made atonement for himself and the people. The blood of a slain animal was sprinkled on the altar with the golden censer. *For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul (Leviticus 17:11).*

If this process was not done with sincerity, the priest would be stricken dead. It is said that the priest would enter with a rope around him and bells on his robe,⁸ so if those outside heard the bells stop ringing or clatter to the floor, they could drag out the corpse with the rope.

Entering into the Lord's presence back then was not something that was permitted by everyone, only select priests who would be chosen to become the high priest. The high priest represented the future Messiah who was ordained to remove the sins of the people, even though at that time, this symbolism was not understood by the people.

God's presence remained separated from the outer court by a foot thick veil. Thus the characteristic of the first covenant was one of religious ritual and knowing God remotely, from a distance, symbolically separated from Him by that heavy thick curtain.

The Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing (verse 8).

While the first tabernacle was still in existence, only the high priest was permitted to enter into the presence of God that was symbolized by the second inner chamber, the Holy of Holies. The first tabernacle was where the ordinances were practiced. As long as those ordinances were in effect, not everyone could enter the holy of holies, because those ordinances were not capable of making the people holy enough to enter God's presence.

Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; (verse 9).

The services that took place in the first tabernacle were only a temporary preparation for what was to come. The entire set up was designed to illustrate the principle that God could not be approached by anyone other than a specially designated priest to make atonement for the people.

The carnal ordinances that were performed in the first tabernacle, again, could not make anyone pure enough to approach God. No religious service or ritual can purify anyone. The “conscience” or the inner man, could never be purified or made holy by outward works or religious ceremony. No matter what attempts for cleansing were made in the first tabernacle, still only one person was permitted once a year to symbolically enter “heaven” to represent everyone else, and that person, as previously mentioned, was designed to represent the coming and purpose of the Messiah.

Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation (verse 10).

This temporal illustration that the two tabernacles were orchestrated to represent is very powerful. We want to enter that inner sanctuary where God resides, but nothing we do in our own efforts will make us holy enough to enter heaven which the second tabernacle represents. No ritual will suffice, no discipline we can perform will make us worthy.

Everyone at that time had to wait for a “reformation;” a change that would sever that foot thick curtain and enable every one entrance into God’s holy presence.

But Messiah being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building (verse 11).

The “greater and more perfect tabernacle” is the tabernacle prophesied by Moses, in Exodus 15:17; a tabernacle not made by human hands or human effort, but one made exclusively by God. –

You shall bring them in and place them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, where you have made for You to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established (Exodus 15:17).

Jesus’ priesthood is of this invisible tabernacle; a better, everlasting sanctuary. Thus Jesus’ priesthood shines as a testimony of “good things to come.” His priesthood assures us of our placement in eternity which this new sanctuary represents.

The sanctuary not made by human effort is the plan of redemption that God ordained from the beginning of time.

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (verse 12).

The author here is reinforcing his readership in the principles of the old covenant typology. The physical tabernacle is a foreshadow of a heavenly sanctuary where our High Priest, Jesus, has entered the heavenly Holy of Holies through His once for all time sacrifice, the offering of Himself for our sins. He alone has purchased our redemption by His own blood; the sacrifice that has secured our eternal redemption.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh: (verse 13).

These temporary sacrifices were accepted for the forgiveness of sins by God at that time, because they were a foreshadow of the permanent removal of sin fulfilled by Jesus.

If these temporary sacrifices were accepted at that time...

How much more shall the blood of Messiah, who though the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (verse 14).

Because we now have been given something so much better in the New Covenant, what point is there in returning to a system of carnal ordinances and ritual, when our entrance into the holy place, God's presence, has been obtained for us by Jesus' sacrifice? In this, any form of legalism is refuted and labeled a "dead work."

And for this cause He is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (verse 15).

"And for this cause," meaning, for this reason. God's reason is to remove "religion" and replace it with a new and living relationship with Him through Jesus. Therefore Jesus is the mediator of this new covenant relationship. In other words, He alone makes it all possible through His death which has removed our sins and redeemed us to our Father God.

Those sins were defined by the law of the first testament, which as the Apostle Paul taught, was the schoolmaster that brought us to Jesus, and made us aware of our own unrighteousness.

Because no one can be justified by legalistic law keeping, only Jesus makes it possible for us to receive eternal life which

is our eternal inheritance.

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator (verse 16).

Here the author is comparing the New Testament to a will. In order for the recipients of the will to receive the inheritance, there must be a death.

For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator lives (verse 17).

Any will cannot be probated until the one who made the will is deceased. In other words, the New Covenant that carries with it the promise of everlasting life, could not be probated so to speak, until the time of Messiah's death which would instigate the change, (the reformation of verse ten), which transitions us into the New Covenant.

Whereupon neither (even) the first testament was (has not been) dedicated without blood (verse 18).

The foreshadow of the New Covenant, was the old covenant, that was in effect as well by the shedding of blood that was symbolic of the Messiah's sacrifice.

For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, (verse 19).

The author now returns us to one of the most significant scenes of Messianic typology in the Bible. Here we see Moses giving the law, God's holy standard, to the people.

We know from the example given to us in the Scriptures that Israel failed as a people to keep that holy standard. In this example, the book of the law and the people are sprinkled with blood and water. The water is symbolic of the Holy Spirit which is the conduit through which the blood of the sacrifice is applied to the Word of God and the people. We see the blood unifying or linking the people to God's word. This symbolism shows us that it is the blood that enables the righteousness of God's law to be imparted to the people. The sacrifice of Jesus who is the word of God (John 1:1), enables the righteousness of the law to be imparted to us.

The blood is also applied with hyssop, a healing herb. This represents the forgiveness and healing that comes from the sacrifice of the bloodied Lamb of God, symbolized by the scarlet wool through which the blood is applied.

Saying, "This is the blood of the testament which God has enjoined to you" (verse 20).

This is a quote from Exodus 24:8, where this event takes place. The blood of this testament is again the foreshadow of Jesus' shed blood in the New Testament.

Moreover he sprinkled with blood the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry (verse 21).

Everything that God established relating to the tabernacle services is sprinkled with blood. The tabernacle itself is symbolic of God's provision for the remission of sin through sacrifice.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission (verse 22).

The author here is referring to Leviticus 17:11. – *For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul.*

God has never changed this requirement for the forgiveness of sin.

Let's take this opportunity to explore the pattern that God has established in His word that relates to this principle.

The first sacrifice recorded in the Scriptures occurs in Genesis, chapter three. Adam and Eve had disobeyed God. They recognized that they had lost their spiritual covering and realized that they were naked. They made coverings for themselves from leaves, leaves that would eventually dry up and wither away, exposing their nakedness all over again. The prophet Isaiah must have had this incident in mind when he said, *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away"* (Isaiah 64:6).

Their frail efforts to cover their sin was totally in vain. Then we see God, making clothes of skins for them from the first sacrificed animal for this purpose (Genesis 3:21). Only God can cover our sins, through a sacrifice that He has ordained. This incident instigates the plan of salvation fulfilled through Messiah Jesus. The serpent that beguiled Eve was told that this Messiah, would bruise his head, and the serpent would bruise Messiah's heel (Genesis 3:15). This is a reference to the Lord's sacrifice.

In this entire scenario we see a beautiful portrayal of the Lord's grace. We can't cover ourselves, or remove our sins by any act that we can perform. Our salvation is procured totally by an act of God through a sacrifice that has been instigated by Him.

It's no wonder that the tabernacle that symbolizes the sacrifice for sins, is covered by animal skins, reminiscent of this first sacrifice and God's covering Adam and Eve's nakedness in the soft, warm skins of forgiveness. They still had to live with the consequences of their disobedience and they were expelled from the garden. We also must live with the results of what transpires when we violate God's word.

We continue on to witness blood from a sacrifice being put on the doorposts of the houses of the Israelites in order to protect them from the plague of death upon the Egyptian's firstborn. Likewise, Jesus' sacrifice protects us from the curse of death that falls on all those who refuse to put the blood of His sacrifice upon their hearts by faith.

The Jews were shown at that time the significance of blood sacrifice for their safety and protection. This provision was once again instigated in the tabernacle sacrifices that were designed to be a "pattern" of a better provision through the Messiah.

It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these (verse 23).

The tabernacle and its services were a physical pattern of the heavenly tabernacle, and the physical is purified by the blood; which again is symbolic of the better sacrifice of Jesus' blood.

For Messiah is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: (verse 24).

The physical tabernacle that was considered to be a "figure of the true," is no longer in existence. It was designed to be a

foreshadow or a type of its parallel in heaven which is eternal.

The holy place, or the inner court, is again figurative of heaven. Messiah has entered that holy place where He sits at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us.

Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entered into the holy place every year with the blood of others; (verse 25).

Jesus did not have to offer Himself more than once as did the high priest who had to enter the tabernacle's holy of holies once every year to offer the blood of animals to make atonement for the people. Because this was designed by God to be symbolic of the Messiah's one time sacrifice, it needed to be continued until Messiah came.

For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: ...

If the tabernacle services were not merely a foreshadow, then Jesus would have had to have been continually sacrificed from the beginning of the world, because blood atonement was the only way a soul could be forgiven.

Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), because God counted the Lord's future physical death the actual basis for atonement from the beginning of time. It is upon the merits of Jesus' sacrifice in the future, that God received anyone who truly repented, even before the tabernacle was constructed.

... but now once in the end of the world He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (verse 26).

Jesus' ministry on earth lasted a mere three and one half

years. Forty years after His death and resurrection from the dead, the temple where the animal sacrifices were made, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

Jesus foretold of this destruction in His prophecy in Luke 19: 43, 44. Here He states the reason why the Jews had rejected their Messiah; Jerusalem was destroyed because they did not know "the time of their visitation."

For the days shall come upon you, that your enemies shall cast a trench about you, and compass you round, and keep you in on every side,

And shall lay you even with the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another; because you knew not the time of your visitation.

The final sacrifice for sins had been made. There was no longer any reason for the temple sacrifices to continue. Jesus physically put an end to a system that was only meant to prepare the people for the Lord's ultimate sacrifice.

The epistle to the Hebrews was written before the temple services were ended. Again, the purpose of the epistle was to keep the Jewish believers from returning to a system that God no longer recognized, and would soon be destroyed.

Because the sacrifices could only be made within the temple, with its destruction the atonement for sins could no longer be made. Now the provision for the forgiveness of sins can only be appropriated through faith in the Messiah.

And as it is appointed to men once to die, but after this the judgment: (verse 27).

Because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), no man can be righteous enough to be accepted by a holy God; thus the necessity for obedience to

God's method of preparing our souls before Him at the last judgment.

So Messiah was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation (verse 28).

Because of Jesus, we have the gift of eternal life, and because of this great gift, we can live our lives in hope, looking forward to the time when Jesus returns.

He comes for us first individually when we make the transformation out of our bodies and into His waiting arms. And all those who are alive at the end of this age, will be gathered by His angels at His second coming (Matthew 24:31).

It should be our goal and desire as Christians, people in whom the spirit of Jesus resides, to bring as many as we can with us into the hope so exquisitely orchestrated through the centuries to be our deliverance from the bondage of fear and death.

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish,
but have everlasting life.
For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world;
But that the world through Him might be saved.
John 3:16,17*

Chapter Ten

The tenth chapter of the book of Hebrews is a summary of the main theme of the previous three chapters.

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of those things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereof perfect (verse 1).

The law as it was revealed in the tabernacle sacrifices, was designed to be a foreshadow or a preparation for its fulfillment in the new covenant - "the good things to come." In the old covenant, the sacrifices served as a foreshadow of Jesus' sacrifice. They were never intended to accomplish what Jesus' sacrifice was ordained to achieve for the people. Therefore the previous animal sacrifices could never remove the sins of the people, they were only designed to prepare the people, or condition them to the principle that a sacrifice will have to be made in order to have their sins forgiven.

For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins (verse 2).

If the sacrifices made in the tabernacle were a permanent solution for the removal of sin, then the sacrifices would not have had to be continued; but the people continually came to offer sacrifices for sin because their consciences told them that they were still sinful. The presence of sin was still operational in their lives.

But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year (verse 3).

Every year the high priest had to offer sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the people; continually reminding them of the fact that their sins were never completely removed. The next verse tells us why.

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins (verse 4).

The blood of those animals could not remove sin, because only the Messiah was ordained for this purpose.

Wherefore when He comes into the world, He says, "Sacrifice and offering You would not, but a body You (God), have prepared Me:" (verse 5).

Here the author is quoting from Psalm 40:68. In this Messianic prophecy, the Messiah is speaking to God the Father. "You did not want sacrifice and offering."

The ritualized sacrifices and offerings of the tabernacle services were never intended to be the final solution for the

remission of sins.

“But You prepared a body for Me.” The body that was to be the final sacrifice, designed to take the place forever of the blood of bulls and goats, was birthed through the Virgin Mary, to house the Spirit and Soul of the Messiah, who “came down from heaven.” -

For I came down from heaven (John 6:38).

I am the living bread which came down from heaven (John 6:51).

What and if you shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before? (John 6:62).

Jesus came down from heaven and was born to be the final sacrifice for our sins.

In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have had no pleasure (Verse 6).

The constant slaughter of animals for the forgiveness of sin was not something God took pleasure in. The sacrifice of an animal was meant to implant within the hearts of the people, some measure of responsibility for the death of that animal. Because of our sin and rebellion against God, something has to die.

We return again to Eden where the first sacrifice was instigated. Adam and Eve’s nakedness would be covered by an act of God as an animal was slain before their eyes. The consequences of their disobedience was graphically illustrated for them and they realized that death had been instigated into creation as the result of their refusal to obey God’s commandment.

God lovingly wrapped them with the warmth of that sacrifice. This entire incident, which takes place in the third chapter of Genesis, has been designed to be another foreshadow of God’s plan for the redemption of the human

race from death. It would be a sacrifice that God would make on humanities' behalf that would cover our sins.

Adam and Eve's frail attempts to cover themselves with leaves that would dry up and blow away, shows us that it is impossible for man to cover or remove their sins. It must be accomplished by an act of God.

Then said I, "Lo I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me,) to do Your will, O God" (verse 7).

The Messiah comes as prophesied "in the volume of the book." Jesus fulfilled those prophecies concerning His coming, death and resurrection. The testimony in God's word regarding the Messiah's purpose is clear and unmistakable. Jesus shows us that the Old Testament scriptures record His mission perfectly, and He used them to explain who He is from "Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets" to the travelers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27).

