



# Hebrews

a systematic study

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## PREFACE

THIS STUDY OF HEBREWS originated as my prepared notes for teaching our local ABF (Adult Bible Fellowship) class on Sunday mornings. As with the other resources at our web site, we make it available to others simply because it already exists. I make no claim to scholarship, special insight, or extraordinary understanding of God's holy word. I have been called in the local assembly to teach (predominantly) senior adults from God's word. Following the example of the early churches, those of us in the kingdom are encouraged to "[share our possessions] with all, as anyone might have need." (Acts 2:45) If others can benefit from this study, then all the better.

Different from our earlier published studies, this Hebrews study has not been overly modified or formatted, but is published in essentially the format of my original notes used in class. Scripture text has not been added after-the-fact; use these notes with your own Bible alongside.

As with all of our resources, we offer this free of charge, to the glory of God the Father, and the praise of Jesus Christ our Lord.

David S. Lampel  
Winterset, Iowa  
December 2013

## EXPLANATIONS

### SCRIPTURE VERSIONS

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Greek and Hebrew citations are from *Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary*, and the *NASB Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*.

### ABBREVIATIONS

NASB: *New American Standard Bible*

NKJV: *New King James Version*

KJV: *King James Version*

KJVS: Both *King James Version* and *New King James Version*

NIV: *New International Version*

RSV: *Revised Standard Version*

YLT: *Young's Literal Translation*

ESV: *English Standard Version*

OT, NT: *Old Testament, New Testament*

### PRINCIPAL COMMENTATORS

**Lane:** William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment*, Regent College Publishing, Vancouver, British Columbia, Copyright © 1985, Brenda Lane.

**Hewitt:** Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Copyright © 1975, Tyndale Press.

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**Carson:** D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gæbelein, General Editor. Copyright © 1976, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Clarke:** Adam Clarke's *Commentary on the Bible*.

**Darby:** John Nelson Darby, *Synopsis of the Old and New Testaments*.

**Grudem:** Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.

**Henry:** Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

**JFB:** *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* by Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown.

**Vincent:** Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies*.

**Vine's:** W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

## SESSION 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

### INTRO: A GRAND ADVENTURE

We are about to embark on a grand adventure. I am reminded of the time—back in February 1982—when Linda and I spent 2½ weeks on safari in Kenya.

- We witnessed sights of incredible beauty: the watering holes and vast savannahs at sunset, the myriad beasts of the field.
- We witnessed sights of ugliness, as well—such as one beast consuming another.
- We saw things we had never seen before—and perhaps never will again.
- We met strangers who became friends.
- We experienced ecstatic joy and profound discomfort, such as awakening one morning to a thatched hut (and ourselves) swarming with ants.
- We were, at times, bone weary and dirty, but at other times exhilarated—sometimes both!
- In those 2½ weeks we experienced many of the colors, the ups and downs, the pleasures and inconveniences of a lifetime, and we came away with new knowledge and memories that warm us to this day.

It is my prayer that this study of Hebrews will be that for you—a grand adventure. In it

- we will witness sights of incredible beauty—and ugliness;
- we will see things we've never seen before, meet strangers that will become friends, or old friends that we will now appreciate in a new way;
- we will experience fresh joy, as well as discomfort;
- we will get a little dirty, perhaps weary of it all, but also exhilarated and revived;
- we will gain new knowledge and fresh perspectives on a portion of Scripture that gets little attention—and that knowledge and wisdom will warm us for many days and years to come.

### WILLIAM LANE

As usual, for this study I have and will be consulting a number of authorities and commentators. One in particular requires special mention. *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment*, by the late William L. Lane was recommended to me by Pastors Gary and Jeremy and has been an invaluable resource for the preparation of this class. William Lane is the author of a scholarly two-volume commentary on Hebrews, which is far beyond the scholarship of the average layman—certainly mine. But in this small volume he has done us the courtesy of condensing down the essential meat of his treatise for those of us who do not have letters after our name.

So I am indebted to Professor Lane, and when I cite him in the coming months, I refer to this book.

### TWO MISSING THINGS

The book of Hebrews contains two glaring omissions:

the name of its author, and specific citations for many of its OT quotations

Regarding the authorship of Hebrews, commentators love to quote Origen of Alexandria, the great theologian who wrote and taught in the third century after Christ. Eusebius quotes Origen as saying, “Who wrote the epistle, God only knows.” It seems that most *older* scholars favor Paul, while most *modern* scholars favor anyone *but* Paul. As for myself (as if anyone is interested) from the first time I read the book it did not sound anything like Paul’s writing. But then, what do I know.

Regarding the many quotations, I have long been mystified by the manner in which some are presented. For example, look at v6 of chapter 2.

#### Read Hebrews 2:6.

For a long time I thought how odd this was. It sounds like the way I might try to quote something when I can’t quite put my finger on just where it is found or who wrote it.

But now I understand that both of these omissions—the authorship of Hebrews and these odd citations—are by design. These omissions, I believe, are not accidental, but purposeful, as the writer wants the reader—and *hearer*, as we will see—to have greater clarity of focus on the true purpose of the text— **The preeminence of Christ**—not the wisdom of the author, nor the eminence of the ancient authors quoted, but the *preeminence* of **Christ**. So we are not going to concern ourselves with its *human* author. It doesn’t matter.

## Read Hebrews 3:7.

Just as the author treats his many OT quotations, we are going to focus our attention on *the text itself*, as put down by the agency of the Holy Spirit—not the human being who penned it. The writer of Hebrews certainly knew that Psalm 95 had a human author, but the only author that truly matters is *God*, working through His Spirit. So regarding the author of Hebrews we will agree with Origen: “God only knows.” Regarding the authors of the various OT quotations, let the authorship of the Holy Spirit suffice.

## WHAT IS HEBREWS?

Just what *is* this book called in many Bibles, “The Epistle to the Hebrews”?

First, it is not an epistle. Oh, it is true that it was written out, probably in a scroll, bound up and carried by a courier to a relatively small group of people. In that, it was what we might term a “letter” or epistle. But after that the similarity ends.

As Lane (and others) develop, the writer of Hebrews was not an evangelist or church starter, like Paul or one of the other apostles, but a *pastor*. He was a *preacher*, and what he wrote and sent to this group of people was a sermon to be read in his physical absence *as* a sermon. Hebrews has the structure not of a letter, but of a sermon.

We need only look at the first few verses of the book to realize that this is unlike any other epistle in the canon.

**Read Philemon 1:1-3.**

**Read Hebrews 1:1-2.**

Another clue to this is found near the end of the book.

**Read Hebrews 13:22.**

*...bear with this word of exhortation...*

This expression—“word of exhortation” (*logos paraklesis*) is found in only one other place in the Bible.

**Read Acts 13:13-16.**

The setting here is obvious; the apostle Paul is invited to stand and deliver a spoken word of encouragement to the congregation of the synagogue—which he does most eloquently, by the way. And even though he could not stand before them in person, the pastor to these Hebrews wanted his written words to be so delivered: he expected someone to stand before them and read the written words as if he were delivering a sermon in person. So as we journey through this book we are to keep this context in mind: These are the spoken words of a pastor to his congregation—words of exhortation delivered to them just as our own pastor does behind the pulpit every Sunday morning.

*William Lane:* The proper way to listen to Hebrews is to recognize that it is an early Christian sermon and to come prepared both for encouragement and warning.

## WHO WERE THE RECIPIENTS OF THE SERMON

Just as we do not know who wrote Hebrews, we cannot say with certainty to what group it was written. But the text itself contains clues.

- This was a house-church that had once stood their ground with bold faith, suffering public abuse, imprisonment, and the loss of property. Read Hebrews 10:32-34.
- This description fits the hardships borne by Jewish Christians who were expelled from Rome in ad 49. Read Acts 18:1-2.
- It is now about fifteen years later. And now the congregation is facing a new and perhaps worse form of persecution. Read Hebrews 12:4. This “not yet” implies that they may be “shedding blood” in the near future. And now these people are struggling with the cost of discipleship. These people were frightened—with good reason. Fifteen years after ad 49 would be ad 64—which is the date of the great fire that almost destroyed all of Rome. The populace was enraged at the perceived indifference to the tragedy by Emperor Nero. So months later he decided to do something to distract attention away from himself. The Roman historian Tacitus writes that “to suppress this rumor Nero fabricated scapegoats, and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called).” The threat of arrest and torture was very real for the house-church in Rome, and the writer of Hebrews encourages them with a reminder of Christ’s solidarity

with them.

**Read Hebrews 2:14-15.**

These people had a very real fear of death.

As we journey through Hebrews we will see more clues as to who these believers were and what they were experiencing. But for now let us keep in mind that they were people who had persevered, had once stood for the faith against trial and persecution, but were now becoming wobbly in the knees. The writer encourages them by showing that Christ Jesus, too had endured hostility.

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.  
(Hebrews 12:3)

## THE THEMES IN HEBREWS

As already stated, the overarching theme of this sermon is the preeminence, or superiority, of Jesus the Christ. But there are several sub-themes within that. Let's look at a few.

The preacher begins his sermon declaring that we have a God who *speaks*—

**Read Hebrews 1:1-2.**

—and this is recurring theme throughout the book. Look at the verbs in vs5-6 ("says").  
Look at chapter 2.

**Read Hebrews 2:1-3. ("spoken," "heard")**

While we are in chapter 2 we can see the beginning of another important thread woven throughout Hebrews—in fact, this is far more than a thread; more like a whole blanket! In v17 we have the first mention of it.

**Read Hebrews 2:17.**

This is the first mention in Hebrews of Jesus as a *high priest*—and nowhere else in Scripture is Jesus referred to as a high priest. And this important topic is developed over several chapters.

As a part of this discussion about Jesus being our high priest, there is the thread about the fascinating *Melchizedek*—whom we discussed in our study of Psalm 110. He is introduced in Hebrews in chapter 5.

**Read Hebrews 5:5-6.**

Finally, there is the sub-theme of *faith*, which culminates in the familiar "roster of faith" of chapter 11. But the preacher leads into this by speaking of *endurance*.

**Read Hebrews 10:35-36.**

Chapter eleven's "roster of faith" is about historical figures who *endured*—putting up with trials and persecution, torture and death because of the Lord's promises about, as the preacher puts it, "a better country." Let's read that passage.

**Read Hebrews 11:13-16.**

And that is his counsel to those he is pastoring: Have faith in God's promises. Endure. Hang in there.

## SESSION 2. HEBREWS 1:1-4

### PREFACE

One of my least favorite (hence, most poorly done) parts of a study like this is the first, introductory session. It is important to step back and look at the forest as a whole as one begins a study, but it is a lot more fun examining the leaves and branches and bark on every tree *in* that forest. What joy there is in digging into God's word, burrowing down into every word, every sentence and paragraph to discover and embrace God's truth.

So I want to begin *this* session by thanking you for the privilege, the gift, of teaching this class, and spending this last week discovering that truth in the first four verses of Hebrews 1.

### INTRO

In this opening paragraph the preacher declares the overarching theme of his sermon.

