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TO THE HEBREWS

A Research Paper
Presented to
Dr. Robert Stagg
Ouachita Baptist University

In Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Course
Special Studies 493

by
Marvin Peters
December 1970

I INTRODUCTION

The letter to the Hebrews is a difficult book for many readers to understand. However, the Epistle is full of exhortations for the Christian. The writer of Hebrews sets forth the argument that Christ is superior to all things and that a life of faith in Christ is the greatest thing that could happen to anyone. It is not only a great experience in life, but also it is such a tragic loss for one who refuses to believe in Him, "for whom are all things and by whom are all things..." Hebrews 2:10b.

The Epistle was rejected some 200 years by the Christians because it seemed to hold out to the fact that there was no second chance at salvation for those who renounced Christ. Many Christians took the oath to Caesar and renounced Christ to save their lives. A great controversy arose as to whether these "lapsi" (as they were called) could be reinstated in the church. Finally in the fourth century the arguments faded away and Hebrews was accepted into the canon and most Christians were convinced that in the wisdom of God the book was received as Holy Scripture for the strengthening of Christian life and doctrine.

II AUTHORSHIP

The author of the Epistle never mentions his name, nor did any of the early church leaders bother with the authorship. This could have been due to the fact that they were

mainly concerned with the doctrinal content and the problems at hand. It is doubtful if they even once thought that God would still be using the work nearly 2,000 years later.

a. Internal evidence. As was previously mentioned the author makes no mention of his identity or his position. He did show in 2:3 that he as well as his readers had been led to conversion by someone who had heard the Lord speak of His salvation.

It is quite evident that he was a Jew. He shows that he was familiar with the Jewish ritual of sacrifice and he was quite familiar with the Old Testament and quoted from it rather frequently.

The author was known by Timothy (13:23), and was familiar with Paul's doctrine. It is possible also that he was familiar with Stephen's speech.

b. External evidence. It appears that Clement of Rome had the Epistle before him and quoted from it as he did the other New Testament Epistles. However, he makes no mention of the author.

There is no mention of the Epistle in the Marcion Canon or in the Muratorian Canon. Origen was certain that the Epistle was Paul's, but he could not account for the difference in style. Scholars of the Greek New Testament have remarked that the style and grammar of Hebrews is different than that of the Apostle Paul. Origen made a

famous remark, "But who wrote the Epistle only God knows for certain."¹

c. Various suggestions for authorship.

(1) The King James Version attribute the Epistle to Paul. This may be due to the Alexandrian belief, which influenced the eastern Christians, and towards the end of the fourth century the western Christians were swayed to this view by Jerome and Augustine. Clement of Alexander stated that the Epistle was written by Paul in the Hebrew language and translated into Greek by Luke. Origen, who knew Hebrew as well as Greek, said that he could find no evidence of the Epistle ever having been translated from Hebrew. This argument seems to be valid since the author based his arguments from the LXX translation of the Old Testament.

There are various arguments against the Pauline authorship. There are theological differences between Hebrews and the Pauline Epistles. Paul makes no mention of the High-Priesthood of Christ, also Paul emphasizes the resurrection whereas the Hebrew author concentrates on the exaltation. Also, Paul emphasizes the redemptive work of Christ whereas the Epistle centers on the cleansing, sanctifying and perfecting work of Christ.

The language of the Epistle is more polished than that

¹Clarence S. Roddy, Proclaiming the New Testament, Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 9.

of the Pauline Epistles. The Epistle is better organized in its argumentation than the Pauline Epistles. The most that could be supposed is that one of Paul's circle wrote down such an oration as he heard Paul preach it.

(2) Barnabas has been suggested as the author of the Epistle. This is possibly due to the fact that the Epistle as well as the "Epistle of Barnabas" has an Alexandrian influence.

The strongest claim for this view is that Barnabas as a Levite would have been acquainted with the Temple ritual.

It is thought among scholars that if Barnabas was the author of the "Epistle of Barnabas" then he could not have written Hebrews. The "Epistle of Barnabas" is inferior in spiritual grasp, and in understanding of the problems with which it deals.

(3) Luke had been suggested by some in Origen's day, while others have thought of him as only translator of the Epistle. Luke was well educated, influenced by Alexandrian philosophy, and, from the context of the Colossians, was a Gentile and a proselyte. In view of the lack of evidence it is better to say that the author was acquainted with Luke's writings rather than to say Luke wrote the Epistle.

(4) Silvanus has been suggested because of the similarities of 1 Peter and Hebrews. Silas was a member of the Pauline circle, and Silas and Timothy were known to each

other. This is the most that can be said for this view. Silas was a Jerusalem Jew and was not greatly influenced by the Alexandrian philosophy.

(5) Clement of Rome has been suggested because of the parallels between the Epistle and Clement's Epistle. Clement's language and style, range of thought, and method of citation are all inferior to those of the author of the Epistle. The similarities can be accounted for by Clement's acquaintance with the Epistle.

(6) Aquila and Priscilla were proposed as authors by Harnack. They were also known by Timothy, as well as Paul and possibly Luke. The arguments for this view are the pilgrim approach (11:13-16); the reference to nautical terms (3:6, 14, 6:19, 13:9); the interest in the tabernacle, since they were tent makers; and the interest in childhood (5:12, 11:23, 12:7) and parenthood (7:3, 11:23).

(7) Apollos is considered the author by many modern day scholars. This was first introduced by Luther. This view presents the strongest argument. It would account for the Alexandrian influence, the Pauline influence, the acquaintance with Timothy, and the knowledge of the Levitical system as well as the knowledge of the scriptures and the use of the LXX Version. Apollos was a Jew, born in Alexandria. There are no data which can be brought against this view.

(8) Philip the deacon was suggested by Sir William

Ramsay. There is only the evidence of the Pauline acquaintance to support this view.

The writer of Hebrews puts the stress on the one who is speaking. For him the Holy Spirit of God is speaking, not himself. We see a reflection of the teaching of Jesus, "And thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." (Matt 6:4). We must recall the words of Origen, "But who wrote the letter to the Hebrews only God knows for certain."²

III DESTINATION

There is no doubt that the church to whom the Epistle was written was Jewish, but where? It is evident that the writer and readers knew each other. But since we do not know the identity of the author we do not know to whom he was writing. Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem have been suggested as possibilities.

Alexandria was probably suggested because of the Alexandrian influence. However this destination doesn't seem valid since the early Alexandrian church fathers laid no claim to it and they assumed that it was addressed to Jerusalem by Paul.

Jerusalem was suggested because the Jewish Christians there were tempted to apostatize to Judaism. There would be

²Ibid.

problems in a Hellenistic approach if Jerusalem Jews were in mind. It is doubtful, also, if the writer would address them in the terms of 2:3, "confirmed unto us by them that heard him". Many of the Jerusalem Jews heard Jesus personally.

Rome is agreed upon by the majority of modern scholars, because the Epistle was first known in Rome. Internal evidence supports the Roman view. In 13:24 the phrase "They of Italy salute you." is understood of Italians who are away from Italy and are sending greetings home. In 13:23 is the mention of Timothy. Timothy was well known by the Roman Christians. In 10:34 is the mention of the reader's generosity which agrees with that of the Roman church. However, since Rome was not evangelized by those that were eyewitnesses, especially with signs and wonders, there is some doubt as to a Roman destination. But there were those from Rome who were present in Jerusalem on Pentecost. If the letter was addressed to this house-group rather than the entire Roman church then the Roman destination could be justified.

IV DATE

The date of the Epistle is also hard to determine because of the uncertainty of the authorship. It is evident from the contents that the Christians had undergone persecution and were facing the risk of another persecution. The first persecution was under Nero in A.D. 64, and the next

persecution was in the time of Domitian about A.D. 85.

Assuming Apollos to be the author the best date is between A.D. 68-70.

V PURPOSE AND OCCASION

Many Christians had renounced Christ and had taken an oath to Caesar to save their lives. The writer intended to encourage the Christians to endure persecution and remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

VI THEME

Because the Hebrew Christians were tempted to fall back into Judaism to avoid persecution, the author repeatedly shows the superiority of Christ over the Old Testament revelation.

VII SOURCES OF THE AUTHOR'S THOUGHT

The writer's thought is somewhat Platonic, but this does not mean that he was a philosopher like Plato, or that he had studied Plato's works. It has been recognized by many scholars that the book of Hebrews shows a close relationship to the thinking of Philo of Alexander. The author's Christology is the most impressive evidence of Philonic influence, and his use of scripture is almost conclusive. Like Philo he works with the Greek translation of the Old Testament and at times his use of a passage depends on a word present in the Septuagint and absent in the Hebrew text. Also like Philo he disregards the historical setting

of the scripture passages.

The author of Hebrews may not have been familiar with Philo's writings, however. Most of Philo's writings and ideas may have been the common property of Hellenistic Judaism. The author differs from Philo in holding that everything centers in Christ, for Philo it was Logos.

The parallels between Philo's Logos and Hebrews' Christ are impressive. Not only does the author set forth the relation of the Son to the Father and to the world in Philonic terms, but he presents Melchizedek as typical of the ideal high priest, which is Christ, as Philo equates Melchizedek with his Logos. The sinlessness and the service attributed to Christ as priest are similarly stressed by Philo in speaking of the Logos.

The most obvious source of his thinking is the Old Testament institution of priesthood and sacrifice. The validity of the cult was not destroyed by the destruction of the temple. The study of the law of sacrifice became the substitute for its' performance. The author shows that the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ is far superior to the Old Testament practice.

VIII OUTLINE³

³Merrill C. Tenney, Editor, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," Pictorial Bible Dictionary. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), p. 342.