Let's take a moment to consider the fact that there are over three hundred prophecies concerning the Messiah interwoven throughout the Old Testament. Some of them are repetitions of the same prophecy. For example, the prophecy concerning Jesus being from the line of David is repeated about fourteen times. The prophecy that tells us that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem is repeated five times. The number of non-repeating distinct prophecies is about one hundred and ninety.

M.B. Bleecker was a brilliant engineer. He invented a helicopter prototype and the ram jet engine. He was also a Christian who took one hundred and fifty of the remarkable prophecies that Jesus fulfilled and calculated the odds of His fulfilling those prophecies. The odds of one man fulfilling one hundred and fifty prophecies in one lifetime are one in -

1,039,851,278,722,473,896,502,516,467,047,788,121,009,514,090,594,304.

The odds of Jesus fulfilling just eight of them in His lifetime are one in - 100, 000, 000,000,000,000.⁹

God, The Ultimate Mathematician, has given us the numbers that point the way to the miracle of the Messiah Jesus.

Getting back to the author's train of thought, he continues to show us the distinction between the animal sacrifices and the Messiah's sacrifice.

Above when He said, Sacrifice and burnt offerings and offering for sin You would not, neither had pleasure therein: which are offered by the law; (verse 8).

The author here is relating to us that the entire system of animal sacrifice was not pleasing to God because those sacrifices were done under the law, which means that the whole system of sacrifice as it was practiced in the tabernacle services was done by man's self-effort. Compare this to what was previously mentioned in the Eden scenario, where it was shown to us that it was God who made the sacrifice for Adam and Eve, not the other way around.

Then said He (Messiah) "Lo, I come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first, that He may establish the second (verse 9).

Messiah comes to fulfil the foreshadow that was made in Eden. He is the sacrifice that God makes to cover His children with the atonement and the promise of eternal life it provides.

Jesus came to do the Father's will. "Not My will but Thine be done," (Luke 22:42), setting an example for all of us of selflessness for the sake of others.

Through Messiah's final offering for sin, the old covenant is

removed and the New is instigated, thus making all man-offered sacrifices obsolete.

By the which will... (by Jesus' submission to the Father's will on our behalf)...We are sanctified through the body of Jesus Messiah, once for all (verse 10).

"It is finished!" (John 19:30) Jesus cried from the horrific perch of His cross, putting an end to the previous system of multiple sacrifices by one final and complete act of Divine sacrificial love.

And every priest stands daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: (verse 11).

Under the old imperfect system, sacrifices were continuous as we have been shown. Man's own efforts will never be sufficient to remove sin; and as we have seen in the example provided by Adam and Eve's failure in Eden, sins can only be covered by an act of God.

But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God (verse 12).

Jesus' amazing sacrifice of selfless love, exalted our Lord to the highest position at the right hand of God.

From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool (verse 13).

The author is quoting from another Messianic Psalm. –

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies Your footstool" (Psalm 110:1).

Jesus has fulfilled this prophecy, and while it is a confirmation of the Lord's victory, it also contains a dire warning to all those who oppose the Gospel. The servants of the Messiah Jesus will also share in His exaltation and are promised a place with Him in His Father's throne (Acts 2:30, John 14:3, Rev. 3:21).

The enemies of Jesus are the enemies of His people, and as His people share in His positioning with the Father, their enemies as well will be included upon that footstool beneath the Messiah's feet.

For by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified (verse 14).

Right after Jesus' resurrection, He breathed upon His disciples His Holy Spirit (John 20:22), sanctifying them and anointing them with His Holy Spirit which is "The Spirit of the Father" (Matthew 10:20).

Because Jesus took our sins upon Himself on the cross and removed them, He thus enabled us to receive the Holy Spirit when we repent and believe. We now have the Spirit of eternal life and we are sanctified through the Holy Spirit which is only made available to us through the atonement. No one can have eternal life without the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is the "Eternal Spirit" (Hebrews 9:14) of the Father which is the Spirit of eternal life.

In order for us to understand this principle, let's return again to Eden. We watch as God forms Adam out of the earth, then gives him life by "the breath" (Genesis 2:7). In the Hebrew the word "breath" is neshamah. The word for God's Holy Spirit is Ruach. Adam was not given life by the Holy Spirit, although the Spirit is the agency through which Adam was formed. If Adam's life force was the Holy Spirit, then He would be divine.

The Apostle Paul recognized the distinction between Jesus' and Adam's life force. –

And so it is written, the first Adam was made a living soul. The last Adam was made a quickening (Greek, zoopoieo- life giving) Spirit (I Corinthians 15:45).

For as the Father has life in Himself: so He has given to the Son to have life in Himself (John 5:26).

Because humans were created to live on earth, the neshamah was not designed to transport the soul into heaven after the death of the body. When sin entered creation and humans began to die, God provided the means through Jesus to enable our souls to live in God's heavenly domain.

Through faith in the atonement, the Holy Spirit of eternal life enters the believer, overriding the neshamah. Thus when a believer dies, the soul that resides in the Spirit's embrace, can rise with it into God's holy presence.

This assurance of our salvation is only possible first through Jesus' removal of our sins by His sacrifice, and secondly through the union of the soul with God's Spirit.

The soul that has been cleansed and unified with the Holy Spirit, is assured of salvation "forever" as long as the believer remains in the faith and does not block himself from receiving God's forgiveness by harbouring perpetual unforgiveness towards anyone (Matthew 6:14,15).

Again, the new covenant that guarantees us this salvation, has been foretold in the Old Testament scriptures.

Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us: for after that He had said before, (verse 15).

The Holy Spirit is the vehicle through which God speaks to His prophets. Whatever the Spirit hears, that is what the Spirit speaks (John 16:13).

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, "I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;" (verse 16).

The author here is quoting from the prophecy in Jeremiah 31: 33-34.

Through the new union with the Holy Spirit that is now indwelling the believer, the Spirit communicates God's word directly into the heart and mind. The intimate fellowship with God causes the believer to naturally want to do the things that please the Lord. Therefore a true believer cannot wilfully continue in deliberate sin as the Apostle John shows us in I John 3:9. – *Whoever is born of God (born again) does not commit sin; for His seed remains in him: and he cannot sin,* (original Greek – continually practice) *because he is born of God.* The "seed" which is the word of God is in him serving as a check upon sinful behaviour. This does not mean that a believer will never sin, but a true believer does not wilfully and deliberately continuously practice sin.

It is here we have to stop and remind ourselves that we are saved by grace alone, and in turn that grace works within the believer to cause him to walk in the things that God has ordained for us to follow in His word.

The Apostle Paul explains it perfectly. –

For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

God's word, His law, always existed and before the law was "written in stone" and presented by Moses to the

Israelites, God gave His word orally to Abraham (Genesis 18:19).

Abraham is a similitude of the believer that is saved by grace. – *Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Galatians 3:6 from Genesis 15:6, see also Romans 4:3,9,22).*

God gave His standard for conduct to Abraham because He knew faithful Abraham would follow the Lord and obediently teach these things to his children. Abraham was justified by faith and obeyed God's word for his welfare and the welfare of his family.

We have been shown in this study that no one can be justified by keeping the law, we are justified by faith in Jesus alone. The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Jesus (Galatians 3:24), where the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit works within the believer to conform us to Jesus' image which is a soul of holy character and selflessness.

God is interested in the total transformation of the soul into a completely new creation (II Corinthians 5:17). This is something that outward law keeping can never accomplish and thus we see the beauty and purpose of this new covenant.

The Holy Spirit works within us to help us keep from yielding to the whims and sins of our old natures, gradually reforming us into the image of our Lord.

The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that obedience to the ordinances does nothing to accomplish God's purposes in the life of a believer in Messiah Jesus. – *But now, after that you have known of God, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereby you desire again to be in bondage? (Because the ordinances were nailed to the cross - Colossians 2:4). You observe days and months, and times and years (Galatians 4:9,10).*

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days:

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Messiah (Colossians 2:16,17).

And you are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:10).

The true circumcision as we are told, is the removing of the old life, *"Putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of the Messiah"* (Colossians 2:11).

We have been raised to a new life in Jesus where the sins of the flesh are left behind in the waters of baptism. These waters represent the commitment that we make to remain in the faith that saves us. *"If we deny Him, He will deny us"* (I Timothy 2:12, Matthew 10:32,33).

It is actually easier for some to rely on outward law keeping or legalism, rather than allowing the Lord to take full control of their lives for their inward transformation. This is why there is so much religiosity and pharisaism in the church, rather than humble yielding to the inner workings of God's Holy Spirit. Some people are afraid of dying to self and intimacy with the Lord, and sadly like the Pharisees, they will sometimes persecute those who are seeking to walk with the Lord on a deeper level. Let us make sure we are not of that pharisaical camp that Jesus rebuked so severely (Matthew 23).

While the ordinances have been removed, especially all those that were related to the tabernacle services, the moral law remains as our guide. We can study and see how the apostles utilized the *"Holy Scriptures"* (II Timothy 3:15), the Old Testament, and follow their example; always keeping in mind that following those things that God has ordained for our welfare and the welfare of others, is not for our justification.

Just as a father instructs His children in good behaviour for their wellbeing, we read God's word as obedient children so we may avoid the harm sin can inflict upon our lives, and the lives of others.

The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy to – *Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (I Timothy 2:15).*

But continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them,

And that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Messiah Jesus (II Timothy 3:14,15).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, (mature), thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Timothy 3:16,17).

Keeping in mind that the only scriptures the apostles had at that time were Old Testament, we use them as we are instructed by Paul, not for our justification, but as a guide for our growth into spiritual maturity and the reinforcement of our Christian faith.

Returning to the writer's discourse, we read;

And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (verse 17).

We are shown in this verse that under the prophesied New Covenant, our sins and iniquities will no longer be remembered.

Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin (verse 18).

This succinctly summarizes the principle the writer has been trying to convey. Because our sin has been removed through Jesus' final sacrifice, animal sacrifice is no longer required.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest

(holy of holies) *by the blood of Jesus, (verse 19).*

When Jesus was crucified, the historical record reveals that an earthquake tore the curtain that separated the holy of holies from the outer court (Matthew 27:51). That massive act of God, was orchestrated to show us that the barriers to that holy place have been removed by Messiah's sacrifice. We now have been given access to the holy of holies, which symbolizes heaven and God's presence, or should I say, the heaven of God's presence.

We can enter with boldness, because it was God's intention all along to make entrance into His realm possible for everyone who believes, not just a few high priests who were only meant to be representatives of our one and only high priest, the Lord Jesus.

Jesus' sacrifice, His blood shed for us, is the only means through which this access to God is made.

We enter God's presence –

By a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; (verse 20).

Here the author likens Jesus' torn body to the severed veil that blocked our entrance to the holy of holies. This "New and Living Way" renders all the previous foreshadows of this event exquisitely fulfilled.

And having a high priest over the house of God; (verse 21).

Jesus is the only priest we need, who is the head of His church (Ephesians 1:22).

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies

washed with pure water (verse 22).

The author is using here the Old Testament imagery of the ordinances of the priesthood that was required before entering the presence of the Lord. The “sprinkling” is a reference to the blood that was used to sanctify the objects in the tabernacle. That blood is now Messiah’s blood, sprinkled upon our hearts, cleansing us from guilt and the sins of our past life.

We are washed by the waters of baptism that was foreshadowed by the ceremonial washings that cleansed the priests.

We “draw near to God through the full assurance of our faith” because our faith is assured through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the testimony of the previous scriptures that verify the reality of our faith, and helps to shepherd us into a close relationship with our beloved heavenly Father.

For the remainder of the chapter, the author returns to the basic theme of the book which is an exhortation to hold onto faith. –

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;) (verse 23).

As God is faithful to us, so shall we be faithful to Him, because His promises to us are true.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: (verse 24).

The fruit of a genuine Christian faith is love and good works. These things are evidence of a true, living faith, because faith without works is “dead” (James 2:17).

The author is showing us what our purpose should be if we

are truly serving the Lord. And we cannot exhort one another to do the things we should as believers unless we are fellowshiping with each other.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching (verse 25).

It's important to encourage each other in our faith, especially "as we see the day approaching." The author is referring to the time at the end of days that precedes Jesus' return. This will be a time of tribulation and increased persecution of the church.

We are shown that at this time there will be a great falling away; the prophesied apostasy (II Thessalonians 2:3).

When we examine the book of Revelation that chronicles these days, we can understand the importance of sound Christian fellowship. The encouragement and support of other Christians is a vital safeguard against apostasy and false doctrine. Believers need to be exhorted to cleave to sound doctrine and avoid any attempts to discredit God's word as the final authority for what we believe.

Those who are found faithfully cleaving to God's word, like the Philadelphian remnant described in Revelation's chapter three, are promised to be protected from the hour of temptation, or apostasy, which will in turn protect them from the great tribulation to come (Revelation 3:8-10).

Christians need to be assured that what we have received from our original founding apostolic Fathers, is to be followed for our safety and spiritual protection. They are the jewels of the foundation of the New Jerusalem, which is the Bride of Christ (Revelation 21:2,14). Without them, we have no church and no foundation. Therefore to deviate from the original doctrines that they established is to succumb to the apostasy

that will ultimately lead to destruction.

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins (verse 26).

The author is returning us to his discourse in chapter six. For those who have had full knowledge of the truth and fall away to embrace another theology, there can be no other sacrifice that can save them after Jesus. He has been crucified once for our sins and cannot be crucified again for someone who has abandoned the faith.

The faith is abandoned as well through compromise. Those who cleave to Christianity, and at the same time embrace other religions as valid have denied the atonement and their salvation.

But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation (A fierceness of fire) which shall devour the adversaries (verse 27).

Those who abandon the faith are adversaries of the faith. We are shown here again, that there are consequences for sin. This teaching is diminished or abandoned by apostate teachers, especially in these latter days. The subtle greying of the distinction between the pure white truth of the Gospel and the obvious blackness of demonic lies, will and is being skilfully introduced into our churches for the purpose of gathering the spiritually unaware into the embrace of the last one world religion that accepts all religions as legitimate. This blasphemy degenerates Jesus to one of many prophets and reduces the Christian faith to just another ideology on the same level with all others. This heresy clearly has to be vehemently rejected and exposed by genuine Christians who have been set apart for this purpose. Never be afraid to join

yourself to their company.

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses (verse 28).