**Read Hebrews 1:1-4.**

### v1

How better to begin something! "God..." The Bible as a whole begins with God: "In the beginning, God..." And the preacher chose to open his sermon the same way. The original Greek does not have "God" as the first word, but I appreciate the NASB and KJV5 that place it there, for it focuses our attention where it belongs—on God. It implies two things:

- What you are about to hear—God did it;
- So keep Him above and before everything else.

We have a God who speaks. As I pointed out last week, the idea of speaking and hearing is important to the preacher. And one of the most important reasons for his sermon is to get the church *to listen to what God says*. We find just one example of this in his quotation of Psalm 95 in the third chapter.

**Read Hebrews 3:7-8.**

And He speaks in different ways to different people on different occasions.

**spoke** = a prolonged form of an otherwise obsolete verb; **to talk, i.e. utter words** :- preach, say, speak (after), talk, tell, utter. Compare <G3004> (lego).

**prophets** = *proph-e'-tes* = from a compound of <G4253> (pro) and <G5346> (phemi); **a foreteller** ("prophet"); **by analogy an inspired speaker**; by extension a poet :- prophet.

NASB: in many portions and in many ways,

NKJV: various times and in various ways

KJV: at sundry times and in divers manners

NIV: at many times and in various ways

ESV: at many times and in many ways

**many portions (or parts)** = *polymeros* (pol-oo-mer'-oce) = adverb from a compound of <G4183> (polus) and <G3313> (meros); in many portions, **i.e. variously as to time and agency** (piecemeal) :- at sundry times.

**many ways** = *polytropos* (pol-oot-rop'-oce) = adverb from a compound of <G4183> (polus) and <G5158> (tropos); in many ways, **i.e. variously as to method or form** :- in divers manners.

*John MacArthur*: Sometimes it was in a vision, sometimes by a parable, sometimes through a type or a symbol. There were many different ways in which God spoke in the OT. But it is always God speaking. Even the words spoken by men and angels are included because He wants us to know them. Men were used—their minds were used and their personalities were used—but they were totally controlled by the Spirit of God... "Many ways" includes many literary ways. Some of the OT is narrative. Some of it is poetry, in beautiful Hebrew meter. The "many ways" also includes many types of content. Some is law; some is prophecy; some is doctrinal; some is ethical and moral; some is warning; some is encouragement. But it is all God speaking.

Let's look at just one scene where God Himself explains how He speaks differently (*polytropos*) to different people or at different times (*polymeros*) for different reasons.

**Read Numbers 12:1-9.**



# HEBREWS 1:1-13

“The several passages from the Old Testament [in Hebrews 1:5-13] were carefully chosen to correspond to the declarations concerning the Son of God in the opening lines of the sermon.”

(William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment*)

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son,

whom He appointed heir of all things,

through whom also He made the world.

3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact

representation of His nature, and upholds all things

by the word of His power. When He had made

purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of

the Majesty on high,

4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

5 For to which of the angels did He ever say, “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You”? And again, “I will be a Father to Him And He shall be a Son to Me”?

6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.”

7 And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds, And His ministers a flame of fire.”

8 But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.

9 “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness above Your companions.”

10 And, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of Your hands;

11 They will perish, but You remain; And they all will become old like a garment,

12 And like a mantle You will roll them up; Like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.”

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said, “Sit at My right hand, Until I make Your enemies A footstool For Your feet”?



So what we can take away from this is that we are not to be jealous of the way God speaks to or works through someone else. The Lord God communicates in different ways to different people—and He even speaks in different ways to the same people on different *occasions*.

v2

*“...in these last days...”*

It's not clear what the preacher means precisely by this, but probably one of two possibilities—perhaps both.

**First possibility,**

not: in our present time, His most recent statement (as in “latest”)

but: finally, His last, once and for all statement

This is God's *final* revelation, delivered in the person of His Son.

**Second possibility,**

the phrase “in these last days” is to be understood as a messianic reference, which would have been familiar to a Jewish congregation. They would have been taught all their lives that the promised Messiah would arrive to inaugurate the “last days.”

It's easy to see how both of these are true: the final revelation has been spoken in God's Son, the promised Messiah, who comes in “these last days.”

*...[God] has spoken to us in His Son,*

And John 1 reminds us that when the preacher says that God now speaks in His Son it entails far more than what He did in the prophets of old.

**Read John 1:1.**

God spoke *through* or *by means of* the prophets, but *Jesus is God speaking*. Jesus the Son does not just transmit God's words, but speaks *as God*.

*Pastor Jeremy:* One observation that I find very significant is that the word “his” does not occur in verse 2. Literally it reads “He has spoke to us in Son.” It is as though the language of revelation that God ultimately speaks to us is that of ‘Son.’ The significance of this point is that Jesus (and only Jesus) could be this final communication of God *par-excellence*. God did speak to us *through* Jesus but more importantly He spoke to us *in* Jesus. Jesus reveals God but also is Himself the full revelation of God (“if you have seen me you have seen the Father”). And this of course ties in with the concept of Jesus as ‘the Word’ who is simultaneously both God, and God's own fellow.

The same passage in the gospel of John illumines the two characteristics of the Son itemized in Hebrews (actually, if I were writing this, I would have changed the order):

**Read v2.**

- He inherits everything that belongs to God (and everything *does* belong to God)
- He created “the ages,” eternity

John puts them in my preferred order:

**Read John 1:2-3.**

**Read John 1:12-13.**

Christ Jesus—the Son, the promised Messiah—is superior because

- He speaks as God,
- as “heir of all things” He can deliver to us the right to be heirs as well,
- He was not just in the world, but the world was made *through* Him.

This word translated “world” in the NASB and ESV is translated slightly better in the KJV (worlds) and NIV (universe). But the NASB makes up for this with a very good margin note (Lit., ages).

**world(s), universe** = *aion* (eye-own') = from the same as <G104> (aei); properly **an age; by extension perpetuity** (also past); by implication the world; specially (Jewish) **a Messianic period** (present or future) :- age, course, eternal, (for) ever (-more), [n-]ever, (beginning of the, while the) world (began, without end). Compare <G5550> (chronos).

The Greek *aion* is first and foremost a word about *time*—a long span of time (we get our word “eon” from it). So the idea here is that The Son created not just this globe, not just everything that exists (the universe), but time itself: eternity past and eternity future! When Gabriel described to Mary the Son she would be bearing, he said,

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever (aion) and His kingdom will have no end.” (Luke 1:32-33)

*The Message*: By his Son, God created the world in the beginning, and it will all belong to the Son at the end. (paraphrase of Hebrews 1:2)

I’d like to bring out one more thing that is going on in vs2-3. Read Hebrews 1:2-3.

Lane points out that this congregation of Jews would have been very familiar with the concept of Wisdom—God’s Wisdom, or Divine Wisdom—who is personified throughout Scripture—especially in the wisdom literature of King Solomon. Jewish writers assigned four tasks to wisdom—and see if you can locate the reference to each in vs2-3:

1. the creation of the world [“through whom also He made the world”]
2. the providential sustaining of the world [“upholds all things by the word of His power”]
3. the revelation of God’s truth [“the exact representation of His nature”]
4. the reconciliation of persons to God [“He made purification of sins”]

The preacher in the opening strains of his sermon does not *explicitly* label Jesus the “Wisdom of God.” But he does *implicitly* by assigning to Jesus the four tasks traditionally assigned to Wisdom. The application for us today is that if Jesus is all of that (and more, of course) we can trust in His ability to sustain us in all things—and the Jewish congregation to whom this sermon was delivered could trust in Him to sustain them through the very real trials to come.

### v3

Personally, I’d like to spend about 3-4 weeks on v3 alone. There is that much good stuff crammed into this one verse. But, alas...

In v3 the pastor continues describing the Son in expansive terms. The words are beautiful—even poetic—and continue this Wisdom line of thought.

*He is the radiance of His glory...*

**radiance**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **brightness**<sup>KJV</sup> = *apaugasma* (ap-ow’-gas-mah) = from a compound of <G575> (apo) and <G826> (augazo); **an off-flash**, i.e. effulgence :- brightness. [MacArthur: “to send forth light”]

The word can be interpreted to mean either the *radiance* of the divine “glory” (*doxa*) as the sunlight conveys the brightness and intensity of the sun—or God’s *reflection*, as in a mirror. In this context the former is preferred, especially considering what follows.

**Read John 1:4-5,9.**

**light** = *phos* = from an obsolete *phao* (**to shine or make manifest, especially by rays**; compare <G5316> (*phaino*), <G5346> (*phemi*)); luminousness (in the widest application, natural or artificial, abstract or concrete, literal or figurative); fire light.

This is the only place in the NT where this word is used, but it is used in the Wisdom of Solomon, part of the *Apocrypha*, or non-canonical books of the Bible, and the passage found there makes for an interesting comparison to our text. I quote the passage from the *Douay-Rheims Bible* (1899), which is the official Roman Catholic Bible, and does include the Apocryphal books that protestants do not accept as part of the canon. Here is our text in the NASB:

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. (v3a)

And here is the pertinent passage in the Wisdom of Solomon:

For wisdom is more active than all active things; and reacheth everywhere, by reason of her purity. For she is a vapour of the power of God, and a certain pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty God: and therefore no defiled thing cometh into her. For she is

the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of his goodness. And being but one, she can do all things: (Wisdom 7:24-27a)

...the exact representation of His nature,

**exact representation**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **express image**<sup>KJV</sup> = *character* (khar-ak-tare') = from the same as <G5482> (charax); a graver (the tool or the person), i.e. (by implication) engraving (["character"], **the figure stamped, i.e. an exact copy or [figurative] representation**) :- express image.

In this digital world we have the ability to make exact copies of certain things. A copy of a digital image or document or song is an "exact representation" or "express image" of the original. Nothing of the original is lost in the process. The Son is the express image of the Father. Nothing of the original was lost in the process. Jesus is fully, completely God.

The first part of this verse speaks of Jesus having the full radiance of God's glory, and the second part speaks of Jesus being an exact image of God's "nature" or "person".

**nature**<sup>NASB</sup>, **person**<sup>KJV</sup>, **being**<sup>NIV</sup> = *hypostasis* (hoop-os'-ta-sis) = from a compound of <G5259> (hupo) and <G2476> (histemi); **a setting under (support), i.e. (figurative) concrete essence**, or abstract assurance (object or subject) :- confidence, confident, person, **substance**. [Leon Morris: *that which stands under a thing, that which makes it what it is.*]

*Matthew Henry*: This is a high and lofty description of the glorious Redeemer, this is an account of his personal excellency. [1.] He is, in person, the Son of God, the only-begotten Son of God, and as such he must have the same nature. This personal distinction always supposes one and the same nature. Every son of man is man; were not the nature the same, the generation would be monstrous. [2.] The person of the Son is the glory of the Father, shining forth with a truly divine splendour. As the beams are effulgent emanations of the sun, the "father" and fountain of light, Jesus Christ in his person is God manifest in the flesh, he is light of light, the true Shechinah. [3.] The person of the Son is the true image and character of the person of the Father; being of the same nature, he must bear the same image and likeness. In beholding the power, wisdom, and goodness, of the Lord Jesus Christ, we behold the power, wisdom, and goodness, of the Father; for he hath the nature and perfections of God in him.