PROLOGUE: COURSE AND CLIMAX OF DIVINE REVELATION (1:1-3)

- I. PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST HIMSELF (1:4-4:13)
 - A. Superiority of Christ to Angels (1:4-14)
 - B. Warning: Peril of Indifference to These Truths (2:1-14)
 - C. Reason Christ Became Human (2:5-18)
 - D. Christ's Position is Greater than That of Moses (3:1-6)
 - E. Warning: Unbelief Brings Temporal and Eternal Effects (3:7-4:13)

II. PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST (4:14-10:18)

- A. Importance of His Priesthood for a Believer's Conduct (4:14-16)
- B. Qualifications of a High Priest (5:1-10)
- C. Warning: Immaturity and Apostasy are Conquered Only by Faith, Longsuffering, and Hope (5:11-6:20a)
- D. Melchizedek's Eternal Successor (6:20b-7:28)
- E. Heavenly Sanctuary and New Covenant (8:1-13)
- F. Priestly Service under the Old Covenant and the New (9:1-28)
- G. Inadequacy of the Sacrifices under the Law contrasted with the Efficacy and Finality of Christ's Sacrifice (10:1-18)

III. PERSEVERANCE OF CHRISTIANS (10:19-12:29)

- A. Attitudes to be Sought and Attitudes to be Shunned (10:19-38)
- B. Faith in Action-Illustrious Examples from the Past (11:1-40)
- C. Incentives for Action in the Present Scene and in the Future Goal (12:1-29)

POSTSCRIPT: EXHORTATIONS, PERSONAL CONCERNS, BENEDICTION (13:1-25)

IX CONTENTS

A. God Speaks Through His Son (1:1-4)

"God speaks His last word." That sounds like "God is dead" theology, doesn't it? Well, it's not. God is as alive today as He was in the beginning of time, or when Christ came into the world, or when the disciples received the Holy Spirit. God is alive in those who have faith in Him.

Who has the answer to the ultimate mysteries of nature,

history, and redemption? Who has the answer to the perfect nature of Deity and humanity? None but God. But has God revealed Himself to man? The Bible clearly states, "God has spoken." He has spoken about man, nature, sin, redemption, death, life eternal, and Himself. God has revealed all that man needs to know about salvation and life.

God has spoken. In Old Testament times He spoke through many ways. He spoke through nature, through the fathers, through the prophets, and through various other ways. But today and in the New Testament God has spoken through a Son. This was God's clearest and highest revelation of Himself. If you want to know and understand God then you must study Jesus. This Revelation is unique. There is no other religion in the world that claims a Savior such as Jesus. The uniqueness of the Son of God stands, and here are seven things about the person and work of that Son.

1. The Son is heir of all things. What was the Hebrew writer thinking about? Maybe he thought of Psalms 2:8 "I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance." or maybe Ephesians 1:10, which is more probable, "as a plan for the fulness of time when he might unite all things in Him." What will be the end of all things? The Bible tells us that they are heading towards a day when God would complete His purpose in history, and all things will be integrated into Christ.

The world appears to be in a more wicked state than it

has ever been in history. We have prophets of doom predicting a terrible end to the world. But never fear, the world is not out of control. Christ is the end. Christ is the answer to our problems. In that final day Christ will come in the glory of His angels and consummate His Spiritual Kingdom and usher in His Eternal Kingdom. Is there any message more needed than this when the end of the age seems to be falling upon us?

2. The Son was creator of the world. How can Jesus fit into the creation of the universe? We find recorded in the book of John these words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without him was not anything made that was made."

John 1:1-3. Again we have the testimony of Paul in Colossians 1:16, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, 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." Then we have the testimony in the book of Hebrews, "by whom also he made the worlds." (1:2) The early Christian church thought only in terms of the Son, Jesus, being the creative agent of God.

3. The Son reveals the glory of God. Having discussed Jesus' relation to the world we find in this statement Jesus' relation to God. What is God really like? Jesus reveals the

Glory of God. He is God disclosed. He is an impression of God. Jesus said in John 14:9, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Someone has said the "Glory means the holiness of God made visible." What a glory. It's not the glory of material things. It's not the glory of kings and princes. Rather, it's the glory of suffering and victory. It's the glory of the cross. It's the glory of man not being able to save himself.

The phrases "the brightness of His glory," and, "the express image of His person," means that in Jesus was revealed the exact representation of the very being of God. All of God that could be expressed in humanity was expressed in the Man Jesus Christ.

4. The Son sustains all things. This is very natural as well as logical. It would seem that if He created it, and is the end to which it is working, then it would seem that He is the one who would sustain it. He is the Alpha and Omega and all the alphabet in between. There are those that believe that God created the world, setting certain natural laws into motion, and is sitting outside watching. The early Christian church didn't believe that. Their God was not a remote God, but one that was alive and involved in their everyday lives. That is the same God we have today, one that is alive and active and He should be involved in our everyday lives, if we are His children.

The Bible, from the beginning to the end shows that God was and is deeply involved in the world. God is in the world and couldn't leave it if He wanted to, because He is captivated by His own love. Christ is in the world and all of the powers on earth or in hell can never remove Him. In fact there is no meaning to existence without Him.

5. The Son was made purification for sin. This is the heart of the message of the Book of Hebrews. In fact this is the message of the entire Bible. The primary theme in Hebrews is not the Christ of creation or the revelation of the nature of God but the Christ of redemption, making it possible for us to come into the presence of God. Purification is a great word. The content of redemption is cleansing. Sin is a dirty, filthy thing. Sinners need a bath, mentally, morally, and spiritually.

No individual can come into the presence of God with sin in their life. We must obtain forgiveness for our sins through Jesus the Christ. There is no other way. There is no other source than Jesus Himself purging our sins.

God has made a way to remove the barrier between man and God.

6. The Son is exalted to God's right hand. This is important to us. Very important. That Jesus died for our sins is a great statement, but without the resurrection of Christ Christianity would be a dead religion. It would have

ended on the cross. After Jesus was crucified His disciples went back to fishing with the thought in their mind, "it's all over." But when Jesus appeared to them a few days later they began to come to life again.

He arose from the dead. He is at the side of God as our great High Priest. We have access to God through Him who lived, loved, and died for us. We have a friend who will be our lawyer at that final court session on judgement day.

The writer of the Hebrews said that God had spoken His final and perfect word in a Son. In Christ and in Christ alone is there free and perfect access into the presence and fellowship of God. The Hebrews writer wrote this to keep the Christians from accepting something of a lesser quality.

B. The Son Superior to Angels (1:5-14)

The writer sets forth his argument against the worship of angels. In verse 4 he sets forth the thought that the name of Jesus is superior to the angels. Beginning in verse 5 the evidence for the statement is set forth. None of the angels have ever been called the Son of God. Rather the angels worship and minister to Jesus. The writer quotes several Old Testament scriptures, none of which were said of the angels, but of the Messiah.

There is no room in the discipleship of Christ for the worship of any other than God through Christ. The demanding qualification of cross bearing make it impossible. If we

worship any other, whether material or spiritual, then our witness and power and experiences as a Christian are weakened. Instead of the believer spending time in worship to them, the writer says, they are sent out by God to render service to the believer as he serves God.

C. So great a danger.(2:1-4)

The Hebrew writer had just discussed the superiority of the person and the work of the Son over the angels. The implication that we catch in this discussion is soul shattering. "Therefore we ought to give more earnest heed to the things which we have heard." God hath spoken. We learned previously that God had spoken by the fathers and prophets, and finally God spoke through a Son, Jesus Christ. No new revelation is needed, or can be given. We must heed therefore and study that revelation and advance within it. It requires a life of faith, and only when one gives himself to it's truth does he learn and advance. It is certain that God has spoken and we ought to listen.

The witness and work of Christ are stressed in these scriptures, and needs to be stressed today. The writer of these scriptures wanted to arouse the Christians out of their dullness and neglect. The Christians tended to surrender their faith in Christ for something of a lesser quality. We have this same problem facing us today. Both Christians and non-Christians, because of the demanding qualities of

Christianity, and because it appears to be easier to live a non-Christian life, look for an easier way out. But don't be deceived. God has spoken, and when God speaks man cannot ignore Him. It is a matter of life or death. Indifference to God is equal to disrespect and is the essence of disobedience.

We ought to take heed to the voice of God. Let us shut out all other voices and give Him our undivided attention. If we don't we face a tragic peril.

1. So great a peril. So great a peril it is indeed. The peril of drifting. Drifting is as common as the race is old. It was present when the Book of Hebrews was written, and is present today.

In verse one we see two phrases, "more earnest heed," which means "pay attention," and "let them slip," or "to drift." Both are used in a nautical sense and gives us a picture of a ship drifting past a safe harbor to its destruction because the pilot has not paid attention to the course. A very few are lost because they deliberately throw away their faith. Many are on the road to hell simply because of carelessness, simply because they won't take heed to the warnings and stumbling blocks of God. Many people drift to eternal destruction because of everyday pressures of trying to make a living, or trying to gain prestige, or trying to win friends. In so doing we push out a far greater value -

knowing and serving God.

It is such a great and tragic danger that is faced for those who carelessly toss aside the warnings of God and begin to drift, maybe to the point of no return and eternal loss. Such a tragic loss Jesus emphasised it again and again, "He that hath ear to hear, let him hear." (Revelation 2:17)

2. So great a penalty. Not only were they in danger of drifting out of the area of salvation in a negative sense, but they were exposing themselves to the positive judgement of God. "For if the word spoken by the angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape?" This is a reference to the law of Moses. The law of Moses was a just law and every disobedience received a just punishment. How then do we expect to escape? In the teachings of Jesus and all through the Bible there is indication that to whom more is given more is required of that one. We have been given greater opportunities for the Gospel than some others and God requires a greater response from us than He does from those who have received less of the Gospel.

In verse 2 transgression and disobedience are stated. Transgression means stepping over a line. The law and conscience has drawn a line. To step over it is a sin. Disobedience means imperfect hearing, then careless hearing, and then it finally means unwillingness to hear, which

becomes disobedience.

Someone has stated that it is a terrible responsibility to be the friend of the Eternal One. Israel as the chosen of God illustrates the idea. Men now have the revelation of the Eternal Son of the Eternal God. How great the privilege, how great the responsibility - how terrible the punishment if they neglect and disobey! Life is not a dream without moral responsibility. Life is real. God's salvation is real. Let us not minimize the awful peril of loss involved in failing to listen to what God hath spoken. It is such a tragic loss. But it need not be so. Listen to God's voice and become submissive to His Marvelous Grace.