The author is using this example from Deuteronomy 17:6, to emphasize the point he has made in the previous verse. If the punishment of death was the consequence of abandoning the law, God's word, which contained the foreshadows of the New Covenant, then –

Of how much sorer punishment do you suppose, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing and has done despite to the Spirit of Grace? (verse 29).

Those who abandon the Gospel or compromise it, will receive a much “sorer punishment” which is the loss of eternal life.

For we know Him that has said, “Vengeance belongs to Me, I will recompense, says the Lord.” And again, The Lord shall judge His people (verse 30, from Deuteronomy 32:35,36).

Every believer who has been resurrected from the dead, and those who are alive at the second coming, must stand before Jesus to be judged (Matthew 25:31-46). Everyone else will be resurrected to stand before God at the end of all days (Revelation 20:11,12). Those who have rejected His plan of salvation for mankind through the Messiah Jesus, will then receive the consequences for their deliberate rebellion against the will of the Almighty.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God (verse

31).

The latter day's apostasy seeks to eradicate the necessity for a healthy fear of God. This is one reason why Jesus said that before His return the spiritual climate will be "as in the days of Noah." The fear of God, and even belief that there is a God, will be eliminated by most of the population, resulting in unrestrained immorality and violence.

Without a restraining fear of God, humanity collapses into its worse state. Those who abandon their Christian faith will be classified with those who have no use for God and will share in their judgment in the hands of the Living God.

The author has again reminded all of us of the consequences of rejecting the atonement, the Gospel of Jesus; the one and only Messiah ordained from the foundation of the world.

I am very grateful that this writer of Hebrews had the courage and the love to tell the truth. I pray today, that more pastors and teachers will wake up to the reality of these warnings and have the same love for God's people, and be courageous enough to teach what the word actually says, and not produce a watered down version of it in order to capitulate to itching ears (II Timothy 4:3).

The author has just reinforced his audience of the consequences of abandoning their faith. Now for the remainder of his epistle, he changes pace. He has sufficiently covered the subject of the tabernacle and its purpose, the unique priesthood of Jesus and the typology that verifies the Gospel. Now he turns his attention to encouragement and general Christian conduct. He wants his readership again to know that after his previous warning, they are not of those who abandon their faith.

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you

were illuminated, (enlightened) you endured a great fight of afflictions; (sufferings) (verse 32).

These Jews he is addressing had already experienced persecution for leaving Judaism to follow Jesus. They refused to abandon Him at that time, even when they were enduring tremendous pressure to deny Him.

Partly while you were made a gazing stock (to be exposed as a spectacle, object of ridicule) both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, while you become companions of them that were so used (verse 33).

They not only were persecuted for their faith, they also suffered because they were not afraid to join themselves and support the author when he was enduring persecution for preaching the Gospel.

For you had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and enduring substance (verse 34).

This sounds like something the Apostle Paul would write, although he was not the only apostle undergoing “bonds” at that time. Whoever it was, those he is addressing had stood with him at great personal loss.

It’s important to note that faithfulness to the Lord should also result in faithfulness to other true believers in their affliction. It’s honourable to defend our brethren when they are under attack for their faith, whether it is in a schoolyard or a jungle.

These Hebrew believers recognized that this life is temporal, what they have been given in Messiah Jesus is eternal, and whatever losses we must endure in order to

maintain our faith is worth the suffering.

Knowing that even greater persecution lies ahead for his readers, he exhorts them again to: -

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of reward (verse 35).

Casting away our faith has disastrous consequences, holding onto our faith gains us the reward of faith - eternal life and a heavenly kingdom.

Picture a mountain climber hauling his way up a sheer cliff. He is holding onto a rope that is his only lifeline. Now what if that climber suddenly decides he doesn't need that rope anymore and lets go of it? He will fall to his death. That's exactly what will happen to us if we decide we don't need to believe the Gospel as it was "delivered to the saints" (Jude verse 3).

For you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise (verse 36).

We must endure to the end which is the will of God, and the result of that endurance is the reward of our eternal inheritance as sons and daughters of God.

For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry (verse 37).

He is quoting from Habakkuk 2:3. While this is a reference to the second coming, Jesus returns for us when our souls are released from the cocoon of our bodies. He will come, and believers can rest in this assurance and delight in this hope.

Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, My

soul shall have no pleasure in Him (verse 38).

The author seems to be quoting from Habakkuk 2:4, but it is almost as if the Lord here is speaking prophetically through him to reinforce us in “His will” as previously written in verse thirty-six.

The just will live by faith, and remain in it until the Lord comes. This faithfulness gives God pleasure, and it should be the desire of any believer to please God in this way.

We live our daily lives as if we can see what is unseen. The reality of the invisible God is our treasure.

But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (verse 39).

Again, the outcome of holding onto our faith is eternal life. The rejection of the Gospel results in “perdition” – hell, which is an existence void of the presence of God, who is all love, joy peace and every good thing.

The thought of spending eternity in the dark abyss of fiery torment and regret, should cause us to hold onto our faith even more closely; and thus that is what these warnings have been written to cause us to do - if we are wise and listening.

The author is showing us the importance of faith and in the next chapter, he gives us a brilliant exhortation to follow the examples of those who walked in a God-pleasing, victorious faith.

Chapter Eleven

At the conclusion of the previous chapter, we were exhorted to “believe,” and we were encouraged to see that the just lives by faith. This serves as an introduction to the following chapter eleven. Here the author focuses on the subject of faith. Everything that he has discussed so far is substantiated and verified by faith.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (verse 1).

Faith gives “substance,” a spiritual tangibility to the unseen reality. Faith verifies the hope of our belief. Therefore to believers, our faith is all the evidence we need of the reality of God, the truth of the testimony of His words to us and the Gospel.

For by it the elders obtained a good report (verse 2).

If you want to get a good report card from God, treasure

your faith. The elders retained their faith through every circumstance and because of their faithfulness, their testimonies were recorded for our example. Their faith was pleasing to God, and He has honoured them in this way. Likewise, all of us who hold onto our faith no matter what we must endure to keep it, will be honoured by our God, who is recording our testimonies in heaven.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (verse 3).

The first verse of Genesis launches us into the realm of faith. We believe through our faith, that God's word is true. Therefore the account of creation's beginning is substantiated by our faith. The intangible reality of God's spoken word, the unseen power, produced a dimension that could be seen with our eyes.

The reality of our world, is the evidence of God's power of creation and we rejoice in it.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it being dead yet speaks (verse 4 from Genesis 4:3-5).

Abel's gift was accepted by God because Abel offered a sheep from his flock, which represented the sacrifice that covered his parents in Eden. That sacrifice was orchestrated to represent Jesus' sacrifice. Therefore in the typology we see a picture of the Gospel. The author sees the record of Abel's voice crying out from the ground after his murder (Genesis 4:10), as a representative of the life after death we receive when we offer God our faith in the Lamb of God as an

offering for our sins that results in everlasting life.

Cain offered the fruits of his own labour from ground that God had cursed (Genesis 3:17). This represents the spiritual principle that our own works cannot save us.

Just as the leaves Adam and Eve made represented their vain attempts to try and cover their sins, so Cain's offering symbolized the same effort to justify himself before God in order to be accepted by Him.

The only way anyone can be accepted by God is to receive the plan of redemption for mankind that He has ordained, instigated by the first sacrifice in Eden that covered the sin of our first parents. Therefore Cain's offering had to be rejected and Abel's received, thus adding another portrait of redemption fulfilled by the Messiah Jesus.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God (verse 5 from Genesis 5:22-24).

Enoch's faith produced a relationship with God that caused him to "walk with God."

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him (Genesis 5: 24).

Enoch walked with God which means he followed God in everything he did. God's ways were his ways.

Enoch's relationship with God mirrors those believers who follow Jesus the same way. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

Believers who follow God like Enoch, are also translated into eternal life which is symbolized by Enoch's translation.

In another one of the worst sermons I ever heard, the errant

pastor made this statement: "There isn't anything you can do to please God." He wasn't referring to a works verses grace scenario, he meant that nothing we do in this life will please God. Obviously this pastor never read Enoch's testimony. When we direct our minds to God's word and make a conscious effort to do the things that please Him following Jesus' example (John 8:29), we please Him and He blesses us.

This has nothing to do with our salvation which is already a done deal through Jesus' sacrifice, but it has everything to do with a child who enjoys pleasing his Father because he loves Him. God rewards these children with the joys of a close relationship with Him.

I believe that Enoch represents the spiritual condition of the Philadelphian believers described in the book of Revelation's third chapter (Rev. 3:7-12). These Christians are promised to be kept from the hour of temptation (apostasy), which in turn keeps them from the hour of His judgment (Rev. 14:7), which is the great tribulation. No matter how God chooses to provide that protection, whether by a sudden airlift into the sky, or by some other means, the point is that it behoves us to follow Enoch's example and walk in the steps of our Lord where ever He leads us. And He will always lead us away from sin and into service to others.

It is faith and love that motivates those footsteps and God gives us the strength and ability to remain on the path of obedience which results in a life that is pleasing to our heavenly Father.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (verse 6).

First our faith directs us to believe that "God is." He exists in the realm of the invisible and those who embrace Him by

faith can experience the reality of His presence in their lives. He has promised to reward those who “diligently seek Him.” And the greatest reward is to find and know Him. “*I am your shield, and your exceedingly great reward*” (Genesis 15:1).

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (verse 7).

Noah’s faith enabled him to have a close relationship with God that included the ability to commune with God and hear His voice. Because of this relationship that is produced by faith, and also through Noah’s diligent seeking, that relationship, like that of Enoch, caused Noah to walk with God in righteousness. Noah’s righteous faithfulness separated him from the sins and apostasy of the people of the land. Thus he could hear God call him and warn him of the Lord’s coming judgment on the wicked.

The people in Noah’s community must have thought that he was crazy building a massive ship in the middle of a sea of dry land, miles from any ocean. He must have been the brunt of much ridicule, just as many Christians are today when they share the Gospel.

In the typology represented by Noah’s story, the ark is symbolic of the Messiah Jesus and the provision and safety we have in Him.

When the first waters of God’s judgment arrived, the rain that eliminated the wicked was actually a blessing to Noah and his family which caused them to come to rest on higher ground (Genesis 8:4). The mountain the ark was placed upon, symbolized a location of intimacy with God.

As Noah floated above the cursed ground, there was nothing he could do but rest in the ark as it had no rudder. He

could not control where the boat was going, he had to trust that God was leading him in the right direction. Just as we trust in Jesus for our salvation, we can trust Him to lead us to that higher place of eternal life in Him.

As Noah was nearing the end of his appointed time in the ark, he released a raven and a dove to see if they could find land. The waters had not yet abated, but the raven did not return and “went to and fro” until the waters had dried up (Genesis 8:7). The dove, however, did return to the ark to rest when it couldn’t find land (Genesis 8:9). This little parable illustrates the contrast between those who seek to find their own salvation apart from the rest we find in Jesus. The raven symbolizes those who seek salvation from their own vain, continuously flapping self-effort, in contrast to the dove who wisely returned to rest in the safety of the ark, which also represents the safety of resting in the Messiah Jesus.

We proceed to yet another illustration of faith found in the story of Abraham.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing where he went (verse 8 from Genesis 12:1).

Abraham also had a close relationship with God that enabled him to hear the Lord for direction. Because God was to Abraham more real than what his eyes could behold in this realm, he obeyed God and left the security of the familiar, trusting God all the way.

Abraham allowed himself to be detached from the things of this life. He trusted in the security of God’s direction for his life; knowing that by believing in His promises, and obeying the Lord, he would be blessed in a new land.

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange

country, dwelling in tabernacles (tents) with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise (verse 9).

Abraham was willing through his faith, to leave his homeland to wander in tents, and be moved by God from place to place. God had a plan and a purpose for Abraham's journey, although it was hidden from Abraham. God knew He could trust him to follow wherever He chose to lead him. Likewise, believers need the same faith to follow God, even when He directs us to leave the comfortable and the familiar.

The next verse explains why Abraham could live in a completely different manner than what he had been used to.

For he looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God (verse 10).

Abraham's mind was fixed on God and he saw by faith the reality of another realm. This new world of God's domain was Abraham's goal. Therefore he could detach himself from the tangible and be led by the intangible, which to him was more real than what he could see with his mortal eyes.

He looked "for a city," a new spiritual dwelling place, a city with "foundations." The author here is letting us know that Abraham had been shown what was also shown to the apostles. God's city, the New Jerusalem, is a city representing the church which is built on the foundation of the apostles (Rev. 21:14), with Jesus the Messiah being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). This is the city where God dwells in intimate union with His people.

Abraham knew that he had a new city waiting for him that was so much better. This knowledge enabled him to leave his home by faith. He knew that what he was leaving behind had no comparison to the future that was waiting for him if he obeyed God.

We can see from Abraham's example that the faith he had needs to be our own. When the storms of this life remove us from our comfort zones, we can recover and move on with God wherever He leads us, because we know through faith, we too, have a city waiting for us whose builder and maker is God.

Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, (too old to have children), because she judged Him faithful who had promised (verse 11).

We see that Sarah had grown past her previous lack of faith that caused her to offer Abraham her servant Hagar to provide a child through this surrogate. The seeds of God's promise that she would conceive, must have remained in the back of her mind. As she watched Ishmael grow, the fact that he was not literally her son, kept him at a distance in her heart. Time passed, and the seed of faith began to develop, moving that seed of God's promise from her head to her heart. As an old woman who had long passed the years designated for child bearing, she began to realize that the God who made the planet out of nothing, could produce a miracle in her womb.

I always pictured Abraham out in the field when God moved upon Him at the right moment. I see Sarah turning in surprise as she sees Abraham standing in the doorway of their tent, holding a bouquet of wildflowers he picked for her. A smile beams across her face. She knows a miracle is about to begin.

Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable (verse 12).

Abraham was one hundred years old, and Sarah was ninety when she bore him Isaac. They both realized that God has a sense of humour in how He accomplishes His purposes at times. Thus the child was named Isaac, which means laughter. And Sarah said, *God has made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me (Genesis 21:6).*

The punchline to this saga is exquisite. Two old folks have a baby defying nature, and proving again that God's word overrides any physical obstacles that we perceive are blocking the way to His promises.

The offspring of this miracle did multiply as God said, filling the world like the stars and the sands of the sea. But more importantly, the nation that sprang from the loins of Abraham would produce the Messiah and redemption for the entire world.

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 earth (verse 13).