...and upholds all things...

**upholds** = *phero* = a primary verb (for which other and apparently not cognate ones are used in certain tenses only; namely, oio, oy'-o; and enegko, en-eng'-ko); **to "bear" or carry** (in a very wide application, literal and figurative, as follows) :- be, bear, bring (forth), carry, come, + let her drive, be driven, **endure**, go on, lay, lead, move, reach, rushing, **uphold**.

*Morris*: The author does not see Christ's work in sustaining [upholding] creation as holding up the universe like a dead weight (as Atlas was supposed to do!). Rather his thought is that of carrying it along, of bearing it toward a goal. The concept is dynamic, not static.

...by the word of His power.

Here again our pastor refers to that which is audible.

**word** = *rhema* = from <G4483> (rheo); **an utterance** (individual, collective or special); by implication a matter or topic (especially of narration, **command** or dispute); with a negative naught whatever :- + evil, + nothing, saying, word. **power** = *dynamis* = from <G1410> (dunamai); **force** (literal or figurative); **especially miraculous power** (usually by implication a miracle itself) :- ability, abundance, meaning, might (-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle (-s), power, **strength**, violence, might (wonderful) work. [Morris: *The "word" is not empty. It has force. It does things.*]

When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

This is where the preacher has been headed all along; this is the punch line. And here we have a good segue into the rest of the sermon. To understand the true weight of this statement—specifically its two parts: "purification of sins" and "sat down"—we need to look at chapter 5.

**Read Hebrews 5:1-3.**

**First**, on the day of Atonement, when the high priest made sacrifice in the Holy of Holies for the sins of the entire nation of Israel, he first made sacrifice for his *own* sins. He had to atone for his own sins before he could be

sufficiently ritually clean to atone for the sins of the people. This he had to do each time. Jesus “made purification of sins” for the people once—and once only—and it was not necessary for Him to first make sacrifice for His own sins. He had none. He was already ritually clean.

**Second**, there were no chairs in the Holy of Holies. The business of sacrificing for sins never ended; the job was never done. But because the sacrifice Jesus made for sin was once for all, He could then sit down. As the Spotless Lamb He could take His place of honor and glory at the right hand (the hand of power) of the Father.

**v4**

Verse 4 declares that Jesus the Son was not just better than the priests, but better than the angels. (We will look at this verse more next week.)

### SESSION 3. HEBREWS 1:5-14

Why does the writer of Hebrews dwell to such an extent on this business of angels? Did this congregation have some peculiar fascination with them? Were they in danger of developing a belief-system in them that threatened to knock Christ Jesus off His position of Lordship?

Probably not. We haven't the time to examine in detail angels and their place of importance in the Jewish faith, but let's just remember that the pastor's congregation was made up predominantly of Jews, and that the angels and their actions and responsibilities were far more prominent in the Jewish belief system than in Christianity.

#### **v4**

Verse 4 declares that Jesus the Son was not just better than the priests, but better than the angels.

**Read Hebrews 1:4.**

#### **“BECOME”**

Let us first address this word translated “become” in our text. It is important to understand what it means, for by my count it is used 6 times in Hebrews in relation to Christ, and it can be a stumbling block. In our vernacular, when one “becomes” something it implies one was something *else* before, and our mind has a hard time reconciling this with the eternal Son of God. Making matters worse, in Hebrews 11:24 the same word is translated “grown up”!

**By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter**

So what are we to make of this? We'd better work it out now, because it will come up five more times in our study.

This is one of those flexible words that is translated myriad ways in the Bible, but it is most often translated using one form or another of “become.”

having **become**<sup>NASB,NKJV,ESV</sup>, being **made**<sup>KJV</sup>, **became**<sup>NIV</sup> = *ginomai* = a prolonged and middle form of a primary verb; **to cause to be (“gen”-erate)**, i.e. (reflexive) **to become (come into being)**, used with great latitude (literal, figurative, intensive, etc.) :- arise, be assembled, be (-come, -fall, -have self), be brought (to pass), (be) come (to pass), continue, be divided, draw, be ended, fall, be finished, follow, be found, be fulfilled, + God forbid, grow, happen, have, be kept, be made, be married, be ordained to be, partake, pass, be performed, be published, require, seem, be showed, × soon as it was, sound, be taken, be turned, use, wax, will, would, be wrought.

*Leon Morris:* “He became” is somewhat unexpected. The writer has made some strong statements about the superiority of Christ's person, and so we should expect him to describe Christ as eternally superior to the angels rather than as “becoming” superior to them. But the writer says it this way because he was thinking of what the Son did in becoming man and putting away the sins of men. Of course, the Son was also eternally superior to the angels. That, however, is not what is in mind here. It was because he had put away sins that he sat down on the throne in the place of highest honor, and it is in this aspect that he is seen as greater than any angel.

Think of it this way: We are reasonably comfortable stating that the Son of God “became” man to redeem man from his sin. This is how *ginomai* is used in Hebrews. The second member of the Godhead was and is and always will be superior to *any* created being. But as the man Jesus he “became” better than the angels and inherited a more excellent name *because of* His work of redemption.

#### **CHRIST HAS A GREATER NAME**

So v4 sets up v5 by stating that Christ inherited a more excellent name than the angels.

**Read v5.**

Here the preacher first quotes v7 in the second Psalm, but the entire Psalm bears upon this passage in Hebrews. Note, as well, the mention of inheritance.

**Read Psalm 2.**

In the latter part of the Psalm we see the superiority of the Son as Jehovah warns earthly kings to pay appropriate homage to Him.

[Back to Hebrews.](#)

We know the names of a few of the angels: Michael, Gabriel. But none of those names is more excellent than “My Son.” No name in all of the kingdom is superior to that of the King’s son.

The second quote in v5 is not explicitly Messianic, but is from 2 Samuel, where the Lord is telling King David how He will establish the Davidic dynasty forever through David’s son, Solomon.

**Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16.**

[Back to Hebrews.](#)

So in v5 the preacher establishes the superior lineage—the family “name”—of Christ Jesus. The man Jesus is the Son of Father God, and as such possesses a superior name—a more excellent name—than the angels. And remember, too, what we have discussed many times before: in biblical parlance a person’s name is something far more substantial than how we use names today; it represented, it summed up all that a person is.

## CHRIST HAS A GREATER DIGNITY

**Read v6.**

In Psalm 2, quoted in v5, Jehovah tells earthly kings to pay homage to the Son, and here the writer quotes Psalm 97 to include angels—or “heavenly beings” in this worship of Christ.

**Read Psalm 97:6-9.**

“gods” in Psalm 97 is the Hebrew *elohim*, which in various places in Scripture is used to represent multiple pagan gods (as here), the tri-unity of the Godhead (as in Genesis 1:1), or heavenly beings in general, such as angels.

William Lane makes the case for the preacher using as his standard text of the OT Scriptures, the Greek translation, known as the Septuagint. Lane cites a number of instances where the writer bases *his* text on the Greek translation of the Hebrew, rather than the original Hebrew. And here in v6 the word is of course not *elohim* but the Greek *angelos*.

**angels** = *ang'-el-os* = from *aggello* [probably derivative from <G71> (ago); compare <G34> (agele)] (to bring tidings); a messenger; especially an “angel”; by implication a pastor :- angel, messenger.

With the point here that earthly kings and heavenly beings will worship the Christ, one would almost risk bodily harm if one did not reference that most splendid passage in Philippians.

**Read Philippians 2:8-11.**

## CHRIST HAS A GREATER STATUS

In v7 the writer again quotes the Greek translation of Psalm 104. There, regarding angels he finds the clause, “Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.” Here again the superiority of the Son is shown. Angels belong to the created order, subject to God’s creative activity. As such they may be transformed into anything of His design—including, as here, winds and fire. But the Son of God is not subject to change or decay; He is constant. When the created order grows old and wears out, the Son will remain.

Why should we care about this? Why is this important? For the same reason it was important for the preacher’s house-church to hear it.

**Read Hebrews 13:8.**

In a world that seems to be going mad; in a time of incredible instability and change; in a time when there is seemingly no one or no thing in which we can depend—Jesus Christ, the Son of God remains the same. And this brings stability—and hope—to a believer’s life. And the rest of this passage (to v12) expands on this, quoting Psalm 102 in vs10-12.

Note what it says here:

**(Read vs8-12 with comments, below.)**

But of the Son He says,	From v1:1 it is still Jehovah God speaking; what follows is Father God speaking of Christ.
"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His [later mss., Your] kingdom.	So Father God addresses the Son as God—already a higher status than the created angels. Jesus Himself established this: <b>Read John 5:16-18.</b> And here we have the necessary components of Lordship: the throne, the ruling scepter, and the kingdom.
"You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness [or, joy] above Your companions."	<b>anointed</b> = <i>chrío</i> = probably akin to <G5530> (chraomai) through the idea of contact; to smear or rub with oil, i.e. (by implication) <b>to consecrate to an office or religious service</b> :- anoint.  v9 quotes Psalm 45:7, but note the passage from which Jesus read in the synagogue when He announced Himself at the start of His public ministry: <b>Read Isaiah 61:1-3.</b>
And, "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of Your hands; They will perish, but You remain; And they all will become old like a garment, And like a mantle You will roll them up; Like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end."	vs10-12 quote Psalm 102, which we studied last month.  The heavens and the earth will perish, but Christ Jesus remains; He will not come to an end.

## CHRIST HAS A GREATER FUNCTION

Finally, the writer of Hebrews makes an important point about the difference in roles or function between the angels and Christ Jesus.

The pastor quotes Psalm 110 in v13, and once again we are privy to a conversation between God the Father and God the Son:

**Read v13.**

No angel has ever been invited to take the throne at the right hand of the Father, nor to rule over the enemies of that throne. But they *have* been given an important role to play—one that is again important to the house-church of the Hebrews, as well as to us today.

**Read v14.**

As Lane points out, "the function of the Son is to rule; the function of the angels is to serve."  
And D. A. Carson states, "No angel was ever appointed to reign in the Davidic line."

I think we see here a pastor's heart. In less-skilled hands, or, say, in the hands of a detached scholar, in comparison to the second member of the Godhead the angels could have been presented as virtually unimportant—so far beneath the Son of God as to be almost insignificant.

But the pastor doesn't do that. He closes this passage with a timely reminder of the *importance* of angels to the lives of his parishioners. The Hebrews, as well as our local church, can be encouraged that

- Believers are never left wholly defenseless in a hostile world. Just as the unseen "principalities and powers" (Romans 8:38)



work *against* us, the unseen ministers sent from God work *for* us.

- This is another, encouraging demonstration of God's love for us, that He sends out the troops of heaven to fight for us.

And note the time frame of v14. The angels are "sent out to render service for the sake of those **who will** inherit salvation." Angels are active in the lives of the elect—even *before they come to Christ in faith*.