3. So great a salvation. We have arrived at the heart of the argument. This is why the punishment is so great. The salvation itself is so great! The grace of God came down to man in none other than His own Son - God Himself incarnate. The greatness of this salvation is seen in three aspects:-

1) It is great because it was spoken by the Lord. God will do no more. It may sound strange but the naked truth is that God has spoken finally and ultimately. He has spoken at a great and infinite cost. The life, suffering, and death of His Son constitutes the word spoken. His suffering on the cross, His experience of death and His glorious resurrection were all on behalf of weak and sinful men.

2) It is great because it was manifested to the

Hebrew readers by those who were eye-witnesses, from men who heard it directly from the lips of Jesus. It came from men such as Matthew, Mark, John, Peter, and even Paul claimed to have a revelation of Jesus. All of these have written about their experiences with Jesus. Jesus didn't live His life in a corner. His moral teachings are imbedded in history. Christianity was not founded on fables, myths, or legends, but on actual life experiences of God's revelation,

This knowledge was passed on by those who knew Christ, and remains true unto this day. We must know Christ if we are to pass this knowledge on. We cannot teach what we don't know. We have the witness of those who were eye-witnesses.

3) This salvation is great because God himself bore witness to it, by miracles of the Holy Spirit. Miracles may not occupy the Christian's experiences as they once did, or maybe they do and we credit them to man's achievements. However there is still one miracle that man can't claim, that is the miracle of a life being transformed into Christ. One man used to say, "the proof of real Christianity is still the fact that it can change the lives of men."⁴

The aim of every Christian should be to manifest the Spirit of God in his life.

⁴William Barclay, The Letter to the Hebrews (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 15.

Thus the writer has given evidence that God has spoken in the gospel of His Son, Jesus. What is the natural question? What is the unanswerable question? "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Men do not drift because of lack of evidence but for the single reason of refusing to give attention to the evidence that they possess.

D. But we see Jesus (2:5-18)

This is the central purpose of all preaching. Carved on the pulpit of the Baptist Temple in Philadelphia, where the preacher can see them, are these words, "Sir, we would see Jesus." When the people see Jesus during the worship service they leave saying in their hearts, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." John 20:20.

The writer refers to the Son of man in the first portion of these verses. "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visited him...." We see reflected in these verses the thought that man is not all that he was created to be. Man, who was created a little lower than God, created to be free, is bound. Man was created in the image of God to have fellowship with God and mastery over all things. But because of his sin man entered into frustration and defeat instead of mastery and dominion. But we see Jesus who came into this state of frustration and defeat, in order that by His life, death and glory, He might make man what man was meant to be. Without Him man can never

be what he is meant to be.

The Hebrew writer paints four beautiful portraits of Jesus. These portraits encompass His entire Ministry.

1. We see Jesus our Savior. Jesus, who possessed the form of God, made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man. How can we explain that? This is the grace of God. Though He was rich He became poor for our sakes. Men have searched the world over to find an illustration, but in vain. Only God could love the world as to give His only Son. But humiliation is not the goal of this passage.

Jesus was crowned with glory and honor - the glory and honor of God. He was honored because He died. He was made perfect through suffering. Through suffering Jesus was made fully able to become the captain of our salvation. Why should this be so?

1) It was through His sufferings that He was really identified with man. The writer of the Hebrew text quotes from three Old Testament passages as to His identity with man: Psalm 22:22, Isaiah 12:2, Isaiah 8:18. If Jesus had come into this world in any other form He would have been unable to identify with man. He would have been different than man and therefore unable to save man.

To the Greeks the cross was a stumbling block. Their idea of God was detachment. But the Christian idea of God is

identity. Through His sufferings Jesus Christ identified with man.

2) Through this identity Jesus Christ sympathizes with man. He literally feels with them. It is almost impossible to understand another person's sorrows and sufferings unless we have been through them. Before we can have sympathy we must go through the same things the other person has gone through - and that is precisely what Jesus did.

3) Because He sympathizes He can really help. He knows our need. He has met our sorrows. He has faced our temptations. Because of that He knows exactly what help we need and He can give it.

He was made perfect through suffering. He went through things Himself and He can help others who are going through them.

2. We see Jesus our Sanctifier. Here is salvation linked with creation. The sanctifier is God, the sanctified are the believers and they become the sons of God. Christ is the link. He became man in order that He might sanctify, that is, set apart, consecrate, dedicate to God those who believe in Him. We are consecrated to God for His worship, and for His service, and set apart for God as His Holy people destined to enter His glory.

Christ, in a sense, has become our Brother because we

have become the sons and daughters of God. "He is not ashamed to call us Brethen." How about our feelings toward Christ? Are we ashamed to be called the brother of Christ? Christ is not ashamed to own us. We should recognize our brotherhood. He, like us, had to exercise faith in God the Father. He walked in faith. He suffered in faith. He died in faith, and He arose in faith. He never used His divine power for His own benefit, but to glorify God, the Father.

Christ is our sanctifier. He has purged our sins. He has become one with us as He and God are one. He has become the link between man and God and set us apart for God's service and worship.

3. We see Jesus our Deliver from fear. He has become our deliver because He was flesh and blood, one with us.

What is the thing men fear most? Death is the capstone of fear. Christ has overcome death and removed the fear of death from our midst. He has conquered death because He has conquered sin.

Through the resurrection of Christ we have assurance of victory over sin and death. 1 Corinthians 15:54b-57, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The devil is a defeated foe! Death is not the end for the believer, but for those who refuse to believe death is only the beginning of an eternity of death and destruction.

4. We see Jesus our merciful and faithful High Priest. Notice that at the beginning of each section the writer refers to Christ's identity with the race. "It behoved him to be made like unto His brethen." It was a necessity of divine love. Only by so doing could He reveal that love.

There are certain qualifications in the Old Testament for one to become a priest. One is that the one appointed priest be able to sympathize with the people. He must be able to feel as the people do. We can be certain that Christ is able to sympathize with us. "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Men who have never fallen are often too severe in their judgement, men who have fallen are apt to be too lenient. But we can be sure that He who was tempted yet without sin can make the perfect judgement.

The second qualification for priesthood was to be divinely appointed. "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

Jesus is the faithful and merciful high priest to represent man in matters pertaining to God. The priest of

the Old Testament would offer sacrifices for the sins of men. Jesus is the merciful and faithful high priest who offered the greatest sacrifice for the sins of men. He offered Himself.

E. Christ Superior to Moses (3:1-6)

The author began the Epistle by proving that Jesus is superior to the prophets, then he went on to prove that Jesus is superior to the angels, and now he proceeds to prove that Jesus is superior to Moses. In the thought of the Hebrews, Moses held a place that was unique. He was the man who had spoken with God face to face as a man speaks to his friend. He was the direct recipient of the Ten Commandments, the Law of God. The greatest thing in all the world for the Hebrew was the Law, and the Law and Moses were one and the same thing. To the Hebrew it would have been impossible to conceive that anyone ever stood closer to God than Moses did, yet that is what the author sets out to prove.

The author calls for the Hebrews to "consider" (KJV) Jesus, and he points out two things about Jesus. (1) He calls Jesus an Apostle. He was not using the word apostle to mean rank or position in the church, but in Jewish terminology. The Sanhedrin (the supreme court of the Jews) sent out apostles who were delegated its authority and who were bearers of its commands. God is the Eternal supreme court and Jesus as apostle has been delegated His authority and

commandments. (2) Jesus as High Priest. This is an idea which recurs again and again. A priest serves as a mediator between man and God. To do this he must know man and God. Jesus is the perfect High Priest because He is perfectly man and perfectly God.

The superiority of Jesus over Moses is found in his use of the word house. The author pictures the whole world as God's house. Jesus is creator of the house, while Moses is the created, or the servant of the house. In short, Moses knew about God, but Jesus is God.

F. Israel failed to believe under Moses (3:7-19)

The very generation to which the Law was given, the people who had been delivered out of bondage in Egypt was the generation to rebel and complain and to harden their hearts to the sound of God's voice, putting Him to prove His mighty works of judgement and mercy, only to perish in the end, doomed because of their own disobedience. Signs and wonders were not enough to awaken their faith. The author reminds the Hebrews that they belong to a generation that is close to still mightier works. God has spoken His clearest word through His Son, who is greater than Moses. He urges them not to harden their hearts because just as the wilderness generation was condemned to endless wandering, barred from the rest of God, so this generation may suffer the same penalty. "They shall never enter my rest" refers to the peace and settled

life of the promised land in contrast to the nomadic life and constant warfare of the wilderness.

The author's warning against falling into unbelief is not a mere refusal to accept a certain doctrine, but the peril of unbelief is the breaking of that trust which commits the whole man, thought, feeling, purpose, and deed, to God. The peril of not trusting in Him and not eagerly listening to His Word, and not earnestly seeking to know and do His will.

The unbelief of which the writer warns is the unbelief that leads one to fall away from the living God. This is the supreme disaster which may overtake a man. Since we are made for Him and find our humanity and fulfillment in His service to fall away is to thwart every good in life and turn the joy of life into an aching grief.

The writer says that we have a mutual responsibility to exhort one another daily to prevent falling away. Many Christians who have fallen away can trace their tragedy to spiritual loneliness. The exhorting is to be "today". This means while the opportunity lasts. The present is our opportunity for a deed. The past is gone and cannot be undone, the future must be taken on faith. Our works must be done in the present, before the deceitfulness of sin gains a hold. Once the clear mind is lost, and things are no longer seen for what they are, the self deceiving knows no end. Only honesty, the faithful dealing with oneself, and seeing

clearly are essential conditions for hearing God's word.