The Messiah did not come on their shift, but they knew that the entrance to that eternal life would come, just because God promised.

Like Sarah, we can cast our doubt aside and believe that Jesus is our promised Messiah and wait for His second coming. We are encouraged here to acquire the same vision of temporality regarding this life as we recognize that we are also strangers and pilgrims on earth. This world is not our home. Jesus walked above the waters of this life, and by faith we can too, so that whatever comes our way in this realm can be endured. By faith we know that we have received that promise of eternal life.

For they say such things (They were confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth) declare plainly that they seek a country (verse 14).

The declaration of faith expressed by those who had gone before, that have been recorded in God's word, reveals the heart conditions of those who have put all their faith and trust in God. Seeing the invisible by faith, they spent their sojourn on this planet seeking God's realm, knowing that to be with Him is their true home and destination.

Can we follow their example and not let the cares of this life interfere with and inhibit our seeking?

And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from where they had come out, they might have had opportunity to have returned (verse 15).

These pilgrims were not thinking about what they were leaving behind. If they were preoccupied with that, they might have been tempted to return to their old lives, but they didn't. This shows us the importance of keeping our focus on God and to not look back upon old destructive behaviours that formally enslaved us, or memories of failures or abuse. We have a new country and a new destination to motivate us to keep moving forward.

But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He has prepared for them a city (verse 16).

Every believer who has anchored their faith in Jesus shares in this pilgrimage to "seek a better country." We know that we have an eternal home waiting for us, secured for us through Jesus' sacrifice. He assures His disciples of this fact just prior

to His death, resurrection and ascension. – *Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: (dwelling places) if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:1-3).*

In the previous four verses thirteen through sixteen, our teacher has been directing our focus again away from this life to adjust our view to the reality of the world that can only be seen through the eyes of faith. Again we realize that the people he is addressing in his epistle are experiencing persecution and are also facing the violent destruction of their city. Although at the time, this fact was unknown, God through His faithful messenger, was preparing them for a future devastation by focusing their eyes on an eternal country that cannot be destroyed.

Likewise today, as we study the prophecies in the book of Revelation and Jesus' warnings to us in Matthew 24, we need to take this opportunity to prepare ourselves for the future. When we, by faith, are separated from this life and we are fully assured of the reality of our dwelling place with God, we can be better prepared to endure the inevitable results of living in this sin soaked world.

Jesus said that in this life we would experience tribulation (John 16:33). As we witness the toll man's rejection of God takes on this planet and the lives of people, we can be reminded to prepare ourselves spiritually for what lies ahead. Some of us have already been victims of sin's devastations in our lives. When our hearts and minds are focused on Jesus and the New Land He is leading us to, we can keep walking when the ground beneath begins to tremble and everything we have known in the past begins to be removed.

In essence, the writer here has been giving us the format for

a successful faith life. Hold onto what you cannot see, for in the end that is all that will remain. *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:21). For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Messiah (Philippians 3:20). If you then be risen with Messiah, seek those things which are above, where Messiah sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection (mind) on things above, not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:1,2). For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (II Corinthians 5:10). While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Corinthians 4:18). Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever (I John 2:15-17).*

We return to the story of Abraham and the typology that has been illustrated for us through his life.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried (tested), offered up Isaac: and he that received the promises offered up his only begotten son, (verse 17).

God told Abraham to sacrifice his “only begotten son.” This child who was promised to be the seed that would eventually bless many nations, God was now commanding to be destroyed.

What was the purpose in God’s commandment that seemingly contradicted everything that the Lord had promised Abraham concerning this child? -

Of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall, your seed be called: (verse 18).

Once again God uses this incident to further construct another portrait of the Gospel. Some have suggested that Abraham may have become too attached to his son and God was seeing if Abraham loved his son more than God. That may be one reason for sure, but the God who knows in advance through His foreknowledge what Abraham would do, needn't have gone through the trouble of testing him in this fashion - unless He had another purpose in mind.

Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; ...

The author here shows us that the reason Abraham was able to bring himself to sacrifice his son was because he thoroughly believed God's promises for this child. Abraham knew they would be fulfilled no matter what. If his son died, then God would raise him from the dead.

... from whence also he received Him (Jesus) in a figure (verse 19).

This was the purpose all along; to make this entire incident a figure of the Gospel. If Abraham's only begotten son was killed, God would raise him from the dead. Therefore Abraham believed the Gospel "in a figure."

The Lord stopped Abraham from killing his son, providing a ram in the boy's place for the offering, showing us that God would provide the sacrifice to save His children from death through the Messiah Jesus. Jesus is the seed from the child Isaac's lineage that would bless many nations with salvation.

We see in the whole illustration another example of the

typology God has orchestrated for us in His precious word.

The author continues his review of the wonderful examples of faith found in the God of miracles.

By faith Isaac, when he was dying, blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come (verse 20).

Blind Isaac could see the future unfolding for his sons and their lineages. He was holding onto a faith that began with his father Abraham and he knew the promises associated with that faith would be fulfilled through his lineage.

Even though according to the tradition of the time, the oldest son, Esau, was to be the one to receive a blessing from his father, Jacob was substituted, and because of this deception, he received the blessing of the firstborn instead of Esau.

God overrode man's tradition, because the God who sees the heart had chosen Jacob to carry the lineage of the Messiah - *"in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed"* (Genesis 28:14).

Esau did not value the things of God and sold his birthright for a bowl of lentils (Genesis 25:29-34). This disqualified him from the privilege of the firstborn and he was removed from being part of the Messiah's lineage.

Esau was not worthy of his calling. He didn't value the things of God. Likewise we need to learn from his example and treasure our heritage in Jesus and not compromise it for the temporal pleasures, provisions and false illusions of this world.

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff (verse 21 from Genesis 48:1-22).

Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were born to Joseph in Egypt through Joseph's marriage to a Gentile. When Jacob blessed these sons, he declared that they would be included in his lineage (Genesis 48:5,6,16). From that point on they were considered to be a half-tribe.

Joseph's story is a type of the Gospel, and Joseph is a similitude of the Messiah. This shows us that through Joseph there is a grafting in of the Gentiles who would be seen as Jews, too.

The Messiah is the light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6,11:10,42:1) and through Jesus, the Gentiles who come to Him are grafted into the Hebrew Olive Tree and are one with Abraham's seed (Romans 11:17,Galatians 3:7,29).

Jacob leaned on his staff of faith, possibly knowing that this significant union of Jew and Gentile was God's purpose all along. There would be one fold and One Shepherd; the Messiah Jesus (John 10:16).

By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones (verse 22 from Genesis 50:24-25).

The prophecy God had given to Abraham was known to Joseph and his people. They would be "strangers in a land that is not theirs." They would be slaves in that land and would endure affliction for four hundred years (Genesis 15:13).

By faith, Joseph believed God's word and thus prophesied to his people that their servitude in Egypt would eventually come to an end. He told them that when that day comes, to take his bones and remove them from that land of pagan idolatry.

The entire story of Joseph is a beautiful parable of the Gospel. Sold by his brother's jealousy into slavery in Egypt,

his captivity resulted in his becoming the provision for their survival.

Jesus was condemned though the jealousy of the religious leadership. Rejected by His own people, Jesus was crucified. Yet, His death became the provision for the eternal survival of all who would receive Him. Then by faith, we too, like Joseph, can foresee a time when our bones will be resurrected into new eternal life, just as our faithful God has promised.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment (verse 23).

During the Israelite's bondage in Egypt, they multiplied greatly. The Egyptian leadership became fearful that if they were ever attacked by their enemies, then the Hebrew slaves could join with them, and if they were so numerous, then the Egyptians would be defeated. Thus the new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, ordered that all the newborn Hebrew male children were to be cast into the river.

Moses' parents must have recognized that God had something special planned for this child. They did obey Pharaoh's command to cast their son into the river, but first they put him in a little ark of bulrushes and placed him on the riverbank, possibly knowing that the childless daughter of Pharaoh would come to that spot to bathe and have compassion on the infant.

Moses' mother's faith and obedience to the Lord's leading resulted in her being appointed to nurse her own baby and see him raised in Pharaoh's household as a prince.

Moses' parents were not afraid of the king's commandment. Likewise, God's people today, by faith, should not fear or obey when unrighteous governments, apostate and pagan religions demand that Christians submit

to orders that are contrary to God's word - especially if God's people are being commanded to deny Jesus as the only way to heaven.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years (reached adulthood) refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (verse 24).

Moses, who had been raised by Pharaoh's daughter as an Egyptian, most likely was not told of his Hebrew lineage. Yet, he had a natural compassion for the Hebrew slaves. When he witnessed an Egyptian brutalize one of his brethren, Moses intervened to save the slave's life and ended up murdering the Egyptian. As a result, Moses was forced to flee to Midian, which was located in what is today, Saudi Arabia where Mount Sinai is located (Galatians 4:25).

He was tending his father-in-law's flocks there when the Lord spoke to him out of the flames of a bush that was not being consumed by the fire.

I can imagine that when this man, who thought he was an Egyptian, heard God proclaim that He was the "god of your father" (Exodus 3:6). And in the next breath (if indeed God needed to take one) Moses was informed for the first time, that this God was not the God of an Egyptian father, but the God of the Hebrews; of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

At that moment Moses must have understood why he had felt so much compassion for the Hebrew slaves. From that point on, he would never think of himself as an Egyptian again, "refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

The realization that he was not an Egyptian must have been an astounding revelation for Moses. When we come to Jesus, we must realize as well, that we are no longer Egyptians either. The idolatry of our past lives crumbles away from us and dissolves into the sand as we are born again into a new

life, a new heritage and a royal priesthood.

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; (verse 25).

The Pharaoh who had wanted to kill Moses had died. Moses would have learned this when God sent him back to Egypt. He could have returned to the palace. He could have resumed his life of comfort, great wealth and status, but he did not. He chose instead to leave his past behind and follow God.

Many of us today may be faced with similar choices; just as the author's Hebrew readers were facing the temptation to return to their former religion in order to avoid persecution as Christians, or remain in the faith no matter what the consequences might be. By choosing to remain faithful to the God who has called us into a new life in Jesus, we too, follow in the footsteps of Moses.

Esteeming the reproach of Messiah greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect to the recompense of the reward (verse 26).

Moses recognized that there was a much greater eternal reward in obeying God, than allowing his flesh to lure him back into a life that could only provide a temporary security. The author of Hebrews is comparing Moses' devotion to God as devotion to the Messiah. As Jesus is one with God, and is His inseparable image, Jesus was also the voice of God that communicated with Moses from the burning bush.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible (verse 27).

When Moses returned to Egypt, he avoided the palace and went to the camp of his brethren. There he must have been identified by his relatives who knew well the history of this one who had been rescued from the river by Pharaoh's daughter. Now Moses would be meeting his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam for the first time. He would learn of his Hebrew identity and heritage in more detail. He would discover that he was of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of the holy priests.

Through his staff of faith in God, his desire to free his people was indestructible. As Christians, can we follow Moses' example and be as determined to defend the Gospel and free as many souls as possible from the bondages of sin and death?

Moses' faith in the God who had revealed Himself so supernaturally was unshakable. Therefore, no human threat, no Pharaoh King, could produce fear in the heart of this one that God had chosen. Likewise, all of us who have placed our faith in the reality of the Messiah Jesus should not fear what man can do to us, knowing that the reality of our treasure in heaven far outweighs the temporary suffering we may experience in this existence.

Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them (verse 28).

The last plague God sent upon Egypt was a curse of destruction against the Egyptians' firstborn. To protect the Hebrews from this curse, God instructed them to put the blood of an unblemished lamb on the doorposts of their houses and when the Lord saw the blood, He would protect them from the destroyer (Exodus 12:23).

The blood on the doorposts is another typology of the blood of the Messiah who was slain to protect us from the

works of the devil, specifically death. Through Jesus, our souls are delivered from death when we receive Him by faith. This places His blood symbolically upon the doorposts of our hearts. When we receive Jesus, He delivers our souls from death.

The blood of Messiah Jesus was symbolically placed on the doorposts of the Hebrew's houses, saving their firstborns from death. The Egyptians had no protection from this curse of death, and there was mourning for their dead loved ones in every house (Exodus 12:30). This tragedy was the event that caused Pharaoh to finally let God's people go.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned (verse 29).

When the Israelites reached the Red Sea, Pharaoh again, true to his nature, changed his mind and sent his army to either kill them or bring them back.

We are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 11:10). God was not forcing Pharaoh to do something that would be out of character for this man. God was merely working with what He knew was already there. Pharaoh was not the Lord's and God knew he would never be. Thus we can see why God would harden the hearts of some who are opposed to the Gospel. They are like this Pharaoh. Their hearts are not the Lord's and are incapable of being faithful to Him.

At the Red Sea, with the sound of Pharaoh's army bearing down upon them in the distance, Moses raised his staff of faith. A great wind arose in response and parted the waters. The Hebrews were able to walk across dry land, which was a natural land bridge that led them to Midian in Saudi Arabia.

Faith parted the waters. The faithless, multiple god, idol worshipping Egyptians entered the sea and the waters closed

back upon them, and Pharaoh's army was destroyed.

God will part the waters of this life for His people who have obeyed Him and put the blood of the Messiah Jesus upon their hearts. For those who, like Pharaoh, have refused God's provision for their soul's safety, the waters of death will fall back upon them with absolute certainty.

The author continues his journey through the pages of scripture that his audience knows so well.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days (verse 30).

The city of Jericho was to God, a place of great evil and demonic activity which had to be destroyed. God had determined that the wicked in that place would not repent and would never be His. Joshua's faith in the power of his God, would be the instrument through which God would remove this city of iniquity.

The Lord appeared to Joshua as Captain of the Hosts (Joshua 5:13-15). Jesus is God's image and therefore in this instance, God the Father spoke His directions to Joshua through His Son.

Joshua was told to march around the city once a day for seven days, then on the eighth day, they were to march around the city seven times. The people obeyed, and when they were commanded to shout, the walls of the city collapsed just as God had promised.

Faith, combined with unity and strict obedience to God's direction, gave His people the victory over the adversaries of the Lord.

The walls that the devil erects around his operations are strong and mighty. There are places in this world today that are strongholds of great evil. There are people within those areas that the Lord knows are His and He desires to save

them. These souls are represented by the harlot Rahab and her family.

We are shown in this illustration that the walls blocking evangelism in these areas can be penetrated only through faith and by seeking and following God's direction in prayer with other believers.