Christ Jesus is superior to the angels in **Name**, in **Dignity**, in **Rank**, and in **Function**. But believers who live in a world hostile to faith can find hope and encouragement that those angels are daily doing battle for us in Christ's name.

## SESSION 4. HEBREWS 2:1-4

### Read Hebrews 2:1-4.

#### v1

v1 begins—

*For this reason...*

—which, of course, raises the question: *What* reason?

The preacher has just spent the opening stanza of his sermon—our first chapter—on a systematic argument for the Son's superiority over angels—

“...having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.” (v4)

Based on his conclusion that the Son is indeed superior, he declares:

*...we must pay much closer attention...*

**must** = it is *necessary*

**pay...attention, give heed** = from <G4314> (pros) and <G2192> (echo); (figurative) **to hold the mind** (<G3563> (nous) implication) towards, i.e. pay attention to, be cautious about, apply oneself to, **adhere to** :- (give) attend (-ance, -ance at, -ance to, unto), beware, be given to, give (take) heed (to, unto) have regard.

**much closer, more earnest** = adverb from <G4053> (perissos); **superabundantly** :- exceedingly, **out of measure**, the more.

This verb goes beyond just turning the mind to something to include *acting upon* what one has learned. **We are not just to hear, but to believe; we are not just to believe, but to place our trust in what we believe; we are not just to trust, but to act upon that in which we trust.**

To what?

*...to what we have heard*

The preacher does not explicitly state what this refers to, but I think it is logical to assume it refers to how he began his sermon.

### Read vs1:1-2a.

That is, what we have heard from Christ Jesus, what we have heard about His gospel and the Christ-ian way of life. We are to believe it—and (in a world in which most everything is stacked against us) *act* upon it.

And here is perspective for us: no matter how bad society's antagonism is toward our faith, it is nothing like what it was for the members of this house-church. They were faced with literal torture and death, and still their pastor was telling them to take their faith seriously, to be bold.

But their witness and usefulness in the kingdom aside, there was another reason for them to “pay much closer attention to what they have heard.”

*...so that we do not drift away from it.*

Note that the pastor includes *himself* with “we”. This does not mean he considers himself to be at the same spiritual level as those he is about to address; it is more the universal, the corporate “we”.

And it is now time to address just who the “we” is. At various points in his sermon the preacher writes things that cause us to wonder if he is speaking to true believers, those still on the fence, or those who were still rejecting the call of the Spirit. Over the centuries much discussion has taken place over how to interpret and apply such passages as this in 2:1, 3:12, 4:1, and, famously, 6:4-8.

**drift away**<sup>NKJV,NIV</sup>, **drift away from it**<sup>NASB,ESV</sup>, **let them slip**<sup>KJV</sup> = *pararreō* (par-ar-hroo-eh'-o) = from <G3844> (para) and the alternate of <G4482> (rheo); **to flow by, i.e. (figurative) carelessly pass** (miss) :- let slip.

Although the different translations of this word are similar and related, there are subtle differences. I see a difference between “drift away” and “drift away from it.” The latter points back specifically to “what we have heard”—that is, the truth of the gospel in Christ. This could refer to a believer just getting a little shaky on doctrine. The former (“drift away”) could refer to the same thing—or something more all-encompassing. It could mean drift or slip away from the faith itself.

The compound word itself (*pararreō*) is used only here, and nowhere else in Scripture. But the root, *rheō*, means “flow,” commonly to refer to the flow of a stream or river. Later, because solid objects that liquefy “melt away,” it came to include the idea of “fall” or “drop off.” So with the added “para” we get the idea of flowing past something or, as Plutarch used the word, letting a ring slip off one’s finger. William Lane puts it more in nautical terms—to “drift off course”—the image being “of a ship whose anchor no longer grips the sea-bed, which drifts dangerously past the safe harbor.”

This is good imagery for the **believer**. By “neglecting our salvation” (v3), our faith can drift off-course, and we can end up in areas of sin and rebellion, in stormy waters that inflict damage. For the **non-believer**, however, this could mean something different. If someone has just “heard” but not acted upon what they have heard, their “drifting away” could be into eternal damnation; they have slipped past the moorings and drifted off the edge of the world.

So this brings us to the question of just who is the “we”? Who is it sitting in the pews listening to this pastor’s sermon be read? Believers or non-believers? Well, look around the pews of our own church. We cannot know what is in the hearts of everyone in attendance on a Sunday morning, but it is a pretty safe guess that in that congregation there is a variety of relationships with Christ. In any given church there would be the venerable saints, walking daily by the Spirit, and there would be those still ice-cold to the gospel. And all variations in between those two extremes.

When we come to these troublesome passages in the sermon called “Hebrews,” and we wonder just who it is being addressed—believer or unbeliever—we can safely answer, “Yes!” In the congregation that met in this house-church there were probably many different relationships with Christ, and just as a pastor today, in a church made up mostly of believers, might preach an evangelistic sermon, followed by an altar call, here and there in the pastor’s sermon he speaks to these different relationships. [\[But when he addresses a group other than ours, that doesn’t mean we check out for the duration, but we are to consider how the same truth might apply to us.\]](#)

So here in v1, where we read about drifting or slipping away, we don’t need to get all sick and nervous, wondering if believers can lose their faith. We just apply the truth based on our relationship with Christ: If a believer, we can drift away from that close, affirming communion; if not a believer, we can drift away and lose our way entirely.

## **v2-3a**

There very often comes a point in our study of the NT when it is critical that we understand how the text would have been received and understood by its first, intended recipients. Only then can we make application of its truth to our lives. We have a case in point in the first four verses of chapter two.

**Read vs2-3a.**

Last week I made reference to the fact that the angels were much more important to the ancient Jewish economy than they are to Christians today. And here in v2 we have an instance of this. It’s not even that we have a different text—it’s just that we seem to pay little attention to the work of the angels. For example, when was the last time you heard a preacher or teacher speak about the work of the angels in delivering the law at Mt. Sinai?

**Read Deuteronomy 33:1-2.**

Our focus here is on the last part of v2. Most contemporary translations soften the angelic aspects of this scene by keeping it vague and generic (“holy ones”) or by translating it “saints”. And the variations on this portion indicate the difficulty translators have had with it.

NASB	And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.
NKJV	And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand Came a fiery law for them.
KJV	and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.
NIV	He came with myriads of holy ones from the south, from his mountain slopes.
ASV	And he came from the ten thousands of holy ones: At his right hand was a fiery law for them.
ESV	he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.
<i>The Message</i>	coming with ten thousand holy angels And tongues of fire streaming from his right hand.
<i>Septuagint</i> (Lane)	angels were with him at his right hand.

Now, for our purpose, it is less important what this text in Deuteronomy literally means than it is to know *how it was understood by people in the first century*. And we have clues to this in the NT. The first is from Stephen’s message, just before he was martyred:

**Read Acts 7:37-38.**

He follows this up with another reference in v53:

“...you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.”

And just one more, from the apostle Paul this time”

**Read Galatians 3:19.**

While today we focus on Moses alone, it is clear that the Jews in the first century understood that the angels were involved, in some way, in the handing down of the law from God to Moses. And this is the basis for the preacher’s rhetorical question in vs2 and 3.

But why does he pose the question?

**Read vs2-3a.**

The pastor is still driving home the superiority of the gospel of Christ over the Mosaic Law—which, to tie it into his opening point regarding angels, was a “word” delivered by angels.

And then the pastor, knowing his congregation, associates their recent behavior with the work of the law. He first declares that “the word (*logos*) spoken through angels proved (*ginomai*) unalterable.”

**unalterable**<sup>NASB</sup>, **steadfast**<sup>KJV</sup>, **binding**<sup>NIV</sup> = from the base of <G939> (basis) (through the idea of basality); **stable** (literal or figurative) :- **firm**, of force, steadfast, **sure**.

The law was from God, and it was sufficient and binding, rock solid, for dealing with “transgression” and “disobedience.”

**transgression** = par-ab’-asis = from <G3845> (parabaino); violation :- **breaking**, transgression.

**disobedience** = from <G3878> (parakouo); **inattention**, i.e. (by implication) disobedience.

**penalty, recompence, reward, punishment** = from <G3406> (misthapodotes); requital (**good or bad**) :- recompence of reward; **payment of wages**. [i.e., they got what they had coming to them]

This second word is the one more important to the pastor. His concern is over the members of this church being

inattentive to what has come from God in *Christ*. That is why he writes what he does in v1: *Hey guys, you need to be paying more attention to the good news in Christ! If you don't you're going to start drifting away, losing touch with Him.*

So the preacher sets it up in v2: If this was true (and it was), and since I have established that Christ is superior to angels, then how much *more* will be our “payment of wages” if we are so careless with this incredible salvation we have in Christ the Son!

**neglect, ignore** = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G3199> (melo); **to be careless of** :- **make light of**, neglect, be negligent, not regard.

**salvation** = *soteria* (so-tay-ree'-ah) = feminine of a derivative of <G4990> (soter) as (properly abstract) noun; **rescue** or safety (physical or morally) :- **deliver**, health, **salvation**, save, saving.

The law (the word through angels) was perfectly capable of serving up justice and punishment, but only *Christ* can offer real *salvation*.

### v3B-4

In the KJV vs3 and 4 comprise one sentence—one question—but in the NASB and NIV a new sentence begins in the middle of v3. And now, after speaking of the law that came through angels, in this passage the preacher focuses in on the salvation that came through [by means of] the Lord Jesus.

#### Read vs3b-4.

*After it was at the first spoken [NIV: announced] through the Lord,*

**it** = salvation

This ties back to the gospel of Luke, which is the only other place where Jesus “first spoke” or “announces” salvation.

#### Read Luke 19:8-10.

And here (v3 in Hebrews) is implied that this salvation (similar to creation itself) originated with God the Father, but was brought to man by God the Son.

*...it was confirmed to us by those who heard,*

Here is also more evidence that the writer of Hebrews was not from the original disciples, for he includes himself in those who have received the gospel secondhand. “Those who heard” would be those who heard Jesus Himself speak the word. They confirmed word of this salvation to the rest of the world.

*Leon Morris:* The verb “confirm” is used as a legal technical term “to designate properly guaranteed security” and in this context means “the saving message was guaranteed to us.” Its frequent use in a legal sense gives it great force here; i.e., there cannot be the slightest doubt about the salvation offered. It came through Christ and that this is the salvation Christ offered is guaranteed by its apostolic attestation.

#### Read v4.

*God also testifying with them...*

**testifying** = *martyreo* = from <G3144> (martus); to be a witness, i.e. testify (literal or figurative) :- charge, give [evidence], bear record, have (obtain, of) good (honest) report, be well reported of, testify, give (have) testimony, (be, bear, give, obtain) witness.

with **them** = those who heard (apostles)

**signs** = neuter of a presumed derivative of the base of <G4591> (semaino); an indication, especially ceremonial or supernatural :- miracle, sign, token, wonder.