The God who spoke in many ways still speaks today. We go about our day's activities unmindful of His voice. With preoccupied mind we turn a corner and God confronts us. Do we hear? Do not harden your hearts as those in the wilderness who rebelled against God. Many do not hear what God has to say. It would be wise to remember the words of the Psalmist, "Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10. Those who heard and were rebellious in the wilderness were unable to enter God's rest because of their unbelief.

G. The Rest Remains (4:1-11)

The Israelite Exodus from Egypt was a venture of faith. But they became faithless and failed. The author warned the Hebrew Christians against repeating this same mistake.

Rewards are appealing and can be the incentives for accomplishing a difficult task. Those who would be faithful to Christ are promised the reward of entering into His rest. Man is cautioned not to come carelessly or purposely short of this goal. To realize the importance of this promise, we need to understand the author's usage of the word "rest". He refers to the "rest" of God at the completion of His work of creation and to the "rest" promised to the children of Israel upon their arrival in the land of Canaan. The author used the two references to picture the true spiritual rest that

God's people will receive at the completion of their Christian pilgrimage.

Doubts usually grow when we are discouraged or afraid and often cause us to wonder if the future objectives are worth the hardships. The children of Israel had approached the border of Canaan, but they had "come short of it" in unbelief. The author of Hebrews called attention to some important facts from their history to alert them to the possibility of their making the same mistake.

Although ancient Israel had stopped short, the promise still remained and had been heightened to include all Christians. This is good news in every age. We have not arrived at the scene too late, there is still a promise left open to us if we go forward in faith to possess it.

The author noted that the good news of salvation had been preached to his generation as it had to the Israelites. It had been unprofitable to the Israelites because of their unbelief. Hearing is not enough, the word must penetrate our hearts and motivate us to action. Belief as contrasted with unbelief is an individual experience of surrendered faith in Christ Jesus and is the condition of entrance into God's rest.

God instituted the sabbath as a day of rest. Man needed the spiritual benefits of his day. In our day of modern technology we have failed to recognize the importance of this special day. The strict observance of the sabbath

was highly esteemed in the Jewish religious practice. The author of Hebrews enlarged the meaning to a spiritual sabbath for God's people. Behind this argument there is one of the favorite thoughts of the Rabbis. On the seventh day, the day after the creation had been completed, God rested from His labors. In the creation story in Genesis there is a strange and curious fact. On the first six days of the creation each day had a beginning and an end. But on the seventh day there is no mention of evening at all. From this the Rabbis argued that while the other days came to an end, the day of God's rest had no ending. It was eternal and everlasting. Therefore although long ago the Israelites may have failed to enter that rest, it still remained for it was an eternal rest.

If man misses the opportunity he does so by his own choice. Although the Israelites finally entered Canaan the promise of God's rest was neither exhausted or fulfilled. There is a greater rest yet to come.

About four hundred years after the first promise was made to Israel a renewed hope was given by David in Psalm 95:7. Also Joshua (the names Joshua and Jesus are synonymous, Joshua in the Old Testament, Jesus in the New Testament) forecast a rest not accomplished in his day. The author implies and confirms that God's invitation to spiritual rest will continue as a standing offer to all mankind.

All Christians are to labor to reach this "prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14. The author warns the Hebrews about following the wrong example of unbelieving Israel and thereby failing to enter into that rest.

H. The Living Word (4:12-13)

The writer of the Hebrews tells us that the word of God has searching and finding power. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword,... and is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The word of God announces to us that God has spoken. The word of God announces to us that God has revealed Himself to us. He is not some absentee deity that cares nothing about His creation, nor is He a God that is so imprisoned in His creation that He cannot speak. No, He is a living God who out of love and mercy is deeply involved with His creatures and is in direct communication with them.

The author of Hebrews tells us that we need to honor the promise of God with a sincere commitment of ourselves to God. Only such a commitment will prevail because God's word is searching and God Himself sees all and we cannot escape that gaze.

The Bible is not an outmoded book but is as modern as the man who reads it. If we let the message speak to us we

will be greatly blessed. A little girl said to her sister, "I tell you that the Bible doesn't end in Timothy, it ends in Revolutions." This is quite true. When God's word is taken seriously it starts revolutions. It starts revolutions against crime, against immortality, against darkness and sin. When people take the Bible seriously their lives are changed. Their family's lives are changed. Communities are changed.

The word of God is alive. It is throbbing, pulsating with life. It is not and never can be dead. Isaiah the prophet realized this as he said that the word of God would never return void. I have never known of an instance when it has.

There have been many important words spoken in history. There have been great memorable words spoken that have sparked great movements in history, but today those words are dead as a dodo. Many scholars pursue these great words, some still influence certain individuals, but never a one of these great words can compare to the word of God. What is it that makes the word of God an issue with men in every age? They may accept it or reject it, or attack it but it still stands. Many people have set out to disprove the word of God, but it has stood many centuries and remains unharmed. They can do whatever they want to the word of God, but there is one thing they cannot do - they cannot escape it.

The word of God is powerful. It is energy, it is

force in expression. God's word never returns void. God spoke and a race was born. God spoke and waters washed the earth clean of a sinful people (Genesis 7). God spoke and Abraham left his home, not knowing where he was going. God spoke and released the Israelites from Egyptian captivity. God spoke and a cross was erected. God spoke and the stone was rolled away from the tomb of Jesus. God spoke and His church was born.

God still speaks today. Those who hear Him and respond to His voice will find life, abundant life and eternal life. God is speaking today through His word, His servants, His church and He will have the last word when His Son returns to inherit His Kingdom.

Men who read God's word know that God's word is something to be acted upon. It is effective and powerful, in season or out of season.

God's word is sharp and piercing. It is sharper than a two edged sword. A two edged sword is considered to be sharper than a single edged weapon. The two edged sword had piercing powers greater than the single edge. So God's word divides the soul and spirit. It divides even the joints and marrow. The word of God never meets a barrier in the soul and spirit of man that it cannot pierce and enter. The word of God enters into the deepest recess of the human personality. God, through His word, is a theologian who

understands our spiritual needs. He is a surgeon who can help in our physical needs. He is a psychologist who can analyze and help direct the very thought and purposes of our hearts.

God's word is sharp and piercing and can even discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. The heart as referred to here is the center of the rational life of man. It is the center of the inner emotion, the thing that makes us love, and hate, or desire or whatever motivates us.

There are no sins in our lives that God does not know. No acts of wrong, no thought of wrong, no desires of wrong are hid from Him. Many people have tried to run from God. All their efforts have been in vain. There is no place to go to get away from God. There is no hiding place.

Pearl Buck relates the story of a monkey who had grown tired and irked at God's protective care. He decided to try the world for himself. He jumped as far as he could; and landed on top of a great mountain in a strange land. Then he heard God's voice very near him "Dear little monkey, you have jumped only to the base of my thumb. You are still in God's hand,"⁵ That's the way it is. How foolish it is for us to think that we can hide from God. Adam tried, but

⁵William Walter Warmath, When He Call Me. (Nashville; Broadman Press, 1969), p. 66.

failed. The voice of God in grace, love and mercy called to him in the cool of the evening. That same voice calls to us today.

The word of God sees all. All things are naked before God. God knows our sins. Not only are we naked but we cannot escape His gaze. The word he used here is quite interesting. It apparently has many meanings, yet they convey the same general idea. It is used of wrestlers grappling for each others throats and throwing the head back. We may escape God for long enough but in the end God grasps us so that we are powerless and must look into His face. God is one issue that man cannot evade. It was also used for stripping animals of their skin. Animals were hung up and flayed. The skin, the hide was taken off them. Men may judge us for our outer conduct and our outer appearance, but God sees into the very inmost secrets of our hearts. It was used sometimes when a criminal in ancient times was being led to his execution, or judgement. A dagger was placed under his chin point upwards so that he could not bow his head in shame and concealment, but he must keep his head up so that all could see his dishonor. He was compelled to look upon those with whom he must deal. It means that in the end we must meet the eyes of God. We may divert the gaze of the people we are ashamed to meet. But in the end we cannot do that with God.

God knows because He cares. Love always expresses itself with its object. We have a mediator to God on our behalf.

I. The Perfect High Priest (4:14-5:11)

Jesus has already been presented to the readers as "a merciful and faithful high priest." (2:17) and now the writer shows how they can receive all the strength needed to maintain their confession and resist the temptation to fall back. Jesus endured every trial that His people are likely to undergo, but he remained steadfast and has now passed to the throne of God. In Him, His people have a powerful incentive to perseverance in faith and obedience.

The heavens through which Jesus passed are the heavenly regions in general. The Old Testament Hebrew thought of the heavens as being divided into sections until the Heaven of Heavens was reached. In the Heaven of Heavens was God's dwelling place. The Hebrew writer is saying that Jesus is "made higher than the heavens." (7:26). His abiding place is the Heaven of Heavens, and because He has been so highly exalted, He is such a great high priest. There is an implied contrast here between Him and the earthly priesthood of Aaron, whose highest privilege was to pass once a year through the inner veil into the holy of holies in a material and temporary sanctuary to appear for a few moments before God on behalf of the people. With Him as their helper the people of

Christ have strength to hold fast their confession in Him.

The author points out that Christians have in heaven a high priest with an unequalled capacity for sympathizing with them in all dangers and sorrows and trials which come their way in life because He, by virtue of His likeness to them, was exposed to all these experiences. Yet He endured triumphantly every form of testing that man could endure. He was tempted, but because of His faith in the Father, He emerged in victory for Himself and for His people. Therefore we are to come with confidence to the throne of grace. This throne of grace is God's throne where Jesus is exalted at the Father's right hand as His people's priest. God's people have free access to the throne and may receive all the grace and power required in the hour of trial and crisis.

Christ met the Old Testament requirements for priesthood. He was taken from among men that He might deal sympathetically with man (v.1), and He was appointed to the office of priest by God (v.4). In contrast to the old priestly order Christ is presented as a greater and more effective High Priest. The priest was appointed to represent men in things pertaining to God. The Hebrew of the Old Testament considered himself to be unworthy to approach God's presence. He was dependent upon a high priest to intercede for him to God. The priest's duties are said to be "offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." (5:1) In order to fulfil these

duties worthily, a high priest needs not only to pay heed to the precise performance of the ritual duties, but also to have inward feelings which are in keeping with his work.