The continuous circling God required, and the blowing of the trumpets symbolizes the preparation of prayer that is needed before any work of God can be accomplished. It can take time.

The days represented in this illustration can represent years. But no matter how long it takes for the barriers to a territory or a human heart can come tumbling down, it's worth the effort to see even just one soul set free from the devil's bondage.

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace (verse 31).

At the Lord's direction, Joshua had sent two spies into the land they were about to conquer. The spies came to Jericho, and by the Lord's leading they lodged with the prostitute Rahab.

The spies' entrance into the city did not go unnoticed, and their location was reported to the king. He immediately sent his soldiers to capture them, but Rahab hid them on the roof of her house. She then told the soldiers that the men had left the city, and the soldiers left to search for the spies in the countryside.

Rahab declared her faith in the God of Israel to the two spies; for she and everyone in the city had heard of the miracles that the Lord had done for His people in parting the Red Sea, miraculous victories in battle and the parting of the Jordan River for Joshua.

The whole city knew of these wonders, but only Rahab came to faith in the true God of Israel and was willing to follow Him. We know that even demons can believe in God and they tremble (James 2:19), but only those who are the Lord's will repent and obey Him.

God knows through His foreknowledge who are His. The destruction of Jericho was meant not only to eradicate a stronghold of evil, but to also rescue this soul named Rahab and her family.

Rahab's house was on the wall of the city and she lowered the spies to the ground by a scarlet rope. The men instructed her to tie the red rope to her window as a sign of her deliverance. She and her family would be spared as long as they remained in the house.

We travel back for a moment to Exodus and witness again the blood of the Passover lamb being painted on the doorposts of the Hebrew's houses as a token that the lives of their firstborn would be spared from death, - as long as they remained in their houses with the blood soaked doors.

We see the similarities of these two accounts. The scarlet rope in Rahab's window, and the blood on the doorposts are both symbols of the blood of the Messiah Jesus and the faith that delivers us from death - as long as we remain in the house, in the faith that saves our souls from destruction.

Rahab and her family were saved from death because of the scarlet thread in her window. This Gentile Rahab became part of the Messiah's lineage and a testimony to the Lord's mission in bringing the Gentiles into God's family through faith in the blood atonement of the Messiah Jesus.

And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of ...

Here the author breaks in his systematic recounting of the

examples of faith in the scriptures, because he realizes it is so much to cover he did not have enough time to go through it all, or his epistle would never be completed, so he begins to generalize. As he lists each of the heroes of faith, he knows that it is up to his readers to return to the Holy Scriptures and refresh themselves in the stories of these heroes.

... Gideon (Judges 6:11-40,7) and of Barak (Judges 4), and of Jephthah (Judges 11); of David also (I and II Samuel), and Samuel, (I Samuel 3,4:1) and of the prophets: (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Malachi)(verse 32).

We see all of these men in our minds and together they share in the legacies the author is about to recount. –

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions; (verse 33).

Is it possible through Messiah Jesus to claim this legacy for our own? Through faith in the name of Jesus, can we pray and subdue the kingdoms of darkness, hindering demonic activity?

Can we live righteously to glorify our Father in heaven?

Can we maintain our faith through every circumstance and receive the promise of eternal life at the end of this life's journey?

Will the mouths of our enemies be stopped because we are living an uncompromised and holy life?

Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens (verse 34).

Can we quench the flames of lust, and carnal passions, resisting the temptations of the flesh in Jesus' name? Do we believe that He will give us the strength to prove ourselves valiant in this fight against the flesh?

Will we escape violence by having the strength and courage to turn the other cheek and be a peacemaker following our Lord's example? Can we love and pray for our enemies?

Can we remember that His strength is made perfect in weakness (II Corinthians 12:9)? And in His strength, can we rise up to the many challenges to our faith and stand our ground, putting to flight the demonic aliens who seek to destroy our witness and our lives?

We can make the legacy of these heroes our own, for God has given us everything we need to join this list of victorious saints.

The summary of events that were experienced in the lives of those that God has recorded for our benefit continues. ...

Women received their dead raised to life again: ...

Faith births miracles, and the visible testimony that God restores the lives of loved ones lost as He did though the faith of Elijah (I Kings 17:17-24) and the Messiah Jesus (Mark 5:35-42, Luke 7:1215, John 11:41-44). And He will fulfil His promise that the dead in Christ will rise (I Thessalonians 4:16,17).

...and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: (verse 35).

In the first part of this verse, we are assured of the faith that births new life from the dead. This same faith enables others to endure torture, "not accepting deliverance;" a deliverance

that would entail a denial of the God who gave them the power to endure. The result of an enduring faith is the reward of a glorious resurrection.

And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonment (verse 36).

Today, just like Joseph who resisted temptation, and as a result was unjustly imprisoned, multitudes are experiencing similar unjust punishments because of their refusal to compromise or deny the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah.

They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, (a possible reference to the prophet Isaiah's martyrdom), were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (ill-treated) (verse 37).

Many today, and in the future, who refuse to deny the Lord that bought them will face some of these same consequences.

The prophesied one world government that emerges from the pages of the book of Revelation and is reiterated in Daniel's prophecies, will eventually have the power to deny people's ability to buy or sell. This "mark of the beast" is in God's eyes associated with a denial of the Messiah Jesus. Thus all those who remain faithful to Him, the true Messiah, and are willing to suffer rather than take that mark and lose their inheritance of eternal life, will be one with those described in these passages of Scripture.

(of whom the world was not worthy:) ...

This world is not worthy of all those who are martyred for

the faith of Jesus. The destitute, the tortured and all who suffer for Jesus' sake, share in the status of being exalted in God's eyes. The world that has rejected them will someday tremble at their feet when they return in victory with the Lord at the end of the age (Revelation 19).

... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (verse 38).

The author here could be thinking of Elijah's flight through the desert to escape from Jezebel's death threat. This led him to find refuge in the mountain cave where Moses communed with God (I Kings 19:8 -13).

Elijah's persecution brought him from the dry desert land to a higher place where he encountered God intimately. In his isolation he was able to hear the Still Small Voice of the Lord and he was restored. The result of his persecution was a renewal. He was enabled to return and get back into the fight against the enemies of God.

Elijah was persecuted by a spirit that was incorporated into the religion of Israel. This spirit sought to compromise God's people and cause them to abandon God to embrace a pagan ideology. Likewise today, there are Christians who are and will be persecuted like Elijah, for standing up to this same spirit that seeks to eradicate faith in the atonement and the pure word of God that was delivered to us by Jesus and His apostles.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: (verse 39).

All those awesome Old Testament heroes did not receive the fulfilment of the promises that were to be revealed in the New Covenant. They were still operating under the old

covenant.

God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect (verse 40).

Those who were under the old covenant, even though by faith their lives were pleasing to God, were still unable to obtain eternal life through their own efforts. Only through faith in Jesus is eternal life assured to those who believe and remain faithful.

This does not mean that the saints whose lives were sacrificed and endured so much pain and suffering were not permitted entrance to heaven.

Jesus shows us through His parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:20-31) that those who died before His arrival and crucifixion were in paradise, which was a traditional Hebrew belief. The Apostle Peter assures us that Jesus ministered to these ones, (I Peter 3:19) bringing them the Gospel and releasing them from paradise to enter God's presence in heaven. Therefore all these ones are in heaven; this massive cloud of witnesses oversees our sufferings for the truth in this present age and I assume that they are cheering us on. We are in excellent company.

Chapter Twelve

The author concludes his previous discourse with the first verse of chapter twelve.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, (verse 1).

Those who have suffered for their faith and have passed on to the realm above us, and are witnesses of the truth, are now beholding us in our suffering for the faith.

The inspiration we have gained by the author's reminder to us of these heroes of the faith, this "cloud of witnesses," encourages us to follow their example. We are exhorted to emulate these ones and thus we gain the incentive to keep ourselves from the snares of sin.

Like Olympic runners who must train and be disciplined in order to win, we too, are persuaded here to run our race of

faith, patiently enduring whatever comes our way.

We have the examples of those faithful witnesses who never gave up, never compromised and always remained true to our God of holiness, truth and mercy. He is worth running for and those who are racing for Him are winners before they even cross the finish line.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; ...

We run with our eyes focused on the One who ran this race before us. He authored our faith; our hope began at the cross and rises with Him at His resurrection.

... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, ...

We are assured of the joy that is ours, and we are given here the secret of running a successful race – keep your eyes on Jesus and the victory He has already accomplished for you.

Our Lord has told us we must pick up and carry our cross on a daily basis, denying the lusts of the flesh with its “affections and lusts” (Matthew 16:24, Galatians 5:24). It’s not easy when temptations beckon us, threatening to distract us from completing our faith race. We can’t afford to turn our eyes away from Jesus as we run. We have to endure until we reach the finish line where the joy of being welcomed into our Father’s loving embrace awaits.

Jesus was able to endure because He kept His eyes focused on the outcome. For the joy set before Him Jesus endured the cross. He knew that His faithfulness to His mission would result in victory. The devil would be defeated, his captive souls would be set free and heaven would be filled with the joyful songs of the redeemed. Therefore, the agony and the

shame Jesus endured would only be for a moment in time. Likewise, what obstacles we face are minimal in comparison to what waits for us in eternity.

... and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (verse 2).

Jesus has promised His disciples that where He is they would be also (John 14:3). We are running toward a glorious destination. We must never lose sight of this fact. This life is only the race track. It's the road we must travel to reach our final destination of glory and joy. We are to always keep moving forward in our faith, never stagnating, never giving into the jeers and ridicule of those on the sidelines who cannot see what we see – the joy that waits for us at our Father's right hand.

For consider Him (Jesus) that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds (verse 3).

The author is asking us to consider or meditate on what Jesus had to endure for us in order to procure our salvation, joy and victory. We are being asked to contemplate the cross as a way to help us overcome our afflictions.

Jesus was persecuted, martyred, and endured the "contradiction of sinners against Himself." So are many of His followers today. Jesus said we would be hated by everyone (Matthew 10:22). Yet while many will suffer as Jesus suffered, none would experience what Jesus endured.

There have been many attempts to portray the depth of Jesus' suffering for us in films and other media. These focus on the physical suffering He endured; the flogging, the piercing of His hands and feet; the excruciating jolt when His

cross was erected and slammed back into the ground. But nothing compares to the agony Jesus experienced when our sins were thrust into His soul and He experienced the loss of His intimate union with His Father. This was the moment that caused Him to cry, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus experienced the ultimate rejection, precisely so we would never have to - as long as we remain in our faith. We have the assurance that His ultimate sacrifice procured our position in the safety of our Father's arms for eternity.

As we contemplate the enormity of Jesus' sacrifice for us, and as we watch in our minds His precious blood roll down that long wooden beam and disappear into the mud, we hear our instructor add this thought. -

You have not resisted unto blood, striving against sin (verse 4).

Our minds are swiftly directed back to a garden called Gethsemane where we behold Jesus in prayer, sweating great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). This is a rare, yet actual physical phenomena called hematomatidrosis which can occur under extreme duress. Capillary blood vessels feed the sweat glands. When an individual is experiencing stress, those vessels can rupture, causing blood to ooze from the skin.

Jesus shed this blood because He knew what He was going to have to endure on that cross. He most likely had witnessed others who had been crucified before Him. It was a common practice of the Romans in His day, to line the roads with victims of this torture as a deterrent to rebellion. He knew that was also going to be His future as well. He suffered in Gethsemane under the suffocating weight of this knowledge, fighting to resist the pull of His flesh that wanted Him to get off His knees in prayer to His Father and run away. But He didn't. Jesus suffered to do what He did not want to do.

Likewise, we must suffer to keep from doing what we want to do when we are tempted to sin.

We are to resist unto blood, striving to overcome temptation, sweating spiritual drops of blood in our souls in the battle with our flesh in order to remain on our knees in prayer to our Father for His strength and endurance.

And in those times when we do fail, we are reminded that there are consequences when we succumb to sin.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as unto children, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him:" (verse 5).

The concept of God punishing, or chastening His people has largely been eroded by much of our present day apostate theology. This is due to the influence of the Jezebel spirit (Rev. 2:20-23), which is a spirit of compromise. The doctrine this spirit promotes in the church, is that God does not punish. This mindset then naturally negates the fact that there are consequences for disobedience to God's holy word. We thus have "forgotten the exhortation" due to this apostasy; the exhortation that speaks to us as God's little children for our correction and benefit.

We are reminded here again that God is our Father, and like any good parent, He will correct and admonish His children when appropriate. This is one of the greatest assurances that we are loved by our God.

For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives (verse 6).

In verses five and six, the author is quoting from Proverbs three, verses eleven and twelve. The wording of the twelfth verse shows that God corrects those He loves "as a father the

son in whom he delights.”

God delights in you, His child, and oversees your spiritual development. He will reign you in when necessary.

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chastens not? (verse 7).

No child ever likes being disciplined by a parent. But if we love our heavenly Father, we won't rebel, but submit to His correction in our lives. This is only for our safety and benefit.

We are assured again by these verses that God is our loving Father, and we are to respond to Him as such.

But if you are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then you are bastards, (illegitimate) and not sons (verse 8).

If we are not corrected, then we are not sons; God's children. This answers those who promote the false doctrine that God does not punish. The false doctrine that God does not punish, is coming from those who by this scripture's definition, have removed themselves from under the Father's authority.

Those who want to have their “itching ears” tickled (II Timothy 4:3), receiving only those things that they want to hear and not what they really need to understand, eagerly follow Jezebel into her bed of compromise. Those who prefer her doctrines above God's word, disregard God's warning that her children will experience great tribulation or consequences for their sin (Rev. 2:22,23).

Just as Adam and Eve were forgiven and clothed by the first sacrifice, they still had to live with the consequences of their disobedience and were expelled from the garden.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us,

and we gave them reverence: shall we not much more rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? (verse 9).

How much greater is our Father in heaven than our earthly fathers? The God who made the “fathers of our flesh” and their children, certainly deserves our ultimate submission and reverence. Therefore, we should submit to His correction and praise Him for it. A child who genuinely loves his parent will receive correction and benefit by it.

We can look at the Prophet David’s example when he was corrected for His sin in Psalm 51. He did not rebel against it, but repented and praised God for His care upon His life, even though the consequences of His sin were severe. His adultery and murder cost him the lives of two children and also his kingdom for a time, not to mention the shame and humiliation that went with it.

For truly for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure (as seemed good to them); ...