**wonders** = of uncertain affinity; a prodigy or omen :- wonder.

**miracles** = *dynamis* = from <G1410> (dunamai); force (literal or figurative); **especially miraculous power** (usually by implication a miracle itself) :- ability, abundance, meaning, might (-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle (-s), power, strength, violence, might (wonderful) work.

**gifts** = *merismos'* = from <G3307> (merizo); a separation or distribution :- dividing asunder, gift.

Here we have God Himself guaranteeing the word of this salvation.

*William Lane:* The confirming tokens, which we describe as the charismatic gifts, were actually an expression of God's love for the human family. They consisted of "signs" that point to the gracious activity of God; of "wonders" that cause us to stand back in amazement, knowing that we are in the presence of God; of "miracles" that call forth the acknowledgement that we could not accomplish these acts through our own resources; and of "gifts of the Holy Spirit" given to us in accordance with God's sovereign will. All these are evidences of God's love. The supporting testimony was grounded in the will of the God who cares for His people.

Lane concludes,

The purpose of this confirmation of the Christian message is the validation that God has spoken definitively in Jesus Christ.

## **SESSION 5. HEBREWS 2:5-9**

### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

This has been a tough job, preparing today's lesson on Hebrews 2:5-9—for one reason: Every few words I would find myself lost in thought, as if in a trance, gazing out the window as the text would draw me away into the deep things being mentioned.

Every so often—*quite* often, in fact—a passage in Scripture will be so full, so rich, so packed with imagery and nuance that it is a challenge to pry oneself out of meditation to organize one's thoughts. We have such a passage here. A preacher could easily build 3 or 4 sermons from this text—each going in a different direction.

So my first counsel is for you to read this second chapter this week. Go to your quiet place, invite the Spirit to be your guide, and read through it several times, taking time to linger, to pause over certain spots. Lean back in your chair and meditate on all that is going on here—some of which we will touch on today.

As a guide, I have written down a few of the thoughts I had when I drifted off. Perhaps these will be of use in *your* times of meditation or communion this week.

### **JESUS, ALWAYS**

My favorite words in the passage before us are found at the beginning of v9 in chapter 2:

**"But we see Jesus..."**

It is true that the NASB and ESV more faithfully translate the original sentence construction used by the preacher—

**But we do see Him ... namely, Jesus...**

—but for the sheer poetry of the truth I favor the other translations.

The pastor of these Hebrews has opened his sermon with a discourse on the superiority of the Son over angelic beings, and in the passage before us—vs5-9—he segues nicely from angels to man. But one gets the feeling that, similar to the apostle Paul who periodically must break forth into exaltation of Christ in the midst of doctrinal discourse, as the preacher begins speaking of man he is compelled to get quickly back to the more important topic at hand.

**"But we see Jesus..."**

These four words glow with the warm and reassuring radiance of heaven.

- Do you see problems before you at work? See Jesus.
- Do you see quarrels and factions all around—even in the church? See Jesus.
- Are you faced with trials or temptation? See Jesus.

Here it is fitting that the preacher uses for the first time the Son's earthly name. Up till now he has been speaking in heavenly, supernatural terms about "the Son." But now in this passage he (among other things) makes a comparison of the Son to man, so it is appropriate that he now uses the more personal name, "Jesus."

### **Read Hebrews 2:5-9.**

### **VS3B-5**

Last week, in vs1-4, the pastor cautioned against being too casual with the gospel of Christ Jesus. He emphasized that this spoken word—that came to us not through angels (as did the Law) but through the Lord, the Son—was so important that not only was it declared by those who heard it from the lips of Jesus, but Father God Himself, because of His love for man, testified to its veracity by means of sign, wonders, miracles and gifts.

In the transition from the middle of v3 through v5 I almost see the pastor shaking us by the shoulders, saying, *Don't you see? Don't you get it? You are special to God—way more than angels. God has a singular, unique love for human man that is played out in this "great salvation" that He offers through the sacrifice of His Son. He doesn't do that for angels.*



### Read vs3b-5:

After it [this great salvation] was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard [the apostles], God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.

You see, at the root of this extended passage is really *salvation*. Vs5-9 flow out of vs1-4, and though the word “salvation” is never used in vs5-9, it is really about it. consider...

- This passage deals with who will ultimately be in charge of earth—that is, as v8 puts it, to who will “all things” be subject. The answer, from the text, is not angels but “man.”
- But not all men—that is, not all of mankind—will rule. Some will be damned for all eternity, while others will rule, or govern, for eternity. What makes the difference?  
Those who will rule have been saved by Christ.

⊕ So right off we have **food for thought**. How amazing is this!? We can understand when the pastor makes the case for the *Son* being superior to angels, but now he’s saying that we, sinful human beings, are more important than His angelic messengers, enjoying a special love from God, as well as a special responsibility and dignity in the future!

### v5

Look back at the end of chapter 1. In v14 the preacher describes the role angels play in the economy of creation.

#### Read v14.

Angels serve, minister to “those who will inherit salvation.” That is, man.

⊕ More **food for thought**: It would be easy to say that it was not necessary for salvation, the gospel of Christ, to be offered to angels. After all, they’re created beings, they’re *angels*. But not so fast. Some of the angels, led by one of the highest angels, Lucifer, fell. If anyone was in need of salvation it would be Satan himself. But it is not offered to him—only humans.

V5 sets up the following quotation from Psalm 8 by stating that angels will not be in charge of the “world to come.”

### Read v5.

**subject** = *hypotasso* = from <G5259> (hupo) and <G5021> (tasso); **to subordinate**; reflexive to obey :- **be under obedience** (obedient), **put under**, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto.

We could easily get lost in this moment as well, but for time’s sake let me just outline in brief the tapestry that is this world and who was/is/will be in charge—all, of course, subordinate to sovereign God.

- At his creation, man was placed in charge of this world.
- When he fell, by sinning against holy God, he forfeited that position.
- At that point the world did become subject to angels—in a number of ways, but specifically subject to the angel Lucifer: Satan.

### Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

- And Jesus referred to him and his position in John 12:31, saying,  
“Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”
- The angels are still in charge.
- As part of the Last Days, Satan will be cast into the eternal lake of fire, along with all his minions. One can safely assume that this will end any power they have over earth.
- When the new heaven and new earth are established, man’s rule over earth under the throne of the Lamb will be restored.

That this *future* role for man is being discussed is clear from v5: the “world **to come**,” and v8: “But **now** we do **not yet** see all things subjected to him.” (emphasis added) Meaning they *will* be one day.

## vs6-8A

Before we dig into the quotation from Psalm 8, remember that the pastor's Bible, that which he used every day just as we use our Bible, was the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the OT. The translators during the several centuries before Christ pored through the ancient Hebrew and came up with the closest Greek words for the original text. So naturally there are going to be word differences between the Hebrew and the Greek.

### Read v6-8a.

The important thing for us to remember here is that the preacher is really focusing on Christ Jesus. He makes use of this passage from the Psalms, which speaks of man, but where the pastor is really headed is the lordship of Christ. So it is incumbent on us not to get sidetracked into a long discussion about *man's* role. This is made clear when we see what he has done with v7—

**"You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And have appointed him over the works of Your hands."**

—in v9:

**But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.**

*That is the pastor's real destination. It's as if he is saying to his congregation, See this passage from the Psalms that speaks of man's temporary abasement and future glory? Let me show you how this also applies to the Lord. So I want to draw out just a few points from this quotation, which we discussed in more depth in our study of Psalm 8.*

Very often a preacher or teacher will want to reference a passage from the Bible, and to do so properly will back up a verse or two to give context. I think that is what the writer of Hebrews has done with our v6, in that he doesn't really discuss or reference it, but uses it to give context to what follows. He really wants to focus in on v7-8.

Just a couple notes, though, about v6. First, the term "son of man" is not a reference to Christ, but just another way to refer to men, or mankind—a common usage in the OT (e.g., Ezekiel). Also,

**concerned, mindful** = to inspect; to go to see; "*episkopeo* and cognates stress **active and responsible care for that which has been seen.**" (Brown)  
[we get "Episcopal" from this]

*You have made him **for a little while lower** than the angels; [NASB,ESV]*

*You have made him **a little lower** than the angels;*

Personally, I'm comfortable with either translation, for both are true. Mankind, as well as Jesus, was made lower than the angels—but it is only for a time; it is not a permanent condition.

Vs7b-8a speak of man's position in the beginning, before the fall, and in the end times, after the creation of the new heaven and new earth. And the preacher feels it necessary to clarify the verb tense of the quotation. in v8b.

### Read v8b.

*For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him.*

In the beginning, all things were subject to man *in affection*. That is, it was a peaceable kingdom; in the current vernacular: everyone just got along. The earth, the beasts of the field, the fauna—everything was in subjection to man.

*But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.*

But not now. Now there are earthquakes and floods and hurricanes that destroy man and what he has. Now a lion or tiger will happily kill and perhaps eat a human—and without question a lamb.

*...not yet...*

There *will* come a day, however, when the creation's original design will be restored.

**v9**

V9 is where the pastor has been headed all along.

**Read v9.**

Though less poetic, the original structure of the pastor's statement in v9—reflected in the NASB—breaks up the flow of the sentence with “*namely Jesus*” to place greater emphasis on Him.

And with v9 we are immediately sent back to Paul's letter to the Philippians:

**Read Philippians 2:6-11.**

In v3 of this chapter the preacher refers to this as “so great a salvation”. The one paying attention could certainly respond with, *What makes it so great?* The preacher begins to answer that in v9.

*But we do see...*

**see** = *blepo* = a primary verb; to look at (literal or figurative) :- **behold**, beware, lie, look (on, to), perceive, **regard**, see, sight, **take heed**. Compare <G3700> (*optanomai*).

*Him...*

[back to 1:1-4]

- Son of God
- heir of all things
- creator of the world
- possessing the radiance of God's glory and His nature
- upholding, carrying, all things by His word
- better than the angels, with a more excellent name
- now seated at the right hand of the majesty on high

This one,

*...who was made for a little while lower than the angels...*

For a brief period of time was made lower than the angelic beings.

**made...lower** = **to lessen (in rank or influence)** :- **decrease**, make lower.

*namely, Jesus...*

Just to be clear, He is the one I am talking about.

*because of the suffering of death...*

It was precisely *because*—not in spite of, but *because*—Jesus suffered humiliation, torture, and death that He was

*crowned with glory and honor,*

Jesus *earned* that crown. And why did He do this? Out of love,

*so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.*

**taste** = to know fully by experience

So that we would not have to.

⌚ And we close with our final “food for thought”:

*Matthew Henry*: And here you may observe, (1.) What is the moving cause of all the kindness God shows to men in giving Christ for them and to them; and that is the grace of God. For what is man? (2.) What are the fruits of this free grace of God with respect to the gift of Christ for us and to us, as related in this scripture-testimony? [1.] That God was mindful of Christ for us in the covenant of redemption. [2.] That God visited Christ on our account; and it was

concluded between them that in the fulness of time Christ should come into the world, as the great archetypal sacrifice. [3.] That God had made him a little lower than the angels, in his being made man, that he might suffer and humble himself to death. [4.] That God crowned the human nature of Christ with glory and honour, in his being perfectly holy, and having the Spirit without measure, and by an ineffable union with the divine nature in the second person of the Trinity, the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily; that by his sufferings he might make satisfaction, tasting death for every man, sensibly feeling and undergoing the bitter agonies of that shameful, painful, and cursed death of the cross, hereby putting all mankind into a new state of trial. [5.] That, as a reward of his humiliation in suffering death, he was crowned with glory and honour, advanced to the highest dignity in heaven, and having absolute dominion over all things, thus accomplishing that ancient scripture in Christ, which never was so accomplished or fulfilled in any mere man that ever was upon earth.