The priest was to have gentle forbearance to those who go astray because of ignorance. For these people the priest was to make sin offerings as prescribed by the law. There was no provision for sin offering for those who were deliberate sinners and lawbreakers. The priest was able to sympathize with those who sinned through ignorance because he was prone to the same weaknesses. This weakness is seen in the record of Aaron himself as he yielded to the demands of the people for a visible symbol of the deity. His excuse to Moses was, "I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off; so they gave it me; and I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf." (Exodus 32:24) Aaron was in no condition spiritually to make priestly intercession to God for the people on whom he had brought this sin, so Moses had to go into the presence of God to make atonement for their sin and to secure God's pardon for them.

The high priest had to present a sin offering for himself as well as for his people. Only after Aaron had made atonement for himself could he present an offering for his people. Jesus, by being tempted yet remaining undefiled, established His power not only to sympathize with His people but to bring help, deliverance, and victory.

The high priest also was called of God to this honorable service. The author presents Jesus as the people's great high priest, and produces evidence of His divine call. He quotes from two Old Testament passages to prove his point. "Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee." (Psalm 2:7) Here the author says that the same God who claimed Jesus as His Son has also claimed Him as the perfect high priest, made perfect through His sufferings.

The other Old Testament passage is from Psalm 110:4, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14:18 as king of Salem, which is traditionally identified with Jerusalem, and as priest of God Most High. The author leaves this thought for the time being and returns to it again in Chapter 7. The Hebrew Christians had become dull of hearing and the author felt the need to encourage them to go on to spiritual maturity.

J. A Call to Advance (5:12-14)

The author reminds the Hebrews that they have been Christians for a long time now, and instead of them advancing to the stage of teaching others they were in the need of being taught. They were not only in need of being taught about such things as the priestly order of Melchizedek, but they were in need of a better understanding of the first principles of Christianity. In view of the time that they had been Christians they should have been taking on solid

food, but they were still unable to digest anything stronger than milk, which is infants' food.

The contrast between milk and solid food in the spiritual sense was common among the early Church, as well as in Greek philosophy. The Apostle Paul makes mention of it in his letters to the Corinthians, and Peter exhorts his readers to acquire an appetite for pure spiritual milk in 1 Peter 2:2. Peter was writing to people who had recently been converted to Christianity. The Hebrews had been Christians for some time and still had no desire for the solid food of full-grown men.

The immaturity of the Hebrews caused the writer to doubt if they would be able to appreciate his teaching about Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. They were satisfied in the point that they had reached and hesitated to go any farther because it would mean cutting off old ties. To such people the high priesthood of Christ along with the teaching that the old order of priesthood and sacrifice had been abolished would have been unaccepted.

K. The Necessity of Progress (6:1-8)

In the opening words of this passage the writer encourages the Christians to press on to perfection, leaving behind the basic principles of Christianity. In 6:1-2 he lists these principles. He lists first the key to entering into Christianity, repentance from dead works. Dead works

are those deeds to defile the man and keep him separated from God. Paul told the Romans that "the end of those things is death." (Romans 6:21) Repentance from those defiling deeds was insisted upon in the Old Testament. Dead works could also mean to the Hebrews those rituals of empty sin offerings that the Christians had broken away from.

Repentance from dead works turns one toward God. The second principle the writer listed is faith toward God. The foundation of faith toward God was laid in the Old Testament. The readers of this epistle had already been reminded that it was unbelief that kept the Exodus generation from entering the promised land. The Christian faith looks to God alone for guidance in this life.

The third principle is the teaching of baptisms. The early Christians had the practice of instructing the converts in the way of Christianity. Before they were baptized they had to prepare their mind and spirit. The author reminds the Hebrews of this and encourages them to go on to a greater faith on the basis of what they have already learned.

The fourth was the laying on of hands. This was an early Christian practice and was associated with the impartation of the Holy Spirit. The laying on of hands occurred when a new convert was baptized and when someone was ordained to a special office. The exhortation here is for the one receiving the Holy Spirit to go on past the receiving of the

Holy Spirit to the act of putting that great power to use to glorify God's Kingdom.

The fifth principle mentioned is the resurrection of the dead. All of Christianity hinges on this fact. Christianity is a religion of immortality. For the Christian death is not the end.

The sixth principle is the teaching of the eternal judgement. Christianity has always been a religion of judgement. No Christian should ever be allowed to forget that in the end he must face God, and what God thinks of him is much more important than what men think of him.

The foundation of their faith was already laid. It was laid in the Old Testament, and also they received the teachings of these things at their conversion now they must advance above these principles to Christian maturity. Day after day these Hebrew Christians were content in rebuilding these foundation. They were content to preach only those Christian doctrines that were compatible with the Jewish doctrines. There was no need to continue relaying the foundation. After a foundation has been laid it is of no use unless something is built upon it.

There is strong language in 6:4-6. In these scriptures it appears that there is no hope for one who had fallen away after receiving eternal salvation. This passage of scripture has been the cause of many books to be written, and is the

cause of much of the controversy of the "once saved always saved" doctrine. There have been many different interpretations of this scripture.

One interpretation is that this passage teaches that it is possible for a Christian to lose his salvation. If this were true then it would make a mockery of the many passages of scripture that speak of eternal and everlasting salvation. Man is saved by God's grace and not by any deeds of his own. (Ephesians 2:8-9) The believer is kept in Christ by grace until that final day. (2 Corinthians 12:9, 2 Timothy 1:12). Man's salvation is sealed by the Holy Spirit as God's guarantial that He will complete the transaction of salvation. (Ephesians 4:30)

Another interpretation of 6:4-6 is that this passage refers to a man who is thinking about becoming a Christian. This person had reached the point of being enlightened in the Gospel and now was at the point where he must make a decision. He must either accept it or fall away.

A third interpretation is that this passage is a hypothetical case. This is the most popular view. In this interpretation the condition described is non-existence but is given to prove its impossibility. This is the best interpretation since other scriptures teach eternal salvation, and since it is evident that the author was writing to Christians. These Hebrew Christians were engaged in the first principles

of Christianity. They were living in the fear of persecution and if they advanced beyond these principles they could be subjected to persecution. In a sense they were joining those who had crucified Christ. It is impossible for such as these to preach Christ crucified. Alexander Nairne observes that "the faithful are crucified with Christ. The cowards crucify Christ to themselves."⁶ Such people are compared to land which had been well cultivated and had received plenty of rain, but still did not produce a good crop. A Christian without suitable fruit is an empty and worthless experience. "Nigh unto cursing" (6:8) is an expression chosen out of consideration for those rejected ones whose situation may be critical but not hopeless.

L. An Encouragement to Perseverance (6:9-12)

The author begins this passage with "beloved" (6:9) This is the only passage in the letter that he addresses the Hebrews as beloved. After the harshest passage of all he begins with love. He speaks the truth in harshness, but he speaks it in love.

Although these Christians were slow to reach maturity, and had been falling away from their first enthusiasm, they were still active in their practical service and help to

⁶R. E. Glaze, Jr., No Easy Salvation (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), p. 69.

their fellow Christians. The author had a desire to reassure them after what he had just said. These fruits of righteousness were witnesses to the fact that those doing them were genuine heirs of salvation. The point here is that deeds of kindness done to the people of God are considered by God as done to Himself, and they will surely receive their reward from Him.

The author insists that they should go on with the same zeal they had from the beginning, until the final and full realization of their hope, "be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (6:12)

M. The Sure Hope (6:13-20)

The example of Abraham as father of all who have faith in God is invoked into primitive Christianity. The author here presents Abraham as the supreme example of a man who received promises from God and lived in persevering to the end in faith and hope of these promises. Abraham is a significant figure in this passage not only because of his faith in God's promise but also because of the part he plays in the history of Melchizedek.

The promise made to Abraham was confirmed by an oath. When men swear an oath it is to insure that their words are certain. They swear by someone or something greater than themselves. Since God has none greater than Himself, He

swore by Himself. Just the word of God is enough to make it sure, but by swearing upon Himself He made it double sure. The "heirs of the promise," (6:17) are all those who have experienced in the gospel the fulfilment of the oath which God swore to Abraham.

The hope which is an anchor of the soul is based on two immutable things, the promise of God, and the oath by which His promise was confirmed. The author states that Christians possess the greatest hope in all the world, a hope that enters into the inner court beyond the veil. In the Temple the most sacred of all places was the Holy of Holies. The veil covered it. Within the Holy of Holies was said to be the very presence of God. Only one man, the high priest, was allowed to enter, and only once a year. But now Jesus has opened a way to the presence of God for every man at any time. Jesus was the "forerunner" (6:20) who went into the presence of God to make it safe for all men to follow. He has "become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." (6:20)

N. The Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

The priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is the most characteristic thought of the author of Hebrews. His argument is that a new and different and new and effective sacrifice is needed, otherwise the way to God's presence can never be opened up. He saw in Jesus the only high priest who

can open the way to God, and he calls the priesthood of Jesus a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14:18-20. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine, and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abraham of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be God Most High, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all." The only other passage mentioning Melchizedek is Psalm 110:4 "The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." From these two passages the author gets his picture of the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek and what that priesthood means.

The author's interpretation of these scriptures follows the rabbinic methods of interpretation. To the rabbis the scriptures had four meanings, 1) the Peshat which was the literal and the factual meaning, 2) the Remaz which was the suggested meaning, 3) the Derush, which was the meaning arrived at after a long and careful study, and 4) the Sod which is the allegorical or inner meaning.⁷ The Rabbis also considered themselves justified in arguing from what the scriptures said as well as from the silences of the scriptures.

⁷ William Barclay, The Letter to the Hebrews (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), pp. 69-70.