Human parenting is flawed and imperfect. Some parents will correct their children, not because they are focused on the welfare of the child, but because the child has intruded on the parent’s own sinful, selfish nature, resulting in abuse.

Abusive parenting can taint a child’s perception of God as a parent figure. We are assured that God is solely concerned for our welfare.

...but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness (verse 10).

Believers are called to be conformed into the holy image of the Son of God. Everything we go through in this life is used by God to form our characters into Jesus’ likeness. When we

understand this principle, we can see the purpose and reward of it, which makes submission to God's correction easier to endure.

Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby (verse 11).

The fruit, or result of our correction is righteousness. We can know when we are being corrected by God, because of the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit lets us know when our behaviour is not lining up with God's holy word. His Spirit will warn and direct us into obedience. It's only when we refuse to listen that we open the door in our lives to demonic attacks.

We can see how this principle operated in ancient Israel. God's people refused to listen to His correction, even though He was extremely patient with them. Their blatant, continuous rejection of God's word, both written and through the warnings of the prophets, eventually caused them to be attacked and overcome by their enemies resulting in a captivity that lasted seventy years.

We know that every bad thing that happens to us is not the result of sin in our lives and the result of God's correction. The devil is working to attack and destroy the righteous. But in this example, the bad things that happened to Israel were the direct result of their refusal to submit to the Lord's correction. We can learn from their example, and apply this wisdom to our own walk with the Lord.

When others sin, sometimes the righteous can be caught in the consequences of their rebellion. As the destruction of Jerusalem looms in the future of the author's Hebrew readership at that time, so today we face the coming tribulation described in the book of Revelation and Matthew

twenty -four.

While we may suffer as the result of someone else's sin, we can be assured that our faith and hope will sustain us. God will help us, we are never alone. We can glorify Him through our suffering knowing that, *"All things work together for good to them love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; (verse 12).

This is a quote from Isaiah 35:3. When we realize that God has only our good in mind no matter what our circumstances are, we can lift up our hands to Him in praise, and be strengthened to stand and endure.

And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed (verse 13 from Proverbs 4:26).

This is a quote inspired from Proverbs 4:26; - *Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established.*

This is a call for self-examination. Whenever things start to go wrong, I always go to the Lord and ask Him to reveal to me if there is anything in me He wants to correct. I want to get this out of the way first in order to discern if I am being corrected or just under a demonic attack for doing something right. This is why it is so important to consistently remain close to the Lord by prayer and reading His word. His word is the mirror we use to adjust our spiritual appearance.

When we are right with Him, then we have increased power to come against any attack of the devil.

Self-examination brings healing and comfort. The lame, or injured areas of our lives are brought to God for Him to heal.

Our paths are straightened and we will keep moving forward in the direction He wants us to follow.

The remainder of this epistle contains instructions for general Christian conduct.

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (verse 14).

In this verse we are instructed to pursue peace and holiness. Both of these elements are closely related. Our holiness, or righteousness is imparted to us through faith in Jesus' atonement for our justification. Because we have received Him, then the Holy Spirit works to conform us into the Lord's image, His character. Jesus makes us holy, then we are made holy and fully separated to God through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we are saved and then we are discipled.

As the Spirit works in us, our sinful natures are transformed. The result of that inner transformation is peace in ourselves that we desire to impart to others through the sharing of the Gospel.

The carnality we harboured in our old lives that was subject to malice and dissention is gradually removed. We seek peace with all men, for the sake of the Gospel and our witness for the Lord. We seek to sow peace and reconciliation where there is discord.

As the fruits of the Holy Spirit are developed in our lives, we become people that other people enjoy being around. True holiness is attractive. The peace it exudes and extends to others, brings a blessing on those who are seeking peace in their relationships. As Jesus said, *"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God"* (Matthew 5:7).

Looking diligently lest any man fail the grace of God, lest any

root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled (verse 15).

We fail the grace of God when we don't allow the Holy Spirit to do His transforming work in our lives. If we allow inner sins like bitterness to remain and fester, God sees us as defiled. This will hinder us in our work for Him and our witness. God has called us to perfection or maturity in our characters. We will stop growing when we harbor inner attitudes that are not pleasing to Him. He will do what is necessary to correct us. This takes us back to the previous verses we have read that instructed us to submit to the Lord's chastening.

No one wants a beautiful flower or vegetable garden marred with weeds. We become ugly inside and our fruit will not develop properly if the weeds of unforgiveness and bitterness are allowed to remain.

We always need to examine our inner attitudes and give our weeds to the Lord for Him to eliminate.

Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright (verse 16 from Genesis 25:33).

The author here uses yet another example from the Old Testament to illustrate the principle of what happens when we do not value the things of God above the desires of our own belly. We see that if those inner sins are left untreated, they can erupt into outer sins very easily.

Jesus told us that we are defiled by what comes out of us (Matthew 15:11). The inner sins originate in the mind and heart before they manifest into sinful behaviour.

If our inner man is not directed to God's purposes as our main goal, we too could duplicate Esau's tragedy in our lives.

If we are continually fellowshipping with the Lord on a

daily basis, our chances of success in this life are greatly increased, and we will not follow in the footsteps of Esau and experience his grief.

For you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears (verse 17).

Christians are saved by grace, but our works in this life will be rewarded. In Esau we see a portrait of one who lost his reward and could not get it back, even though his grief at what he had done was so overwhelming. This one can also be an example of someone who exchanges his faith in Jesus for a physical deliverance. Many will be faced with the same choices as we proceed to the time of the end described in Matthew twenty-four and the book of Revelation.

We can't go back and undo our failings in this life after we die. It is wisdom to value and receive what God's word says and apply it now while we still have life.

The next seven verses are one sentence, the longest sentence in the book of Hebrews. In these verses the author makes a comparison between two mountains; Mount Sinai (Horeb) and Mount Zion. This elaborates upon the analogy of those like Esau and those who have been genuinely transformed by the Gospel.

For you are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, (verse 18).

Here the author is referring to the incident recorded in Exodus 19:12-25, when God descended upon Mount Sinai as a fiery storm. Through our acceptance of the grace found in Messiah Jesus, we are not brought to this mountain.

And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them anymore: (verse 19).

In verse eighteen, the writer described what they saw, in verse nineteen he relates what they heard, the sound of a trumpet. Trumpets were used to announce religious ceremonies and feasts, or before a war. Here the trumpet is a sign to bring the people a little closer to the mountain (Exodus 19:13), but if they came up the mountain or touched it, they would die. It seems here the trumpet is used for both purposes; the calling to a religious assembly before their God, and a warning.

This display of the reality of God, was too much for the people to bear.

(For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: (verse 20).

Moses related God's will to the people in this instance. As time revealed, the people could not endure or persevere in what God wanted them to do. The author here, I believe is making an analogy to the law and the consequences of trying to obey God's law perfectly without the atonement. Anyone who approached that mountain of law only, would be destroyed.

And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake:") (verse 21).

The vision of God's wrath without His provision of grace is a terrible sight indeed.

The massive demonstration of God's power caused Moses

to fear and quake, even though he knew the Lord intimately more than anyone at that time.

We can stand with the people at the base of that mountain and picture the fire and tempest, and we can realize that this God is the same God that revealed Himself in His Son, the humble Lamb of God. When we receive Jesus, this incident is telling us that all that power displayed on Mount Sinai's peak is on our side.

We have not come to the mountain that cannot be touched. God has called us to the intimately accessible mountain of His grace.

But you are come to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, (verse 22).

Mount Zion is symbolic of a place of intimacy with God. This intimacy is made possible only by Jesus' sacrifice. This mountain is a mountain of peace and tranquillity; a place of rest in the presence of God. Here the thunder is quelled and no storm or tempest exists, for God's wrath has been satisfied by the acceptance of His grace.

Grace has brought us to this resting place with God, but we are not alone. We are surrounded by an "innumerable company of angels." Many of these angels are our guardians in this life and they are celebrating with us upon this holy spiritual pinnacle.

To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written (who are enrolled) in heaven ...

We are gathered upon Mount Zion with all the believers whose names are written in heaven. No matter what denomination you belong to, in God's eyes, there is only one

church which is the body of Jesus, (Romans 12:5), and it is called here the church of the firstborn. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18) and the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29). We in turn are His brethren, the firstfruits of our union with God through His Son (James 1:18).

... and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, (verse 23).

This God who is our judge, has orchestrated the refinement of the souls of those He has chosen though His foreknowledge (I Peter 1:2). Through His Spirit, He matures those souls He has made righteous through the Gospel.

We may not all feel that we have reached our maturity as yet, but we need to remember that God always sees us as we will become.

We are gathered on this mountain with the angels and all other believers, but most of all, we are on this mountain in the presence of our Bridegroom, Jesus; the One who makes our union with God possible.

And to Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel (verse 24).

The writer here returns us again to the Old Testament typology to show the distinction between the old covenant and the New.

The “sprinkling” of blood that was used to sanctify the altar and the souls of men, has been replaced with “better things.” Abel brought a Lamb to God and his offering was accepted because God chose it to represent the future offering of His Son, the last sacrifice.

Abel was heard crying up from the ground (Genesis 4:10) because he was still under the old covenant where the actual

blood of the lamb he offered was not sufficient to release his soul to heaven.

Under the New Covenant, we have been brought to the place of fulfilment on this holy mount, where all those souls who have been set free to fly to this spiritual place of rest, can hold onto better promises which guarantees our eternal life.

We are now the church of the firstborn, placed upon the security of our holy Mount Zion where it seems by the author's description, we are assembled with God, Jesus, all other believers and the host of heaven. Let us never sever ourselves from this wondrous assembly who have been privileged to have been called there by God.

See that you refuse not Him that speaks. ...

We can look back from our position of peace upon our mountain of grace, and see the tempest on that other mountain in the past as it roared upon Mount Sinai. We realize that the thunder that roared there, is the voice of our God, but now under grace, He speaks to us in a Still Small Whisper.

...For if they escaped not who refused Him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaks from heaven: (verse 25).

Those who refused to submit to God's authority and rebelled as a result, "did not escape" His wrath at that time. Now that the plan of redemption has been revealed to us in its fullness, how much more would be the severity of our judgment should we fall away from the grace we have received?

The author here again is reinforcing our faith by using a little healthy fear. How many times does a parent warn a child

of the dangers that surround him in this world? This is love in action. Love warns, love corrects, all for the benefit of the child. God's voice is no different in this respect, than any caring parent. Love without correction is no love at all.

Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He has promised saying, 'Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven' (verse 26).

God's voice shook the earth when it thundered upon Mount Sinai. He declared His fearsome power to His people, and this display should have instilled a healthy fear of the Almighty in their hearts as an incentive to obey Him. We can read of this event today, and gain the same perspective for our benefit; knowing also the sound of His gentle Still Small Voice that whispers comfort to our souls.

God has promised to shake the earth again, and not only the earth but heaven also. This is referring to the time when His wrath descends upon all those who have blatantly rejected Him during the prophesied apostasy and great tribulation.

This shaking is spiritual as well as physical, and will eventually cumulate in the removal of heaven and earth. His word reveals that these elements will be rolled like a scroll (Isaiah 34:4, Rev. 20:11) and the earth will be dissolved by fire (II Peter 3:7).

Those who have obeyed His voice and put their trust in the Messiah Jesus, have nothing to fear.

And this word, 'Yet once more,' signifying the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain (verse 27).

The author here is referring to Psalm 102: 24-26.

God has "Laid the foundation of the earth" and yet all of

this old realm will “perish” and be “changed.”

We know from the book of Revelation’s prophecies that someday there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where only righteousness will remain. That’s something to look forward to in spite of what the world looks like today – a sin diseased corpse on the verge of disintegration. But if we look at the remainder of Psalm 102, it interprets the last portion of verse 27. –

The children of Your servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before You (Psalm 102:28).

Everything else will be shaken, removed and changed, except those who have obeyed God and submitted to His plan of salvation fulfilled in the Messiah Jesus.

I had a dream once of a prospector who was panning for gold in a stream. He put in his pan and shook it to remove those things of no value so only the gold would remain.

God was showing me in this parable, that He is like that prospector. His shaking is designed to reveal the faithful who will remain standing firmly in their faith, no matter what is being removed around them. These faithful ones are the gold He treasures.

Wherefore we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (verse 28).

While everything in this world is temporal, and temporary, we belong to a kingdom that is permanent, everlasting and cannot be destroyed. Therefore “let us have grace.” It is grace, God’s forgiveness and loving Spirit that operates within us enabling us to “serve God acceptably with godly fear.”

We fear God constructively as a child fears a parent that

has the ability to correct. We know that our disobedience can invoke that correction and so we walk with this principle in mind, revering the power that is massive, but also a power that is on our side.

As we have been shown in verses eighteen through twenty-one, our God is the ultimate power over us. We must always keep in mind this side of His nature. Our God is the same God that roared upon Mount Sinai in the old covenant and also struck Ananias and Sapphira dead at the Apostle Peter's feet for lying to the Holy Spirit under the New Covenant (Acts 5: 1-11). God did not change His nature when the covenants changed. We worship the same holy, just, righteous God.

This holy fear of God we need to maintain is productive and necessary to our spiritual development. It is designed to keep us where we need to remain spiritually, guarding our walk, and seeking to obey His word for our own benefit.

For our God is a consuming fire (verse 29).

I remember hearing about a lumber crew that was working in the forest near Mount Saint Helens. For some reason, the crew's leader, moved them to another position that was even closer to the irritated volcano which was showing signs of eruption. Her team members were bewildered by her decision because they hadn't finished the work in the area they were in. Moving before they were finished was not according to protocol, but they obeyed. She said later that she didn't know why she made that decision. The volcano erupted while they were working in the new area. If they had not moved to the new location, they all would have been killed.

In a sense, our God is like that volcano. God's wrath is promised to fall upon the wicked. Those who have found shelter in His grace, are positioned on the side of His nature that promises rest and safety from spiritual destruction.

His fire is consuming. He consumes His people with the fiery passion of His love, while the devil and all those who are deceived into following that wicked one, will be consumed by the flames of God's anger at those who practice evil and hurt others.

Make sure that you are following Jesus to the right side of the volcano.

Chapter Thirteen

We have reached the final chapter of the book of Hebrews. Here the author changes pace and finishes with some general exhortations for sound Christian conduct.

Let brotherly love continue (verse 1).

Yes, let it never end. For without love we are nothing (I Corinthians 13:2).