## SESSION 6. HEBREWS 2:10-13

All this week I kept coming back to the last portion of v9.

...so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

How unlike us God is! He is almighty God, Creator, Sovereign—yet if we make the comparison, we are the selfish ones and He the unselfish.

How do we think of “grace”? What is the first thing that pops into your mind when you hear that word? After the ultimate grace that saves us, we think of God being kind to us, His way of being *nice*—gracious. We are grateful for His daily grace, but, on a certain level we also *expect* it, we depend on it. In that we are being self-centered.

Yet God’s grace is far richer than that, and includes what we might consider a darker side—a side not very “nice” at all. His grace includes having His Son fully experience death—a painful, brutal death—for all of us. All this week I kept reading that last line from v9 from the perspective of the Son: His Father expressed grace by putting Him to death. How can we but stand in awe of such a God as this.

### **CHAMPION!**

As we work through vs10-13 this morning, and the following verses next week, I’d like you to keep one word in mind.

#### **Read v10.**

The word translated—

**author**<sup>NASB,NIV,YLT</sup>, **captain**<sup>KJV</sup>, **founder**<sup>ESV</sup>, **pioneer**<sup>RSV</sup> = *archegos* (ar-khay-gos’) = from <G746> (arche) and <G71> (ago); **a chief leader** :- author, captain, prince.

—is central and important to this passage. For a slightly different color on the same word, turn to Peter’s sermon in Acts 3.

#### **Read Acts 3:14-15.**

William Lane, however, suggests a more appropriate word: “**champion**.” He translates this:

“the champion who secured their salvation.” And John MacArthur’s notes on this—without using the word “champion”—support this.

MacArthur: [*archegos*] always refers to someone who involves others in his endeavor. For example, it is used of a man who starts and heads a family, into which others are born and married. It is used of a man who founds a city, in which others come to live. It was commonly used of a pioneer who blazed a trail for others to follow. The *archegos* never stood at the rear giving orders. He was always out front, leading and setting the example. As the supreme *Archegos*, Christ does not stand at the rear giving orders. He is always before us, as perfect Leader and perfect Example.

The champion always comes out from the group—very often *selected* out of the group—to not just lead but *represent* the group in whatever the cause, be it fighting against a common foe or blazing a new trail into the wilderness. He is invariably the very *best* from the group: strong, able, dynamic, earnest.

See how this fits our passage, which (we will see) presents Christ Jesus as Brother to man, since we have a common Father (vs11-12), but also as the Leader of these brethren (v13). And then in vs14-15 our Champion mounts His faithful steed and charges into battle before us—“...freeing those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” And this same imagery continues on through the end of the chapter and into the next.

So keep this imagery of the “champion” in mind as we proceed through this passage.

### **v10**

One of the things we need to clarify this morning is who is speaking of whom. Especially in the <sup>KJV</sup>, which does not capitalize the pronouns, it can be confusing. The <sup>NIV</sup> accomplishes this by inserting the appropriate name; other translations help by capitalizing, but that is not always enough, and it must be gleaned from context.

*For it was fitting for Him [God the Father]...*

This falls clumsily on human ears. In our vernacular, when someone has behaved in a “fitting” fashion it suggests they are behaving *according to societal norms*, or doing what is expected of them. But here, when applied to Father God, it means He was/is behaving *according to His own character*.

**fitting, became<sup>KJV</sup>** = apparently a primary verb; **to tower up (be conspicuous), i.e. (by implication) to be suitable or proper** (third person singular presumed indicative, often used impersonally, it is fit or right) :- become, comely.

**Read Luke 24:21-27.**

These disciples on the road to Emmaus were expecting the Messiah to behave in a certain way—but their expectations were based on, as it were, societal norms. The Jews had been taught for centuries to expect a certain kind of Savior. But Jesus (in vs25-26) corrects their perspective, explaining that it was “necessary” for the *real* Messiah to do what was fitting according to His own character and the salvation plan of the Godhead—that is, to suffer and die and then enter His glory.

*...to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.*

And it is easy for us to stumble over the idea that the Son of God was “perfected” by any earthly experience. And the definition of the Greek word is little help in this regard.

**perfect** = from <G5046> (teleios); **to complete**, i.e. (literal) **accomplish**, or (figurative) consummate (in character) :- consecrate, **finish, fulfill**, make) perfect.

But I like how Leon Morris explains it.

*Leon Morris:* There is a perfection that results from actually having suffered and that this is different from the perfection of being *ready* to suffer. The bud may be perfect, but there is a difference between its perfection and that of the flower.

**sufferings** = from a presumed derivative of <G3806> (pathos); **something undergone, i.e. hardship or pain**; subject an emotion or influence :- affection, **affliction**, motion, suffering.

*...for whom are all things, and through whom are all things...*

The context makes it clear that the first “Him” refers to God the Father, and that He was the one doing the perfecting. Thus the “author” (et al) of their salvation is Jesus. And we have here in the two subordinate clauses an echo of what the apostle Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans.

**Read Romans 11:36.**

Note how it ends: “To Him be the glory forever.” To *God* be the glory. Now back to Hebrews.

*...in bringing many sons to glory...*

In the third clause we have the remarkable statement that even though, as in Romans, all things are for and through God, He has sacrificed His own Son that *we* would now be brought to glory!

**v11**

Now in v11 we move from God the Father to God the Son.

**Read v11.**

*For both He [God the Son] who sanctifies...*

How does Christ Jesus bring us to glory? (v10) He sanctifies us.

**sanctifies<sup>NASB, KJV</sup>, makes holy<sup>NIV</sup>** = *hagiazō* = from <G40> (hagios); **to make holy**, i.e. (ceremony) **purify or consecrate**; (mentally) to venerate :- hallow, be holy, sanctify.

We are sanctified *through* Jesus' sacrifice.

**Read Hebrews 10:10.**

**Read Hebrews 13:12.**

*...and those who are [being] sanctified...*

Both are true—"are sanctified" (once) and "are being sanctified" (ongoing)—are true, but I like the reminder that my sanctification is something that continues until I *am* brought to glory.

*...are all from (or "of") one Father;*

The Greek text reads, essentially, "are all from one." The NIV adds "family," translating "one" as "same," and the NASB adds "Father." When you combine this with the last word of the verse—"brethren," "brothers"—you get a real sense of the context of family:

**brethren** = *adelphos* = from <G1> (a) (as a connective particle) and **delphus (the womb)**; a brother (literal or figurative) near or remote [much like <H1> ('ab)] :- brother;  
[i.e., from the same womb]

Just think about that for a moment: It is so easy to see the relationship between Jesus and believers as supernatural condescension—which is perfectly true. The Son of God willingly came to this fallen earth and gave Himself as a sacrifice for the redemption of man. In that it is easy to see Him as still set apart, other-worldly, almost alien to our sensibilities.

But God says that in truth we are *kin*. Jesus isn't some high muckety-muck who stepped off His throne for a season, then quickly ran home, glad to be free of the whole unseemly, unpleasant mess. No, He *bonded* with believers. We are family, brothers and sisters.

*...for which reason He [God the Son] is not ashamed to call them brethren...*

And if that were not sufficiently amazing, he follows with the incredible statement that because Jesus and believers have the same Father, are of the same family, *He is not ashamed to be associated with them!*

Do you have a family member you're ashamed of? Do you have a family member you'd rather not be seen with—or don't like to be around?

Jesus doesn't.

Even worse, have you ever been "ashamed" of your relationship with Jesus—reticent to stand for Him, or even speak of Him when around those who reject Him?

Jesus never does that with *you*.

Look deep inside your own heart; page through all the darkness there, the bad choices you've made, the hidden sins known only by God—all the legitimate reasons Jesus could have to not be seen with you. And in spite of all that, He is not embarrassed to be known as your Brother.

The mind reels.

## v12

Then the writer of Hebrews draws from three OT passages that illustrate this personal relationship.

(as if Jesus speaking: )

*"I [God the Son] will proclaim Your [God the Father] name to my brethren,  
In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise."*

What beautiful imagery! **Jesus is our ultimate worship leader.**



[and for those who *do* lead in corporate worship, note the priorities]

I'm reminded of the scene just after the baptism of Jesus:

**Read Matthew 3:16-17.**

Do you see the contrast—between God the Father and God the Son, and between then and now? First, the Father, proclaiming His Son, speaks as “a [disembodied] voice out of the heavens,” but Jesus, proclaiming the Father, speaks “in the midst of the congregation.” It is one of the differences between Father and Son—and why the Son became flesh: He, and only He stands *in the midst* of the congregation, rather than remaining in heaven.

Then too, before Jesus made His sacrifice, atoning for the sins of humanity on the cross, thus opening access to the holy of holies, God was a “voice out of the heavens,” but after the way was provided, we are His brothers, and He stands in our midst.

**Turn to Psalm 22 for a moment.**

This quotation is from Psalm 22—which makes it all the more poignant, for in that Psalm is a most graphic rendering of Christ's passion on the cross. Indeed, the Lord quoted from this Psalm in His agony:

**My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? (v1)**

The Psalm goes on to accurately picture the crucifixion scene:

**For dogs have surrounded me;**

**A band of evildoers has encompassed me;**

**They pierced my hands and my feet.**

**I can count all my bones.**

**They look, they stare at me;**

**They divide my garments among them,**

**And for my clothing they cast lots. (vs16-18)**

Yet in this same Messianic prophecy, the Lord graciously associates with these who He now calls brothers—and this is our verse quoted in Hebrews:

**I will tell of Your name to my brethren;**

**In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. (v22)**

John MacArthur points out that Jesus never referred to His disciples and followers as “brethren” until *after* the cross. Only after He had atoned for their sins could they be family.

**v13**

*“I [God the Son] will put my trust in Him [God the Father].”*

As our supreme worship leader, Jesus wants us to place all our devotion and trust in Father God, and He leads by example.

*“Behold, I [Jesus] and the children whom [Father] God has given me.”*

Believers belong to Christ because they have been given to Him by God the Father.

**Read John 17:6:7.**

Indeed, throughout that prayer Jesus repeatedly states that *everything*—His mission, His words, as well as His disciples—have been given Him by the Father.

This portion of the preacher's message emphasizes the familial intimacy, the bond, believers enjoy with both God the Father and God the Son. And MacArthur ties it together for us:

*MacArthur:* Jesus Christ is not our Brother because of our common nature, since He is divine and we are human. For the same reason He is not our Brother because of common wisdom or power. He is our Brother because of common righteousness and common faith in the Father. Brotherhood with Jesus means that we possess His righteousness and that we walk by faith as He did.