As an argument from the silence of the scripture the author argues that Melchizedek was without father and mother. Genesis does not list any genealogies which is unusual, because in Genesis long lists of genealogies usually occur. There is no mention of his birth or his death. The author didn't mean that Melchizedek was an angel in human disguise. Historically Melchizedek appears to have belonged to a dynasty of priest-kings in which he had both predecessors and successors. The author uses this account of Melchizedek to show the kind of priesthood Christ had entered into. From this we can collect five great qualities of the priesthood of Melchizedek: 1) It was a priesthood of righteousness, 2) It was a priesthood of peace. He was king of Salem which is king of peace. 3) It was a royal priesthood for he was a king. 4) It was personal and not inherited because he has neither mother nor father nor genealogy. 5) It is eternal because he has no birth or death, and his priesthood has no beginning or end.⁸ These qualities are to be applied to the priesthood of Christ.

To prove that the priesthood of Melchizedek was greater than the priesthood of Aaron the author captures two points in the Genesis story about Melchizedek. First he points out that Melchizedek blessed Abraham upon his return from the slaughter of the Kings. (7:1) The superior always

⁸Ibid. p.72.

blesses the inferior, therefore Melchizedek was superior to Abraham, and Abraham was father of the Hebrew race and the one who received the promises from God. This gives Melchizedek a place which there could be none higher. Second, the author points out that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. The Hebrew priest exacted tithes from their fellow Jews because the law gave them the right to do so. Melchizedek exacted tithes from Abraham, not because of any law, but because he had the natural right to do so. This sets him above the ordinary priesthood. The Israelites paid tithes to Levi. The author said that in a sense even Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek because he was still in the loins of Abraham. Abraham was Levi's grandfather. Melchizedek, then was superior to the Levitical priesthood.

The writer goes on to show the superiority of the new priesthood. He pointed out that the Levitical priesthood had not reached perfection therefore there was need for a new priestly order, this time not after the order of Aaron or the tribe of Judah. This shows that the whole system was superseded. The law was wiped out. Something greater than the law has come.

This new priesthood would be for ever. (7:15-19)
Under the old system the priest died and kept on dying. There was nothing permanent about it. Now the new high priest lives forever. Again the author quotes from Psalm 110:4

"Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."
 This is to show that as Melchizedek had neither beginning of days nor end of life, so the new high priest would have an endless life.

The new priest would not have to offer sacrifices of sin for himself as the old order of priest did. He came to us "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners." (7:26) He was sinless and needed no sacrifice for Himself. He made one perfect sacrifice. He offered up Himself once and for all. This perfect sacrifice has opened forever the way into the presence of God.

O. The New and Better Covenant (8:1-13)

As the Aaronic priesthood gave way to the new priesthood, so does the old covenant give way to the new and better covenant, the earthly sanctuary gives way to the heavenly, and temporary sacrifices have given way to the permanent and effective sacrifice. The great high priest of the Christians is unthroned at the right hand of God, discharging His ministry in the heavenly dwelling place of God, a tabernacle not pitched by human hands. In contrast to all material sanctuaries, this is the true and real sanctuary, one which is not an imitation of something better.

The fact that the high priestly ministry of Jesus must be exercised in a heavenly sanctuary is further shown by the fact that there would be no room for His ministry in an

earthly sanctuary (8:4), whether a tent shrine or the Temple, because the high priesthood was confined to one tribe, and Jesus was not from that tribe. On earth Jesus was a layman, excluded by law from all priestly functions. But to the author of Hebrews this dignifies the priesthood of Christ because an earthly sanctuary is far inferior to the heavenly sanctuary.

As the earthly ministry is inferior to the heavenly ministry, also the old covenant is inferior to the new covenant. The covenant is one of the basic ideas of the Bible. In the Biblical sense of the covenant, the whole offer comes from God. It comes in the form of a will, or a testament. It is God who comes to man and offers a relationship with Himself and states the terms of this relationship. Man cannot bargain with God, nor can he argue about the terms and conditions of the covenant, he can only accept it or reject the offer that God makes. This is much the same as a will. The conditions of a will are not made on equal terms. They are made by one person, the testator, and the other party cannot alter them. The will is made by one person and the other person can only accept or refuse the inheritance as it is offered. That is the way our relationship with God is. God has given this relationship solely on His initiative and His grace.

The old covenant was the covenant which was the one

made with the people after the giving of the law. God approached the people of Israel and offered them a unique and special relationship with Himself, but that relationship was dependent upon one thing, and that was the keeping of the law. The argument of the author of Hebrews is that the old covenant is done away with, and with Jesus came a new covenant and a new relationship with God.

The author of Hebrews points out that the new covenant was not something he invented, but was already there in the Old Testament. He quotes from Jeremiah 31:31-34. The fact that the scripture speaks of the new covenant shows that the old covenant had not been fully satisfactory. If it had been there would have been no need to mention a new covenant.

The author points out that it will not only be a new covenant, but a different kind of covenant. It would be a covenant to unite the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The kingdom had divided after the death of Solomon, during the reign of Rehoboam, but the new covenant would unite old enemies.

In this new covenant all men would know God, from the least to the greatest. In the life of the Jew there was a lot of discrimination. There was discrimination according to race, sex, class, section of the country, and other forms of discrimination. Under the terms of the new covenant all of this would be removed. In the words of the Apostle Paul,

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26-28. All men, wise, simple, great or small would know the Lord. The doors that were once shut were thrown wide open.

The old covenant had depended on external obedience to the law. The new covenant was to be written on the hearts and minds of men. "I will put my laws into their minds, and on their hearts also will I write them," (8:10) Men would not obey God because of the terror of punishment or because the law ordered them to unwillingly do so, but men would obey God because of their love for Him and because the law was written on their hearts. Men would obey God because of a heart-felt desire to do so.

P. The Temporary Sanctuary (9:1-10)

The author sets forth the inadequacy of the old order with reference to the arrangements of the sanctuary under the old covenant. Provision was made under the old covenant for the people of God to worship Him, but the sanctuary was a material one. The sanctuary which the author describes was the wilderness tent of the book of Exodus. At Sinai Moses was given a divine revelation concerning the nature, construction and furnishings of the tabernacle. The work was carried out

by Bezaleel, Oholiab, and their workmen. When the task was accomplished the tent was covered by a cloud which enshrouded the divine glory.

The tabernacle stood in an outer enclosure or court. The dimensions of the enclosure were 150 feet in length and 75 feet in width. The sides were covered with curtains made from finely woven linen. They were about seven feet long and were fastened at the top by hooks and at the bottom by silver clasp to sixty supporting pillars of bronze, placed at intervals of seven feet. The enclosure was formed uninterrupted apart from an opening in the east wall which was screened by linen curtains embroidered in red, purple, and blue.

Within this open court the various types of sacrificial offerings were presented and the public acts of worship took place. Near the center was the great altar of burnt offering made from acacia wood overlaid with bronze. Its corner projections were known as the horns of the altar. The various sacrificial implements associated with this altar were also made of bronze. A fire which had been miraculously kindled burned continuously on the altar, and was tended by the priest. Almost in the center of the court was the bronze laver which was used by the priest for ritual cleansing.

To the west end of the court, parallel to the long walls, stood the tabernacle itself. Its measurements were about forty-five by fifteen feet, and it was divided into two

parts, a holy place and a most holy place (holy of holies). The basic constructional material was acacia wood fashioned into forty-eight frames some fifteen feet high and was overlaid with gold.

The completed structure was divided into two compartments by a curtain on which cherubims were embroidered in red, purple, and blue. The outmost of these areas was known as the holy place, and measured about thirty feet by fifteen feet. The inmost part of the sanctuary was known as the holy of holies, or the most holy place, and measured about fifteen feet square.

As to the furniture of the sanctuary, the holy place, or outer chamber, contained a table of showbread, a small acacia wood structure overlaid with gold measuring three feet in length, eighteen inches wide, and a little over two feet high. Nearby stood the menorah (a seven branched candlestick made of pure gold). The furnishings of the holy place were completed by the addition of a gold covered altar of incense, about eighteen inches square and three feet high. Like the great bronze altar it had projections on each corner, and had golden rings and a gold covered stave to enable it to be moved easily.

The furniture of the inmost shrine, or holy of holies, consisted entirely of the ark of the covenant. The lid of the ark, called the mercy seat, was made of solid gold. On each

end was a golden cherub whose wings stretched toward the center of the lid.

The ark was the meeting place of God and His people through Moses, and contained the tablets of the law. A veil separated the most holy place from the outer compartment, and when the Israelites traveled from place to place the ark was wrapped in this curtain. The ark was normally seen only by the high priest and then only on very special occasions.

In the sanctuary all the sacrifices and acts of public worship enjoined by the old covenant were undertaken. The sacrifices were divided into two groups, animal and vegetable. The sacrifices were normally presented to the priests in the outer court of the sanctuary. In all sacrifices it was necessary for the worshiper to present himself in a condition of ritual purity. In animal sacrifices he identified himself with his offering by laying his hand upon it and dedicating it to the purpose of atonement. Afterwards the blood was sprinkled near the altar and in the tabernacle. When the worshipers partook of the sacrifice in the form of a meal, the idea of communion with God was enhanced. On the Day of Atonement the Nations collective sins were forgiven, and on that occasion only the high priest entered into the holy of holies.

The Holy Spirit had something to say through Levitical offerings and the tabernacle arrangements. He was saying

that throughout the old covenant there was no direct access to God. The way into the most holy place had not yet been made known. Unhindered access to the presence of God was not granted until Christ came to accomplish His sacrificial ministry.

What did regulations concerning food and drink and a variety of ritual washings have to do with man's relation to God? That great ritual of the Day of Atonement was designed to cleanse all things and all people from sin. Certain things were in the mind of the Hebrew writer. Every year this ceremony had to be repeated. Everyone but the high priest was barred from God's presence and even he entered in the holy of holies in terror. The cleansing was purely external cleansing by baths and water. The sacrifice was the sacrifice of animal blood. The whole thing failed because such things cannot atone for sin. The only sacrifice and only priest who can open the way to God is Jesus Christ.