Love is a fruit of the spirit that is developed in us through our union with Jesus. As we abide in the vine of the Messiah (John 15), this fruit is formed in us by degrees over time. This fruit, as well as all of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, can take longer to develop in some individuals, depending on their background and the areas of their life that need healing and submission.

The fruit of love is like a magnificent multi-faceted jewel. The other fruits of the Spirit are actually facets of love. The Apostle Paul shows us in Galatians chapter five, verse twenty-two and twenty-three, what these other fruits of love are; joy,

peace, longsuffering (patience) gentleness (kindness), goodness, faith (faithfulness) meekness, temperance (moderation or self-control).

As we grow in spiritual maturity, our recognition of how important these facets of love are in our lives becomes a focus of our walk with Jesus. In other words, we know we are developing in Christian maturity when our desire for these valuable fruits begins to outweigh our desire for a new car.

It is the Lord's grace that works in us, there is nothing we can do to change ourselves, except repent, recognize the areas in our lives that are not pleasing to God and be willing to let Him change us into the people He wants us to become. The result of this change leads to service to others.

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares (verse 2).

I remember a pastor and his wife we knew many years ago. They told me about a time when they were having a service on a snowy winter's evening. Not that many people came because of the weather, yet there was one new couple that had never attended the church before. They were the first to leave when the service was over, and when the pastor's wife saw that they were leaving, she hurried after them because she had not had the opportunity to greet them before the service.

She got to the door just a few moments after they had stepped outside and there was no sign of them anywhere. She looked at the ground and there were no footprints in the snow.

Another pastor we met told us about the time he and his children were having lunch at a fast food restaurant. A street man came in and the pastor overheard him tell the manager that he had no money and then he asked him if he could have some food. The manager refused to help him. The pastor

thought that he better help him, knowing the will of his "Boss." The Pastor bought the man some food and the street man left. The pastor's children hurried after him to see where the man was going to eat the meal, but the street man had completely vanished.

It is wisdom to be alert to those opportunities to help someone along the way. You never know who they might be. *"Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it to Me"* – Jesus (Matthew 25:40).

Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body (verse 3).

Compassion is love in action. Compassion enables us to identify with others in their suffering. In this verse the author mentions two groups, those in prison and those who are in any kind of adversity. While we are called to minister to those in prison, I believe that "those in bonds" is a reference to those in his day who were imprisoned specifically because of their Christian faith. In the world today, there are more Christians being persecuted for their faith than at any other time in the history of the church. We are exhorted here to "remember" them as if we are suffering persecution ourselves. As we look at the book of Revelation, which was originally written to encourage a persecuted church, we can realize that someday all of us who refuse to compromise and deny Jesus will be targets of persecution and martyrdom. Many now are subject to ridicule in the work place and schools. Remember to pray for the persecuted.

The second portion of this verse deals with anyone in adversity. Love is selfless, and focuses on the needs of others. We can identify with those who are suffering and serve them with prayer and as opportunity presents itself, with our

service and resources. We are also fulfilling God's royal command to love one another as we love ourselves.

We have recognized the value God places upon each human soul as we witness Jesus pouring out His life blood for us on the cross. As we understand how He loves us and values us, we value and love ourselves. This creates in us the security to make ourselves vulnerable to minister to someone else's need.

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (verse 4).

This is an exhortation to maintain sexual purity. God's word only allows for sex within the context of marriage between a man and a woman. Jesus teaches it this way. -

And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they two shall be one flesh?'" (Mathew 19:4,5).

Any sex act performed outside of the Biblical context is the sin of fornication. As Christians we are exhorted to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts and flee fornication (I Corinthians 6:18). We exhibit our faithfulness to God by our diligence in this area. In the scriptures, God likens His relationship with His people as a husband with His wife. When we fight to retain our chastity if we are single, and also remain faithful to our spouses when we are married, then we are expressing the sacred union we have with our God in Messiah Jesus. We are saving ourselves for our Divine Husband.

I remember meeting a young Christian woman who was in

the military. She told me she was very careful what she watches on television and movies in order to protect her from being aroused. She told me very beautifully that she was guarding herself to remain chaste for her husband Jesus.

One of the most powerful one sentence testimonies I ever heard was from a Messianic Jew who was gay. He said, "I'm gay, but I don't practice because God doesn't like it."

Jesus said if we love Him, keep His commandments (John 14:15). This is not for our justification, because that has been accomplished for us through the cross. We seek to obey Him, because we love Him and we want to please our heavenly husband.

No one who follows God in this area experiences any loss in this life. We are compensated by the sweet presence of our Lord and the knowledge that nothing we do for Him in this life will go unnoticed or unrewarded.

When we separate ourselves from the pagan influences around us, we are treasuring our unique union with the God of creation. We are married to God first, and sexual purity is an evidence of that holy union.

Those who have sinned in this area are forgiven through repentance and their spiritual virginity is restored. Through God's wondrous gift of grace, those who repent and turn from their sin will never be judged by God as an adulterer or whoremonger.

Let your conversation be without covetousness: and be content with such things as you have: for He has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (verse 5 from Deuteronomy 31:6).

This exhortation deals with the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet." This commandment concerns the sins of the heart life. It is designed to reveal our "lust life," and the deep need we all have for inner reformation.

This is one of the reasons why we need to be saved by grace alone, because even when we think we are doing well, God sees all the inner workings of our sinful hearts. Let me give you this example.

I was cleaning the mirror in my bedroom. I thought I'd eliminated every spot and as I was putting away my cleaning supplies, the sun came out and the light shone on my mirror. I was dismayed to see that the light was exposing a multitude of specks and smudges that I had missed.

When we stand before Jesus it is like standing in direct sunlight. He sees into the depths of our hearts. When we think we are doing well He sees the details of our motives and the multitudes of inner sins; sins that we are not even aware exist, because compared to God's holiness, "all our righteousness are as filthy rages" (Isaiah 64:6).

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, all mankind inherited the disease of sin that has been passed down from generation to generation like a birth defect. We are born marred and there is absolutely nothing that we can do to change our inherited sin natures. We must be covered by Jesus' perfect righteousness, for we have no righteousness of our own that can be accepted by God. Only when grace is appropriated by faith and we are saved, can the Holy Spirit begin to work within us to change us into the people God wants us to be.

This is why the Apostle Paul taught that we are delivered, we are being delivered and we will be delivered (II Corinthians 1:10). Our salvation is in three tenses - past, present and future. We are justified by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus our Messiah when we receive Him by repentance and faith. Our salvation is a completed act in the first tense, our sin natures are cleansed and God can no longer see the specks and smudges for our condemnation, for He is now beholding His Son in us through His Holy Spirit

(Romans 8:9).

Once we are in this position of unity with God, the Holy Spirit begins the second tense, the sanctification process which works to conform us to Jesus' image; the image of a human soul that is in total union with the Divine in all things. "Not My will but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

This process takes a lifetime and we are building on the finished foundation of our salvation in Jesus. Some build with fine materials, others with wood hay and stubble (I Corinthians 3:12,13). Some become vessels fit for the Masters use, others do not (II Timothy 2:20,21). Our salvation is not contingent on the degree of our spirituality, but our rewards are based on the quality of our obedience.

We are pruned and refined through this lifetime until the completion of our faith in the third tense when this life is finally over.

In the meantime, we look into the mirror of the Word of God and see the reflection of the person He desires us to be; the perfection reflected in the face of God's Son. He is smiling because He knows that with God all things are possible. No matter how speckled and smudged the mirror of our souls seems to be, when we are willing to completely yield to the workings of His Spirit within us, the God of miracles is able to present us faultless with exceeding joy; a bride without wrinkle, spot or smudge – even when we are standing in direct sunlight. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). But God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).*

As we have been shown in this study, the previous old covenant consisted of a system of outer religious service and could not supernaturally reform the inner man. When we receive Jesus, we receive His Holy Spirit who works within us to change us into the new creatures God wants us to become.

The Spirit works in conjunction with God's word to fulfil this purpose. The word shows us what God desires and when we seek Him to correct us in accordance with His word, the Holy Spirit labours in our souls to produce the necessary changes.

As we walk with the Lord, lust is replaced, our carnal desires are subdued. We are no longer walking after the flesh, or allowing ourselves to be dictated to by the whims of our sinful desires. Now we are walking by the Spirit and the lusts of the flesh are not fulfilled.

This process produces the peace of contentment. We are satisfied with the things of God, and the idolatry that covetousness produces is removed.

We realize that when God said He would never fail us and that He would always be there for us, He is telling us that He is all we really need. And when we come to the place where all we need is Jesus, we understand that we will always have everything we need.

So that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do to me" (verse 6).

In the Apostle Peter's first epistle, he comforts those who have experienced loss through persecution. They took these losses well, because they had come to the place in their faith, where the things of God were more important to them than any of their material possessions. They knew that their treasure is in heaven and what they valued most was their gift of eternal life. Therefore, no matter what transpired toward them through the operations of sinful men, their fear had been replaced by faith.

Let us all strive through prayer and the reading of God's word, to follow the example of these believers and seek the same strength and perseverance.

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end (result) of their conversation (verse 7).

Here we are being exhorted to remember those in church leadership. We are to remember and follow the example of those who “teach the word of God.” Are the teachers in your church teaching God’s word, or someone else’s version of it? You won’t know unless you study God’s word for yourself.

I was visiting a Bible study at a church in Maryland several years ago. I was saturated in the word and I could tell the teacher of the group was distorting the scriptures. I didn’t have to say a word, because one of the other attendees had also been well versed in the word and did not hesitate to correct the imbalances. He did it politely, but it’s sad he had to do it at all. There are many false teachers in the church today, which is further evidence of our current apostasy, which is a falling away from the truth as it was originally revealed by the Lord and His apostles.

We are to examine “the end of their conversation” of our teachers, to make sure they are not deviating from the apostle’s doctrine.

The following verse is a continuation of this thought.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever (verse 8).

Some things are never meant to change. This verse is a litmus test by which we should evaluate our leadership. Is the Jesus they reveal the same Messiah that walked on earth over two thousand years ago? Are His words their words? Have they brought this same Jesus into the present and exhort you to follow Him into the future? Or do they adjust Jesus to suit the times and distort the Gospel in order to compromise for the sake of popularity, or to avoid persecution?

In the swift undertow of popular opinion, and the current trend to accept the one world religion agenda that affirms all religions as equal and valid; it's not going to be popular to affirm that Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6)

Be wary about any teacher that deviates from what the Scriptures actually teach.

Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been accepted therein (verse 9).

The author here is reminding his readership of the spiritual climate of their old system of worship that has been replaced.

An understanding of grace is all we need. We are not to be distracted by odd doctrines that have no practical application to advance our faith or spiritual development.

It's been my experience that the devil will use minor odd doctrines to distract from what is truly important. Christians who have previously been involved in the occult are especially vulnerable to deception in this area, if they have not been properly delivered from their old demonic influences; although any Christian can be distracted to focus on non-essentials.

We can see the fruit of this demonic tactic if we have spent any time perusing some Christian forum boards, where massive arguments and misrepresentations thrive concerning "meats;" ordinances that are no longer part of the New Covenant. There is no profit in being preoccupied with nonessentials.

We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve

the tabernacle (verse 10).

We feast at the altar of grace. Those who serve the tabernacle, the religious system of the Old Covenant, have no right to partake in grace, if they are still clinging to a system that God has abolished. They are excluding themselves from salvation.

As of this writing, there are plans to build a third temple in Jerusalem, complete with the re-institution of animal sacrifice. The plan is to establish a religious centre for people of all faiths to worship their version of the Living God. They envision this temple to be “the place that will unite the whole world;” to bring everyone to “a higher way of thinking.”¹⁰ And of course, to be the place where their false messiah will rule the world and a new unified belief system.

Of course as any Christian who feasts on God’s word knows, all of this is the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy. The messiah the Jews today so eagerly await, is the antichrist, whose goal and purpose is to destroy Christianity.

In the Gospel of Matthew’s chapter twenty-four, Jesus warned of a deception that would be so effective that “if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24). Today there are Christians who are contributing their money and other support to help build the third temple which as prophesied will be the centre for a demonic one world religion.

Jesus prophesied the destruction of the first temple forty years before its fulfilment in 70AD. He said it would be destroyed because the Jews did not know the “time of their visitation” (Luke 19:44). They did not recognize the Messiah when He came to them.

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Jews continued to sacrifice animals, even though Jesus had fulfilled all the prophecies relating to the tabernacle and made the final once

for all time sacrifice of Himself. Thus God permitted the temple to be destroyed by the Roman army, putting an end to those obsolete sacrifices for sin in 70AD.

The current plan to build the temple and resume a system of sacrifice that God has ended, is nothing short of an abomination, and will most likely trigger the great tribulation to begin.

According to prophecy, God is going to once again allow Jerusalem to be invaded (Matthew 24, Ezekiel 38:16, Zechariah 14:1,2), and the Jewish people will experience another captivity before Jesus returns in supernatural glory (Zechariah 14:4).

Jesus' prophecy of the last generation before He returns recorded in Matthew 24, is a dual prophecy. His disciples had asked Him specifically about that last generation before His second coming. As He is describing the spiritual climate of those latter days, He was also foretelling Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD. History will repeat itself by God's design. Any temple that is constructed for the antichrist, who is the false messiah, will be destroyed. And if there is ever to be another fourth temple built, it will be constructed for the true Messiah Jesus to rule from when He returns – if He wants it.

The Apostle Paul shows us that Jesus will not return until there is a falling away from the faith, which we are witnessing at this moment; and the antichrist is revealed. He will demand worship of himself as god (II Thessalonians 2:3,4), which I believe is the abomination that makes desolate; (Daniel 9:27) man proclaiming himself as god.

Christians who refuse to co-operate with the third temple's religion of compromise and self-worship, will be vilified and persecuted for not embracing this new one world religion. Those who serve the satanic belief system, again have no right to eat with us at our banquet of grace.

For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp (verse 11).

Here we are returned to a practice of the tabernacle services. After the blood of the animals was used for atonement, the carcasses of the animals were taken outside the camp and burned. Our table is outside the camp, set apart from a system that God has dismissed.

Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate (verse 12).

Jesus' sacrifice was set apart from the temple. What appeared to be a disgrace in the eyes of the Jews, was the divine fulfilment of prophecy. The Messiah, as prophesied, would be reviled, rejected and be offered for our sins (Isaiah 53).

Likewise, we also identify with His sufferings.

Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach (verse 13).