## SESSION 7. HEBREWS 2:14-18

### vs14-15

If we look at vs12-13 as parenthetical, v14 flows nicely out of v11:

For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same...

Therefore, Inasmuch, Since... I favor the KJV: **Forasmuch**. = accordingly

*...since the children share in flesh and blood...*

There are two schools of thought on this: One position is that this means the children (believers) share in the blood and flesh of *Jesus*; the other position is that this means they share this with each other. But even though there are some perfectly fine scholars who hold to the first, it makes no sense to me. Just read the verse with that in mind:

since the children share in flesh and blood,  
He Himself likewise also partook of the same,

If we are already sharing blood and flesh with Jesus, why does He have to partake of the same? It doesn't track. The second position makes much more sense—especially when you consider the meanings of the two operative words, *koinoneo* and *metecho*.

**share**<sup>NASB</sup>, **have**<sup>NIV</sup>, **partake**<sup>\*KJV</sup> = *koinoneo* = from <G2844> (*koinonos*); **to share with others** (object or subject) :- communicate, distribute, be partaker; **to have a share of**.  
[e.g., koine Greek]

Flesh and blood (lit., "blood and flesh") is what *human beings* have in common. Humans share this characteristic with each other—it is our common nature—but we do *not* share this characteristic with the Godhead. In John 4 Jesus told the woman at the well,

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24)

The Godhead is spirit—that is its "kind"—while humans are flesh and blood kind. But in eternity past the Godhead resolved that one of them—the Son—would need to become the one and final sacrifice for the redemption of man. For that to be accomplished, the Son would have to come down and "partake" of this flesh.

**partook**<sup>NASB</sup>, **shared**<sup>NKJV, NIV</sup>, **took part**<sup>KJV</sup> = *metecho* = from <G3326> (*meta*) and <G2192> (*echo*); to share or **participate**; by implication **belong to**, eat (or drink) :- be partaker, pertain, take part, use.  
["taking hold of something that is not naturally one's own kind" (MacArthur)]

It is important to note the word translated "likewise."

**likewise**, **too**<sup>NIV</sup> = adverb from the same as <G3897> (*paraplesion*); **in a manner near by**, i.e. (figurative) **similarly** :- likewise.

Jesus, in His "partaking" did not become *identical* to man. I like the way John MacArthur summarizes this:

He added to Himself our nature in order that He might die in our place, and that we might take hold of the divine nature that did not belong to us.

**Sidebar:** Any time we catch ourselves becoming irritated by redundancy in Scripture, thinking, "Hey, I get it already!" we need to stop and ask *why* the redundancy. It is always for a reason. In v14 the NASB says it three times, but the KJV wins by saying it four:

...he also himself likewise...

This has the effect of emphasizing the Son's gracious condescension. *Yes, He really did it!*

But *why* did He do this?

*...that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,*

Every once in a while—quite often, actually—we come across statements like this that remind us of what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians.

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:18.**

To “those who are perishing” this statement is utter nonsense. *Let me get this straight: Jesus died to destroy the one who held the power of death? Right.*

Think of it this way: Before the cross, ever since the fall in the Garden, Satan had had an exclusive franchise on death; death was his bailiwick. But *after* the cross, Christ’s death—with the resurrection, of course—removed that exclusive franchise. Satan was not immediately destroyed; he is still around, and he exerts considerable influence in this fallen world—even sometimes in the life of believers. He is not yet dead—but his death warrant has been signed, and his eventual demise is written in stone.

For this reason I prefer the NASB for this verse. Satan was not destroyed at the cross; he was just rendered impotent regarding death. I think we all can attest to the fact that he is still around.

**render powerless**<sup>NASB</sup>, **destroy**<sup>KJV, NIV</sup> = *katargeo* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G691> (argeo); **to be (render) entirely idle (useless)**, literal or figurative :- **abolish**, cease, cumber, deliver, destroy, do away, become (make) of no (none, without) effect, fail, loose, bring (come) to nought, put away (down), vanish away, make void; **to render inoperative**.

**power** = *kratos* = perhaps a primary word; **vigor** [“great”] (literal or figurative) :- **dominion**, might [-ily], power, strength.

But we come back to the question: *Why* did Jesus have to die, and how does His death accomplish this?

**Read John 14:18-19.**

Jesus had to not just die, but He had to come out the other side. He conquered death by surviving it! Before the cross, death was a dark tunnel that ended in black oblivion. The one who died never saw light again. But Jesus went into the tunnel, passed “through” its full length—and came out into the full light of life! And because He did it, we can do it. He proved that it can be done—through Him.

And v15 declares two things:

1. The *power* of death that Satan held included the *fear* of it. Man not only had to die, but he had to live in *fear* of dying. Thus it was a form of slavery, bondage.
2. Jesus freed man of that fear. The tunnel need no longer be feared, because it was no longer necessary for it to end in black oblivion. Now it could end in the light of life.

**free**<sup>NASB, NIV</sup>, **release**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **deliver**<sup>KJV, YLT</sup> = from <G575> (apo) and <G236> (allasso); **to change away, i.e. release**, (reflexive) remove :- deliver, depart.

**subject to, held**<sup>NIV</sup> = from <G1758> (enecho); **liable to (a condition, penalty or imputation)** :- in danger of, guilty of, subject to.

Jesus had paved the way. Death had lost its sting.

Let’s read the original prophecy that is quoted in 1 Corinthians 15.

**Read Hosea 13:14.**

## CHAMPION

Before we leave vs14-15 I want to revisit the word introduced last week. Last week I mentioned that William Lane suggests the word “champion” in v10, instead of author, or captain or leader. He translates the phrase in v10, “the champion who secured their salvation.”

Here in vs14-15 is where this really comes out. These two verses are, as it were, brimming with virility and testosterone. As I read them, keep in your mind the image of the strong champion, coming out onto the battlefield to vanquish the enemy of his people.

**Read vs14-15.**

## v16

And for one last time the preacher makes the argument concerning angels.

**Read v16.**

The <sup>KJV</sup> is a little confusing here. In only a remote manner of speaking it sort of, kind of, fits in with the context of v14, but the preferred interpretation is found in the other translations.

*...He does not give help to angels... He gives help to the [seed] of Abraham.*

**give help**<sup>NASB</sup>, **give aid**<sup>NIV</sup>, **helps**<sup>NIV</sup>, **took on...the nature of**<sup>KJV</sup> = middle from <G1909> (epi) and <G2983> (lambano); **to seize (for help, injury, attainment or any other purpose;** literal or figurative) :- catch, lay hold (up-) on, **take** (by, **hold of**, on).

The roundabout way to understand the <sup>KJV</sup> is in contrast to v14. There it states that Jesus “helped” humans (blood and flesh) by taking on Himself their “nature” so as to die for them. The <sup>KJV</sup> perspective is that Jesus did not need to help angels by taking on their nature, since they are not flesh and blood.

But this is really injecting too much commentary into the text—and, indeed, it is italicized in the <sup>KJV</sup>. The text just means Jesus does not take hold of angels for salvation-help like He does the descendants or “seed” of Abraham—i.e., believers.

**descendant(s), seed** = *sperma* = from <G4687> (speiro); **something sown, i.e. seed (including the male “sperm”);** by implication offspring; specially a remnant (figurative as if kept over for planting) :- issue, seed.

## v17

Only in our book of Hebrews is Jesus referred to as “high priest.” As the sermon proceeds he will further develop this, but here in v17 this unique role of Jesus is introduced.

**Read v17.**

William Lane brings out two points of commonality between these two roles of Christ Jesus: “champion” and “high priest.”

- (1) **The element of representation:** the champion represents the people in battle; the high priest represents the people before God.
- (2) **The element of solidarity:** the champion emerges out of the people; he can represent them only because he is one of them. Similarly, the high priest is chosen from among the people; he can represent them effectively only because he enjoys solidarity with the people.

Let’s examine the words:

**made like** = from <G3664> (homoios); **to assimilate**, i.e. compare; passive **to become similar** :- be (make) like, (in the) liken (-ess), resemble. [i.e., not identical]

**merciful** = *eleemon* = from <G1653> (eleeo); **compassionate** (actively) :- merciful.

**faithful** = *pistos* = from <G3982> (peitho); object **trustworthy**; subject trustful :- believe (-ing, -r), faithful (-ly), sure, true.

**pertaining to** = *pros* = a strengthened form of <G4253> (pro); a preposition of direction; forward to, i.e. **toward** (with the genitive the side of, i.e. pertaining to; with the dative **by the side of, i.e. near to**; usually with the accusative the place, time, occasion, or respect, which is the destination of the relation, i.e. whither or for which it is predicated)

:- about, **according to**, against, among, at, because of, before, between, ([where-]) by, for, × at thy house, in, for intent, nigh unto, of, which pertain to, that, to (the end that), + together, to ([you]) -ward, unto, with (-in). In comparative it denotes essentially the same applications, namely, motion towards, accession to, or nearness at.

But before we press on, we need to go back to the top of this verse and highlight three seemingly insignificant but important words:

He **had to** = *opheilo* (of-ay'-low) = or (in certain tenses) its prolonged form *opheileo*, of-i-leh'-o; probably from the base of <G3786> (*ophelos*) (through the idea of accruing); **to owe** (pecuniarily); figurative **to be under obligation** (ought, must, should); morally to fail in duty :- behove, be bound, (be) debt (-or), (be) due (-ty), be guilty (indebted), (must) need (-s), ought, owe, should. See also <G3785> (*ophelon*).  
[“can be used of financial debts” (Morris)]

And once again we're made uncomfortable by what seems an inappropriate association with eternal God. Our minds rebel against this: *God doesn't have to do anything! Who's going to make Him?* But our previous instance of seemingly inappropriate association—at the beginning of v10: “For it was fitting for Him...” —actually informs this one.

For one reason Jesus “had to be made like His brethren in all things” was that **it was fitting for Him**—His doing this was true to His character, and in all things Jesus, like the Father, could and can only be true to Himself.

Another reason (and there may be many) is that **He was compelled to out of moral obligation**—an obligation born out of His deep love for the people of His creation.

So Jesus was obligated to do what?

*...to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

And “propitiation” is really the best word here. There others, while not wholly inaccurate, are just too thin, and only weakly stress what is key.

**make propitiation**<sup>NASB,NKJV,ESV</sup>, **reconciliation**<sup>KJV</sup>, **atonement**<sup>NIV</sup> = *hilaskomai* = middle from the same as <G2436> (*hileos*); **to conciliate**, i.e. (transitive) to atone for (sin), or (intransitive) be propitious :- be merciful, make reconciliation for.

*Morris*: [on NIV translation choice of “atonement”] [This] is a curious rendering. The word means “to propitiate,” not “to make atonement,” and relates to **putting away the divine wrath**.

*Wayne Grudem*: [This word] means **a sacrifice that bears God's wrath to the end and in so doing changes God's wrath toward us into favor**. As Jesus bore the guilt of our sins alone, God the Father...poured out on Jesus the fury of His wrath: Jesus became the object of the intense hatred of sin and vengeance against sin which God had patiently stored up since the beginning of the world.