Q. The New and Better Sacrifice (9:11-14)

Where Aaron and his successors went into the holy of holies by virtue of animal sacrifice, Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary "through His own blood." (9:12) The blood of slaughtered animals under the old order did possess a certain efficacy, but it was outward efficacy for the removal of ceremonial pollution. The sacrifice of Jesus cleansed men's souls. In theory all sacrifice cleansed from sins

against the ritual law and the legal requirements of the law, but it did not cleanse from the presumptuous heart. A man's body might be clean in a ceremonial sense but his heart might be torn with remorse and anguished with regret. He might feel that he could enter the tabernacle but be far away from the presence of God. The sacrifice of Jesus takes the load of guilt from a man's conscience. The way into God's presence is always open.

The sacrifice of Jesus brought eternal redemption. The idea is that men were under the dominion of sin, and just as a purchase price had to be paid to free a man from slavery, so the purchase price had to be paid to free a man from sin. The sacrifice of Jesus was voluntary. The sacrificial animal died because it had to, but Jesus gave His life because of love, not law.

R. The Mediator of the New Covenant (9:15-28)

The term mediator in this sense means the one standing between God and man. As Moses was mediator of the old covenant, Christ is pictured as the mediator of the new covenant.

This passage centers in the heart of the Christian faith, and that is the blood atonement of Christ. In the words of this passage there can be no escape from a substitutive death. "and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission." (v.22) By virtue of His death, redemption has

been provided for those who had broken the law.

The writer points to the fact that the old covenant had been sealed with blood, (v:18) The first covenant under Moses, in which the people accepted the law as a condition of their relationship with God, was sealed with blood. Moses, after sprinkling half the blood on the altar and putting the other half in basins, read the law to the people and after they accepted the law he sprinkled the people with the remaining blood, signifying that the covenant had been sealed. The basic idea behind the Hebrew writer's thought is that there can be no ratification of any covenant without the shedding of blood.

The author points out that while the one that makes the covenant or testament lives, the covenant is void. For the testament to become valid then the one who made it must die. (v:16-17) Since Christ was the mediator as well as the one who made the covenant, it was necessary for Him to die to ratify the covenant.

The author points out the perfect sacrifice. The Levitical sacrifice was designed to purify the means of worship. The author does not deny that such cleansing was real and effective so far as it went. The argument is that while ritual purification is adequate for the material order, which is a copy of the spiritual order, a better kind of sacrifice is necessary to effect purification in the spiritual

order.⁹ Since the body of the Christian is the spiritual temple of God, (1 Corinthians 6:19) it is an inward cleansing that must take place rather than an outward cleansing. The Christians approach to God must be without defilement as well as their inner being cleansed for a fit habitation for God. This sacrifice was a once for all thing. After the same manner that all men must die and face the judgement, also Christ died once to appear the second time in immortality to declare to His people the salvation which His perfect offering had purchased for them.

S. The New and Living Way. (10:1-25)

If the old order had been able to bring access to God without the constant necessity of removing the barrier of freshly accumulated sin then the sacrifices which belonged to it would have come to an end. What the author could have meant was if the Levitical system had brought perfection or a clear conscience then it would have ended long before his day. To the writer of the Hebrews the whole business of sacrifice was only a pale copy of what true and real worship ought to be. Religion is to bring men into a close and intimate relationship with God. These sacrifices could

⁹F. F. Bruce, "The Epistle to the Hebrews." The New Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans-Publishing Co. 1964), pp. 218-19.

never do that. The best they could do was to give a man a distant contact with God. Year by year these sacrifices were repeated. An effective thing does not need to be done again. It is done and the effect is produced and there is no need of repetition. The fact of yearly repetition of these sacrifices is the final proof that they were not purifying men's souls, and they were not giving full and uninterrupted access to God. In fact the author says that they were serving as a reminder of sin.

The effective sacrifice is the sacrifice of Jesus, and Him only. The author quotes from Psalm 40:6-9. What the Psalm says is that God does not want animal sacrifices. He wants obedience to His will. That is why Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. He perfectly did God's will. He did for man what no man was able to do. He brought for men the sacrifice that no man had been able to bring. He brought the perfect, complete obedience, and therefore the perfect, complete sacrifice.

The way by which they enter the presence of God is a new way, which did not exist until He opened it up and entered thereby Himself. It is thus a new way; it is also a "living way". For in effect the ever-living Christ Himself, as His people's sacrifice and priest, is the way to God. Their confidence in entering the presence of God should be enhanced by the fact that there Jesus fulfils His ministry as "a great priest over the house of God".

T. A Warning against Apostasy (10:26-39)

Four characteristics of the Christian life should accompany him as he enters with boldness to the throne of Jesus. These are faith, hope, love, and good works. It is evident that for a long time these characteristics had been missing in the lives of the Hebrew Christians. They needed to revitalize these qualities and once again get engaged in Christian service.

They had been urged not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, and urged to exhort one another. (v.25) Immediately following this exhortation the author gives one of the strongest statements of this epistle, concerning both man's sin and God's judgement. It is evident that the failure of the assembling was in some way connected with this passage.

In these verses the grammatical change in person is instructive. In verse 26 the author uses the first person to state a principle. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." The use of the first person is not of primary concern here. The chief significance of the grammatical distinction in person is distinguishing between recipients and those to whom the attention of the recipients is directed is not involved in the use of the first person.

The significant point for interpretation is the

distinction between the author's use of the second and third persons. In verse 28, the third person has reference to one who spurned the law of Moses. The readers were not involved in this; their attention, however, is called to this fact in history by way of warning. In verse 29 the reference is to one who decisively rejects Christ. Here, also, the third person, not the second person, is used. Again, this is not a sin of the readers even though it is a sin in their midst. It is the sin of the non-Christian group in their midst. By moving from the lesser to the greater, the readers are reminded first of the judgement upon those who spurned the law of Moses. Then in verses 30-31, the judgement upon those who reject Christ described. The readers are not to let such a group play upon their sympathy and prevent them from involvement in their world mission.¹⁰

The author emphasizes the real extent of the sin of those who have continually rebelled, and are still lost. Since Christ's sacrifice was for all men not for a special group. By their rejection in the face of the full light of what they have received they have "trodden under foot the Son of God" and "hath counted the blood of the covenant...an unholy thing." They have done "dispite unto the Spirit of

¹⁰R. E. Glaze, Jr., No Easy Salvation (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), pp. 43-44.

grace." (v.29) There is nothing left to offer to such as these. It is senseless for the Christian group to suppose that the unbelieving group of Jews sharing the synogogue can be won by compromise. In essence the author is urging them to cut loose from these and move out among strangers to claim their inheritance.

What they needed was patience. They will enter into the utmost enjoyment of their salvation but in the meantime they must remain loyal and not give up doing God's will, because they are of those who "have faith into the saving of the soul." (v.39)

U. A Sure Hope (11:1-40)

The author goes on to give examples of his faith thesis. The long list of illustrations in this chapter gave strength to the thesis of the author concerning the recipients. Careful attention must be given to the kind of faith described in this chapter. It is more than an initial saving faith expressed at the time of conversion. It is a working faith expressed by the courageous believer as he lives each day with a sense of commitment to the will of God. The call is for the Hebrews to break away from their close associates, even kinsmen, and be willing to move forward in faith alone if necessary. AS dedicated men in every generation know, the path of faith often leads the faithful in a lonely journey. The author was saying to his readers that they are

to respond to God's call even when it means severing old ties, sometimes at supreme cost and forever.

The many listed in chapter eleven who were called upon to do the same thing is no coincidence. The selection of illustrations indicate a deliberate choice in keeping with the author's purpose in writing the epistle. Note the following: Abel, because of his faith was removed from his family by death. For many years Noah faced scorn by his community and relatives. Abraham forsook his native land as he responded to the call to go forth, not knowing where he was going. Later Abraham's faith led him to offer his most treasured possession, his only son by promise, Isaac. Jacob had to carry his family into Egypt. Joseph, even as a youth was separated from his family, Moses forsook the royal family of Egypt and more than once found himself rejected by his own people. Rahab was separated from her people as she turned in faith to the God of the Hebrew spies.

Regardless of the cost to the individual, the life motivated by such faith as this is never lived in vain. How much better to speak for centuries because of a short lifetime in which something is said worth saying than to keep talking for a century and say nothing. Because of his faith Abel, though dead, still speaks. Hundreds of years later Rahab was still remembered by more than one inspired writer as an example of one who expressed a working faith. She is

also listed as an ancestress to both David and Jesus. Joseph became the human instrument for sustaining the very family from which he had been separated. The faith of Moses was vindicated. God through him created a nation from the same group of slaves that complained against Moses. It was through the same son that Abraham offered by faith that God fulfilled his covenant with Abraham to make his seed a great nation. Regardless of what may appear to be the result of the moment, the ultimate destiny of every expression of mature faith is victory.

The author gives further examples of faith from the later Old Testament period. Gideon was Israel's champion against the beduin Midianites. His force was small, consisting of three hundred men, equipped with torches in earthenware jars, and trumpets, threw the host of the Midians into panic and won a signal victory. Barak was the commander of the army of the tribes of Israel who united against Sisera, commander of the Canaanite chariot force, and defeated him and his followers. It is surprising to find Barak mentioned here and not Deborah who commanded him in God's name to attack Sisera after he refused to do so unless she went with them. Yet Barak's refusal may have been a token of faith by insisting that Deborah, God's servant and spokeswoman, go with him. It was not for his own honor but for the triumph of God and His people that he sought.

Samson championed Israel's cause against the Philistines in his own single handed way. The book of Judges portrays him as one who was deeply conscious of God, and tells of his call to be an instrument in God's hand against the enemy. Zephtah, commander of the Transjordanian tribes made a rash vow as a token of his sincere devotion to the God of Israel. The message that he sent to the king of Ammon (Judges 11:14-27), with its historical retrospect reaching back to the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, expressed his appreciation of God's guidance of His people in those early days and his confidence that God will judge their cause in his day.