We too, will be rejected and persecuted for not complying with the instigation of a system that has refused God's plan for atonement. We will suffer with Jesus outside the gate of a system that God has abolished.

Today, the Jews who have rejected Jesus, are looking for another messiah who will usher in a false, temporary peace. The fact that the bulk of rabbinical writings describe the messiah as a suffering servant, which validates Jesus as the true Messiah, has been deliberately hidden from view in order to perpetuate a skilfully crafted one world political and religious leader. There is no way that the false messiah can

fulfil the prophecies that Jesus has fulfilled. Likewise, knowledge of these prophecies will also be suppressed, and most likely those who teach them will be vilified and persecuted.

Don't ever allow yourselves to be compromised by any part of this deception. Bear the reproach of Jesus with dignity, for you serve the truth.

For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come (verse 14).

We know this realm, this temporary existence is not our home. We can endure whatever befalls us in this life, because our Messiah has given us the one thing that this world, or any other religion cannot provide; a concrete hope in eternal life. We have the assurance of His presence within us every day. Because our Messiah is God's only begotten Son, His Spirit is God's Spirit, They are One, and we are one with the Father and our Messiah Jesus.

By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name (verse 15).

We worship God through the Messiah Jesus, for He is the image of God. "He that has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). God was in Messiah reconciling the world to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19). Wherever Jesus is, so is the Father through His Holy Spirit in His Son. Because they are one Spirit it is impossible to have one without the other.

When Jesus returns the second time as illustrated for us in Zechariah chapter fourteen, He is called Yahweh (LORD, Zechariah 14:9) which is designating Him as God. *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9).* Our

praises rise to God the Father through His image, His only begotten Son. And our praise for what He has done for us through His Son's sacrifice, will never cease from the mouths of all those who have been redeemed by His magnificent love.

But to do good and to communicate (give) forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (verse 16).

This reminds me again of the pastor I heard who declared in his sermon that there is nothing we can do to please God. There is no work we can do to please God that will result in salvation. That deliverance is only provided for us through faith in Jesus. But there are things that we can do in our daily lives that please our God. He is delighted when we serve others with our abilities and our monetary gifts, especially to those in need. We express our love for God in the way we treat others. So we do good works whenever the opportunity presents itself because this behaviour glorifies God. We give of our substance to help the poor and further the Gospel. These works are the result of a transformed life and evidence of the reality of the Gospel. May we all remember to please God on a daily basis.

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (verse 17).

In verse seven we were told to "remember" those in church leadership. Here we are instructed again to "obey" them, and submit because they are watching, or looking out for the welfare of our souls, our salvation and spiritual development. This is the character of sound leadership. Their purpose is not to build their own kingdom, but the Lord's. A true servant of

the Lord is a servant to God's people, and their first concern should be the salvation of the soul and the soul's spiritual development in Jesus.

We discern the quality of leadership by their willingness to submit to the authority of the scriptures. We obey and submit under their submission.

Church leadership that serves with joy, not because they have to, but because they want to benefit the people and please the Lord, will naturally be a blessing and a benefit to their congregations. We will know them by their fruits. And they in turn will be able to give an acceptable account to the Lord when they stand before His judgment seat.

Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly (verse 18).

The writer of Hebrews is obviously functioning in a position of leadership, and here he is requesting prayer for himself and his co-workers. In this we are also reminded to pray for church leadership.

Here this leader is trusting that his team will have a "good conscience in all things willing to live honestly."

It is so important for those in leadership positions to walk worthy of their calling and never mar their witness and their testimony. When church leadership fails, the damage that is done is immeasurable, especially to new believers who are looking to their leadership for guidance.

The Apostle Paul was acutely aware of his responsibility in this area, and fought to guard his walk so as not to be a detriment to others under his influence (I Corinthians 9:27).

This is something all of us should consider, as our lives are the witness of the reality of Jesus in us. May we never do anything to discredit that witness.

But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner (verse 19).

Here the writer begs his readership to also direct their prayers for a specific purpose. He wants to be restored to them, meaning he desires to return to Jerusalem. If indeed this epistle has been written by Paul incognito, he had been forced to flee Jerusalem. Here he expresses his desire to return and minister again in an area from which persecution had forced him to flee.

We think of all those today who have been forced to leave their homes because of persecution. Let's pray for them as well.

In the next two verses, the author bestows a prayer of blessing upon his readership. So we don't interrupt the flow of this beautiful benediction, we'll read both verses as one.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, (verse 20)

Make you perfect (mature) in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Messiah; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (verse 21).

Our God is a God of peace. If we have inner peace we can endure the turmoil of this fallen world. Our peace and our hope is given to us through Jesus. We are reminded again here of His triumph over death. May we all live each day as if we have just discovered that Jesus' tomb is empty and express the joy of His victory.

The Lord truly is our Shepherd through the blood of the everlasting covenant. He shepherds us in this life and beyond so we need not fear any evil. We rest in His presence as He restores our souls, making us mature in every good work.

As Jesus submitted to His Father's will in all things, may we also follow His example and live our lives to please our heavenly Father.

We are reminded again here that we are a work of His grace. God works in us through Jesus to help us walk in the good works he has ordained for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10).

While legalistic ordinances have been nailed to the cross (Ephesians 2:15, Colossians 2:14), we walk in the commandments that Jesus summarized so eloquently.

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-40).

Love works no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:10).

When our sinful natures are submitted to the leadership of His Holy Spirit, the lies, the thefts, adulteries, and all those other things that wound and hurt others are avoided and repelled.

All sin hurts someone else, including ourselves and our Father in heaven. Love puts others first at the expense of our own selfish desires. We are being conformed into Jesus' image and that is an image of selflessness. In the giving away of ourselves to the Lord, we are released from those inner torments of incompleteness in our natures. He fills those empty spaces with more of Himself - His Spirit, and we are set free to experience the abundant life He promised. The abundant life has nothing to do with how much stuff you own, or how big your house is, but it has everything to do with removing you

from the bondage and imprisonment of your sin nature. *If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed* (John 8:36)

As we submit to him, we are no longer tormented by the thorns that accompany the self-life; fear, insecurity, covetousness, jealousy, anger, bitterness, etc.; these things force us to put the self first at the expense of those around us.

Dying to self is never easy, but we are assured with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). We can be transformed into the peaceful, joyful, loving new creatures He died to save and restore.

And to Him and His Father be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.

And I beseech you, brethren, suffer (permit or accept) the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter to you in few words (verse 22).

Here the author begs us to receive what he has laboured to write “in a few words.” His letter is just a few words compared to the books he could have composed. But he understands as we do also, that the principles and truth that are contained in those few words are massive volumes written in our hearts.

Those few words have survived the centuries to be placed before us in these crucial times before Jesus returns. If we hold onto them, we shall not be ashamed at our Lord’s coming (I John 2:28). He will find His beloved church looking for Him eagerly, holding onto her faith as her only treasure.

In the last two verses, the author closes with some news, a promise and his final salutation.

Know you (I want you to know) that our brother Timothy has been set at liberty, with whom, if he comes shortly, I will see you

(verse 23).

Timothy must have experienced some imprisonment for his faith and was released, a cause of much rejoicing. This again reminds us to pray for our persecuted brethren who are now suffering for their faith in Jesus in prisons all over the world.

We note that this epistle was written by Timothy in Italy. Apparently the author, who may have been Paul, says Timothy had been released, and was coming to him, showing us that the epistle had been written before Timothy had arrived. Paul had trouble with his eyes, and his writing would have reflected his disability. Did Timothy come and copy the text in a more readable script, as he had done for Paul in the past? And was Timothy's work recopied later by Luke who adapted it into a more excellent Greek? Only God knows.

Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you (verse 24).

Mutual respect for one another is reflected in this request to "salute" all the brethren and church leadership. In turn he sends the regards of all the brethren with him in Italy. This simple salutation reminds us that we are one church, and one family in Jesus.

The last verse of this amazing epistle, which is all I need to say to finish our journey through the book of Hebrews, is a simple prayer.

Grace be with you all (verse 25).

Conclusion

For over a year I was deeply involved in the writing of this book. I found it to be profoundly ironic that as I was engrossed with the study of a book that was written to prevent the Hebrew believers from returning to Judaism and its archaic system of animal sacrifice; that the very same system is fervently trying to be re-established in Jerusalem at this present time.

To Christians who ask, "Is it okay to support the building of a third temple?" I would have to respond with an empathic, "No!"

The view of some of the Christians who are supporting Israel in this heresy, do so under the mistaken assumption that the rebuilding of the temple will hasten Jesus' return. The scriptures do show us that the Lord will not return until there is a falling away, an apostasy, and the antichrist is revealed, proclaiming himself to be worshipped as God in the holy of holies (II Thessalonians 2:3,4, Rev.13:6).

While the emergence of a third temple seems to play a part

in this scenario, for a Christian to assist in the construction of a temple that is being built for the false messiah/antichrist, is a form of betrayal to the Christian faith. As we have been shown in this study, Jesus is the final sacrifice for sin. To help in the reestablishment of a system that God has abolished is an affront to the Gospel.

I believe that the third temple will be and is a test of loyalty for the Christian. We are called to proclaim the Gospel, not align ourselves with the apostasy, the falling away that will ultimately result in the world's enslavement to the antichrist's one world government.

The Jews believe that their messiah will rule the world from Jerusalem. Therefore it is no surprise that Jerusalem has now been made the capital of Israel. I have heard it proclaimed from some Jews, that when their messiah comes and rules, then the Gentiles, or Goyim, will then become their slaves. This belief is reinforced in the Babylonian Talmud, which they use to interpret the Torah. The goal is to see the Christian's faith in Jesus destroyed.

How can any true Christian support the establishment of a system that represents the destruction of the Christian faith?

The foreshadow of the antichrist, as history and Daniel's prophecy attests (Daniel 11: 24-31), was Antiochus Epiphanes. He was helped in his ascent to power by Hellenized Jews. These were secularized Jews who were opposed to the orthodox Jew's strict adherence to God's word and their faithfulness to Him. Likewise, Christians today who support the construction of a third temple, for whatever reason, are like those Hellenized Jews who enabled Antiochus to be in the position to violently persecute and destroy the Jew's faith.

The Bible predicts that Israel will be invaded by the Gentiles and go into another captivity before the Lord returns (Rev. 11:2, Zechariah 14:2). When today's Jews in Israel, who have rejected Jesus as the true Messiah, begin sacrificing

animals again, they will be by every evidence we have in the Biblical record, "flying in the face of God."

I believe that the sacrifices, or their attempts to re-establish them, will be the trigger that instigates their captivity and catapults the world into the great tribulation and the wrath of God's judgment.

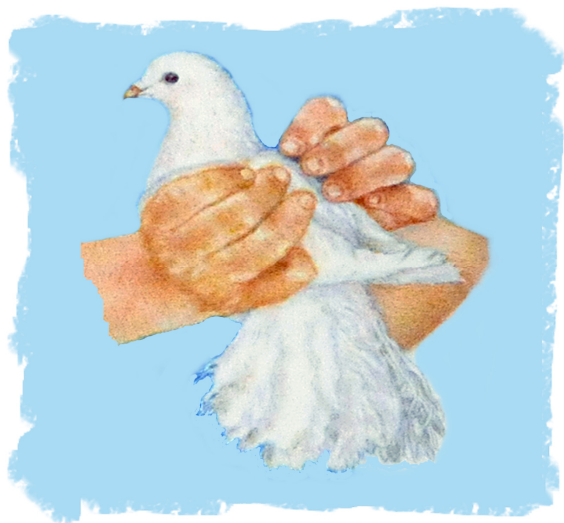
While the Christian should not support the building of a third temple, we should not make any physical attempts to prevent it, other than warning those involved of what the Bible tells us concerning their rejection of the truth of the Gospel. Our prayer should be, "God's will be done."

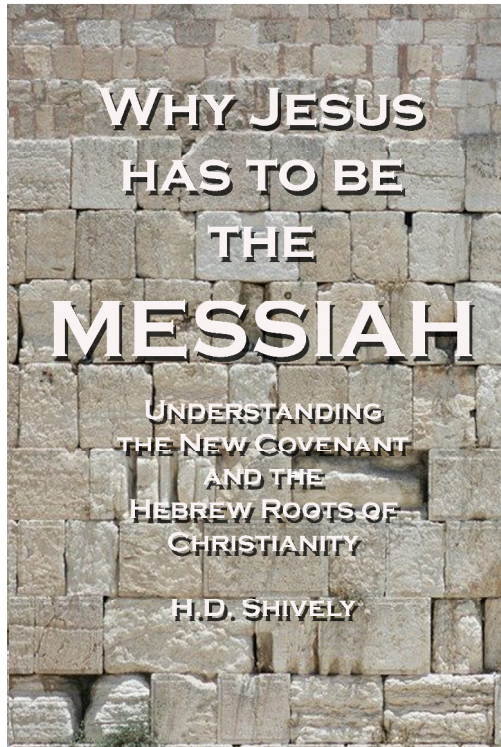
Israel was the womb through which God birthed deliverance for the entire world in the Messiah Jesus. We must love and honor our mother Israel for this reason. She may be an enemy of the Gospel at this moment in time, but we are to love our enemies and do good to them that persecute us. We have this assurance in the scriptures, that when her purge is completed, those who are the Lord's will receive Him at His second coming with tears amid the ashes (Zechariah 12:10,11).

The world is teetering on the edge of the great disaster to come. This is a time for the true Christian to follow the Lord's command to "Come out of Babylon" (Rev. 18:4) and turn our backs on anything that would keep us from holding onto our faith.

Endnotes

1. The New Analytical Bible and Dictionary of the Bible, King James Version, John A. Dickson Publishing Company, 1964, Page 1387
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8. <http://www.jewishanswers.org/ask-the-rabbi-category/the-land-of-israel/?p=2403>
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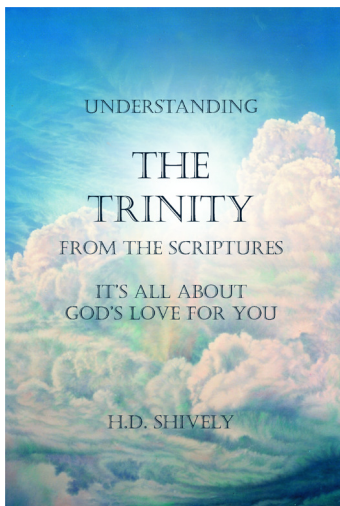
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