David is the only king mentioned by name. His record shows many faults but also shows a humble readiness to repent and seek God's pardon, and a conviction of God's providence and faithfulness.

Samuel manifested the prophetic gift in his youth. When the ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines he showed the people that God was still in their midst even if the ark was in the hands of the Philistines. When the ark was restored he left it in a obscure place so the people would not be reposed in it instead of God. Samuel has been described as God's emergency man.

Those who "quenched the power of fire." (V:34) were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who refused to fall down and worship Nebuchadnezzar's great golden image. They knew that

God was able to deliver them from the furnace, but they had no means of knowing whether He would or not. It took great faith to act as they did.

When the recipients of the Hebrew epistle read of some who experienced "mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments" (V:36), they might think of members of their own community who had suffered some of these things in earlier days. If similar experiences awaited them again it might help them to realize that they were not the first to tread this path.

From Abel to those who manifested their faith at the coming of Christ, none of them received the fulfillment of their promise. They lived and died in prospect of a fulfillment which none of them experienced on earth, yet it was so real to them that it gave them power to press on, even against the tide. But now the promise has been fulfilled, a new age has dawned. With Christ the perfect sacrifice there is a better hope and a better possession obtainable through the same working example of faith.

V. Endurance as Sons of God (12:1-29)

Nothing is so disheartening as a lonely struggle. When no one else cares, then misgivings begin to plague us. Perhaps the struggle is in vain and the issues are not real after all. This is often true in Christian conflict. If we are to be strong our strength will come from sharing with

Christian friends. A person is never strong when he is alone. In Christianity we can find help not only among our friends, but also of the great number who witness before us. By the record of their lives they assure us that endurance is possible. The grace of God will sustain us, and the joys of faith's rewards are enduring. They show us how to run "with patience the race set before us." (V:1) All the heroes of faith are still speaking and they are our witnesses. They are not mere spectators of our running, but witnesses to the faithfulness of the God who has promised salvation.

The author exhorts the Hebrews to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." (V:1) He doesn't say what these weights are. They may be the excess weight one gains by eating too much, or the foods that a runner is not allowed to eat, or it may mean the extra things that the individual carries which impede his running. The besetting sins are those flowing garments that cling to close to the runner's legs and distract or divert him from the course.

These weights and sins may be innocent things in themselves, but there may be such involvement in these so as to hinder the Christian, or hinder others in the race.

The danger that the Christian faced, and a present danger, was that the early vision fades, the race is long, obstacles block the way, diversions are noticed at the side,

and the race slows to a walk then to a careless saunter. The call to perseverance is the only valid call to be a real, mature Christian. Without a goal toward which we bend every energy, we become mere meeting places of the forces that play upon us. This danger can be overcome if we rely on an aid greater than ourselves and our present friends, even stronger than a number of witnesses that were mentioned by the author. The author encourages the recipients to look to "Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." (V:2) We are to look to Jesus who led the way, who as a man of faith far surpassed all other heroes of faith, and who perfected his faith. To be a pioneer of our faith means that Jesus is not merely another runner in the Christian race, but that He is the one who set out the course, blazed the trail, and is far above all others who come after Him and follow His pattern.

This was a joy that could be fulfilled only by doing God's will, and that was by enduring the cross and providing salvation for the men He loved, and by welcoming them into God's presence. This is the joy of an objective accomplished.

For the Hebrew Christians, the struggle against sin had not been to the point of shedding blood. None of them had experienced martyrdom. With pastoral insight the author was preparing them for possible persecution. He pleads with them to compare what they have to suffer with what Jesus had to suffer. Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame." (V:2)

Neither the shame of the cross nor the hostility that was being directed against the Hebrews was the direct work of God, it was the work of sinners in Jesus' case and the work of sin in the race of the readers.

Viewed in the perspective of God's redemptive purpose for man, both the sufferings of Jesus and those of the "children" (V:5) must be thought of as somehow within the divine will and purpose. The author had already expressed the idea that God was behind the suffering of Jesus to make salvation perfect. In the same manner he associated the discipline as being a part of a maturing faith. He encouraged them to endure the "chastening" (V:7) for such discipline in the end "yeildeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (V:11)

The author bids the readers to brace up their weak limbs and press on toward the goal. The weak Christian often finds himself "out of the way" or "out of joint" (V:13) There were weaker Christians among their midst. The author reminds them of this and exhorts them to put them back on the straight path because the weaker ones are more likely to go astray or to abandon the struggle.

In the meantime those who are travelling the Holy way are to live at peace with their fellowmen. The idea that peace with God and man between man and his neighbor is an accompaniment of salvation was commonplace in the Hebrew

prophetic thought. Psalm 24:4 declares that only those with "clean hands and a pure heart" can have a share in the worship of the true and living God.

The contrast between the Christian revelation and the Mosaic revelation is presented as that which is terrible and forbidding as contrasted with that which is hopeful and inspiring. The contrast is set forth in words and figurative representations which are suggested by the Old Testament record of the giving of the Mosaic law, and the earthly Jerusalem. The old covenant had been given on mount Sinai under terrifying conditions. The Israelites trembled with fear. Moses was mediator there and only Moses was able to be in the presence of God. At Mount Zion, or the earthly Jerusalem, the center of worship, the priest was the mediator, and only he was able to enter the presence of God. Under the new covenant Jesus is the mediator. Through Him it is that we come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the presence of God. All are permitted to enter this holy place.

The Christians have been called to an unshakable kingdom. The Hebrews are urged to "refuse not him that speaketh." (V:25) Again he calls to their minds that under the old covenant the offender was unable to escape. Under the new and greater covenant there was much less possibility of escaping. To refuse Him would be to turn from our one source of wisdom to complete folly. It would be to give up the rest

of God for the restlessness of men.

One day that which is visible will be shaken, or will pass away, that the eternal may stand forth in great splendor. History has a story of repeated shakings. The destruction of Solomon's temple, and the exile of the people to Babylonian captivity seemed to be a supreme tragedy. This was a physical kingdom and capable of destruction. The Hebrews were to be thankful that they belonged to an unshakable kingdom. Because the Hebrews belonged to an unshakable kingdom they should offer to God acceptable worship and hold Him in reverence.

W. Concluding Exhortations (13:1-25)

The readers have already been commended for their love (10:34) although there were signs of the breaking of the Christian fellowship (10:25). One of the most urgent forms of brotherly love was the ancient custom of hospitality, which was widespread and deep. In the case of Christians some of the strangers were evangelists, others were refugees driven from their homes by persecution, "thereby some have entertained angels." Many noble Christians were entertained in humble homes during the early centuries. Jesus Himself identified with the needy and homeless. To show hospitality to strangers may be to entertain Jesus unaware. The early Christians had ways of telling if the stranger was an unscrupulous character or not. The Didache said that if the stranger stayed three days and asked for money then he was a

false prophet.

The Hebrew community had shown sympathy for those that were imprisoned. The author urges them to show sympathy as though they were in prison with them (V:3), because they might well be before long, since they were Christians also and subject to the same ill treatment. This strong solidarity among Christians made a vivid impression on outsiders. To show kindness to prisoners as though they were one of them is Christian kindness at its best.

The injunction to honor the marriage union and abstain from sexual sin may also be put under the heading of brotherly love. Chastity is not opposed to charity, but is part of it. The marriage union is divinely inspired and must not be polluted by the intrusion of a third party. Adultery and fornication do not have the same meaning in the New Testament. Adultery implies unfaithfulness by either party to the marriage vow, fornication covers a wide range of sexual irregularities, including unions which are permitted and prohibited by law. The author agrees with other New Testament writers that those guilty of such practices incur the judgement of God.

The author urges them to keep their lives free from the love of money. (V:5-6) This warning recurs throughout the New Testament, especially in the teaching of Jesus. Material necessities cannot be neglected, but the danger comes when the Christian becomes more and more dependant upon these

material things. The chief pang which pierces the heart of the lover of money is gnawing anxiety. The greedy man can never be a happy man. The opposite of covetness is contentment.

An example to follow is Jesus. The Hebrews were to remember their leaders and follow their faith, but the real example is Jesus who is "the same yesterday, today and forever." (V:7-8)

Because Jesus is the same the Hebrew Christian should not allow themselves to be carried away by false doctrines. There was more than a danger of a relapsing into Judaism, but there was the threat of the Christians being led away by the strange teachings which laid insistence on food as a means to know God. Paul also saw that it was necessary to point out that "the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17) To put such indifferent matters in a place of central religious importance would diminish the sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

The fact that the bodies of the animals sacrificed were burned outside the camp suggests a parallel to the fact that Jesus was crucified outside the city gates of Jerusalem. The Hebrew Christians were urged to go outside the camp (V:13) and identify with Jesus. It meant leaving the shelter of a religious city for a fellowship which invited the hostile

attention of imperial law. The future of Christianity lay not within the camp but with the Gentile mission. The old securities to which their hearts were clinging were insecure. The old order was about to crash. By responding to the call to go out they would be gainers.

They still had a sacrifice to offer. There remained no more sacrifice for sin, but there remained the sacrifice, or service of offering the fruits of open confession of the works of God.

The Hebrew Christians were urged to obey the leaders they had in their Christian community rather than submitting to diverse and strange teachings. Their office was to be held in respect because they had the responsibility of watching over their spiritual aspects.

The author requested that the Christians pray for him, which may be some indication that he occupied, or had occupied a position of responsibility with regard to his readers. He had hoped to renew his former personal association with them but had been unable to do so thus far, but hoped that the opportunity would be opened up soon.

He offers his own pastoral, every word with meaning. That God was invoked as the "God of Peace" (V:20) may suggest that the community was troubled by disunity which must be healed if the pleasure of God was to be wrought out in their midst. The prayer is that the people may be spiritually

equipped for every form of good work, and thus fulfill God's will as he operates in them.

The author writes that Timothy is free now, whether from prison or free from a mission assignment, and would be visiting them along with the writer himself. He sends his blessings along with greetings from Italian friends.

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