And here we are reminded just how unique is our High Priest. Under the OT law, the priest would slay the sacrificial animal for the sin offering and pour its blood on the altar. God's holy wrath against sin would be poured out upon that blood. Then the remains of the animal for the sin offering would not be eaten by the priests, but burned outside the camp.

But Jesus, our High Priest, is both the priest *and* the sacrifice! Unique in creation, the two are combined into one; Jesus does not just represent the people before God, but He offers His own blood as the ultimate, final propitiation for sin. God's wrath poured down upon Jesus at the cross, the last sacrifice that would be necessary.

## v18

Lost in the imagery of Christ's unfathomable suffering on the cross, v18 seems anticlimactic—even out of place. To help tie it in, flip over to v15 in chapter 4. Hold your finger there. Now let's read v2:18, followed by v4:15.

### Read Hebrews 2:18, 4:15.

**tempted** = *peirazo* = from <G3984> (*peira*); **to test** (object), i.e. endeavor, scrutinize, **entice**, discipline :- assay, examine, go about, **prove**, tempt (-er), try.

**suffered** = *pascho* = including the forms (*patho*, *path'-o*) and (*penthos*, *pen'-tho*), used only in certain tenses for it; apparently a primary verb; **to experience a sensation or impression (usually painful)** :- feel, **passion**, suffer, vex; **endure**.

I am intrigued by the way the different versions translate this verse. The predominant perspective—found in all but the NASB—we can read from the NIV:

**Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**

Put another way, this means **Jesus suffered by being tempted**. Just as we suffer with temptation (both in the resisting and in the pain that follows acquiescence) Jesus suffered through the torment of temptation and testing. And, as MacArthur points out, His suffering was greater than ours, because His temptation reached an intensity we rarely experience before giving in.

The NASB seems to reverse this:

**For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.**

Put another way, this means **in His suffering, Jesus was tempted**. The only commentator I could find who even marginally referenced this perspective was William Lane.

The incarnation exposed the Son of God to the conflicts and tensions that characterize human life. These tensions were climaxed with the suffering of death on the cross in a final act of obedience to the will of God. It was at this point that His faithfulness to God was put to the ultimate test, and He proved to be the faithful High Priest. Having been tested in this specific sense, He is able to help those who are currently being exposed to the ordeal of testing.

Rather than weakening, I believe these seemingly opposing translations actually *strengthen* the point. They illustrate that our Lord had it coming at Him from both directions: He suffered by being tempted, and He was tempted in His suffering. And the result is that there is nothing—*nothing*—you can experience in either, with which He cannot empathize and compassionately console.

## SESSION 8. HEBREWS 3:1-6

Linda and I like to watch movies, and sometimes after one concludes our mutual response is, “Boy, we’ll sure have to watch that a few more times to get it all.” One viewing is not enough to get everything that it is in some films.

Today when we wish to revisit something the pastor said in his sermon we can listen to a recording. The congregation that sat with rapt attention under the reading of this sermon could not do that, but they had the benefit of it being already in written form. So they could respond, “Read it again! Read it again!” And I imagine they did just that.

As densely packed as *Paul’s* epistles can be, I am becoming convinced that the writer and preacher of this book we call “Hebrews” packs even more into every verse. It truly is a remarkable sermon. And this is in evidence in our passage this morning.

### Read Hebrews 3:1-6.

v1

*Therefore,...*

In the previous chapter, the preacher has made his case for the gracious condescension of Christ Jesus:

- v9: He was made for a little while lower than the angels
- v9: He tasted death for everyone
- v10: He was perfected through sufferings
- v11: He calls believers “brethren”
- v14: He partook of flesh and blood so that He might die and thus conquer death
- v15: and throw off our chains of bondage
- v16: He gives help to Abraham’s seed (by faith)
- v17-18: by suffering and being tempted He qualified as our High Priest, to make propitiation for our sins, and come to our aid.

Based on all this, Jesus is “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.” I’ll get back to this in a moment, but right now I want to return to the beginning of this verse.

*holy brethren,*

What strikes me right off is that we—we who are partakers of a heavenly calling—are now called “holy brethren.” We dare not pass lightly over this. The last two chapters, and especially chapter two, have itemized all that Christ Jesus suffered on our behalf. He did it—He did it *all*. Yet based on everything *He* did, we are now declared to be *hagios adelphos* (ahd-el-fahs’).

**holy** = *hagios* = from *hagos* (an awful thing) [compare <G53> (*hagnos*), <H2282> (*chag*)]; sacred (physical **pure**, moral **blameless** or religious, ceremony **consecrated**) :- (most) holy (one, thing), **saint**.

**brethren** = *adelphos* = from <G1> (*a*) (as a connective particle) and **delphus (the womb)**; a brother (literal or figurative) near or remote [much like <H1> (*‘ab*)] :- brother;  
[i.e., from the same womb]

Let that sink in for a moment. What better illustration do we have than this, that it is all of grace. *He* did all the suffering—and we get all the benefits.

*...partakers of a heavenly calling,*

In addition, because of everything the Son of God did we are also “partakers of a heavenly calling.” Remember last week we learned that the root of this word translated here “partakers” refers to participation in something that *is not naturally one’s own kind*. As made, in our basic nature, we are not remotely heavenly, but through Christ, and because of His suffering, we are invited to share in heavenly things—not just the promise of eternity, but “partakers” of heaven *right now*. And I’m reminded of the MacArthur quote from last week:



He added to Himself our nature in order that He might die in our place, and that we might take hold of the divine nature that did not belong to us.

...consider Jesus,

**consider** = *katanoeo* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G3539> (noieo); **to observe fully** :- behold, consider, discover, perceive; "careful examination with a view to discerning and coming to some conclusion." (Richards)

...the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;

We don't often think of Jesus as an apostle, but in one sense—and certainly in the context of Hebrews—it is fair to apply that term to Him.

**apostle** = *apostolos* = from <G649> (apostello); a delegate; specially an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ ["apostle"] (with miraculous powers) :- apostle, **messenger, he that is sent.**

At its root, apostle means a messenger, someone sent out. And this Christ surely was. The Father handed the Son a message to deliver to man: *I love you, and I want you to find your salvation and redemption in My Son.* This is the Good News Jesus delivered as the Apostle of God the Father. Then, as a result of everything He experienced and suffered, Jesus became the ultimate High Priest for all who would believe.

The word "confession" used here in the NASB, KJVS, and ESV, is not the idea of confessing to a human priest, but rather in the sense of confessing or agreeing with a statement of faith.

NIV: ...Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

YLT: ...the apostle and chief priest of our profession, Christ Jesus,

*The Message*: ...Jesus. He's the centerpiece of everything we believe,

In other words, we do not confess to Him, but confess *Him*.

## v2

We already know from our studies that the writer of Hebrews was a devoted student of the printed Scriptures of his time—the Septuagint version of the OT. He keeps retrieving portions of the OT to buttress his arguments. But now, in vs2-6, he does not so much *quote* an earlier passage, but offers an *exposition* of it. That passage is found in Numbers, where the Lord God is angrily addressing Aaron and Miriam.

**Read Numbers 12:5-8.**

The verse that our preacher keys off of is v7:

**"Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household;**

Now back to Hebrews.

**Read v2.**

And once again let's be clear on our pronouns:

He [Jesus] was faithful to Him [Father God] who appointed Him [Jesus], as Moses also was in all His [Father God's] house.

The focus of his sermon so far has been the superiority of Christ Jesus over angels. Now he moves from that to what might have been an even more challenging comparison. The preacher wisely mentions here for the first time the historical character that would represent to his Jewish congregation the height of human faithfulness: their sainted Moses.

**Sidebar:** This verse begins by stated that Jesus was "faithful"—a translation of the most common Greek word for this: *pistos*—and includes the line, "as Moses also was." But we must not make the common mistake of imagining that Christ's faithfulness has any relation to ours—or even to that of Moses. We generally measure

faithfulness in human terms, which means it can be high or low, *relatively* steady, but with moments of unsteadiness. And we certainly see this in the life of Moses. But as with all attributes of the Godhead, *Christ's* faithfulness was pure, rock solid, *never* wavering.

The preacher does an artful job of painting a word-picture of the family of God as a house, or household.

**house** = *oikos* = of uncertain affinity; **a dwelling** (more or less extensive, literal or figurative); **by implication a family** (more or less related, literal or figurative) :- home, **house (-hold)**, temple.

In secular Greek and as used in the Septuagint, this word originally was used for both the physical dwelling place (of, for example, a family unit or a god's temple) and the inhabitants of that house. Over time it came to be used for the smaller family unit, a clan, and even the larger tribal unit, such as the "house of Judah." In the NT it invariably refers to a group of people.

In the passage at hand the preacher mixes his metaphors, as it were, alternating between the picture of a physical house and the "house" standing for the family dwelling within.

In vs2-6 the writer of Hebrews makes a number of comparisons between Moses and Jesus, summarized below.

Verse	Moses	Christ Jesus (God)
<b>2</b>	faithful	faithful
<b>3</b>	worthy of glory	worthy of <i>more</i> glory
<b>3</b>	worthy of honor	worthy of <i>more</i> honor
<b>4</b>	<b>steward</b> of the house (implied)	<b>builder</b> of the house
<b>5-6</b>	faithful as a <b>servant</b> in the house	faithful as a <b>Son</b> over the house

**v3**

**Read v3.**

It is not difficult for us—Gentiles in the twenty-first century—to accept the teaching that Jesus is superior to Moses. Of *course* He is. But this was more of a challenge for the first century Jew. Moses was their guy; you didn't get any better than that. So they had to chew on this for a while.

As great and faithful as Moses was, he was still *in* the house—he was in the household of God: Israel, the chosen people. He was the greatest among them, but he was still *of* them. In our previous study the preacher developed the doctrine of the Son of God becoming like His brethren humans.

v2:14a - Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same...

v2:17a - Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things...

But Jesus was not *of* them. In His humanity He retained His deity. He was the Creator—not the created.

**Read Colossians 1:16-17.**

And the preacher echoed this at the very beginning of his sermon:

**Read Hebrews 1:1-2.**

So when the writer says "the builder of the house has more honor than the house," Moses is considered a part of the house. But Jesus was the *builder* of the house, and so due a greater honor.

You may be wondering, *Why bother with all this comparison of Jesus to Moses?* William Lane brings up a good point that answers at least part of this question.

As the sermon unfolds the preacher will provide an extended comparison between the provisions for access to God in the Mosaic era and in Christian worship. *There is a studied parallel between Moses as the mediator of the old form of worship and Jesus as the Mediator of the new.* Although Jesus had been shown superior to the angels, it was still necessary to demonstrate that He was superior to Moses, who enjoyed both a unique authority among the prophets and an exalted status.

So it is important for the preacher to establish in the minds of his congregation that the two parties are not equal. For example, in two days the citizens of this country will be electing a president for the next four years. Those who truly are independent and undecided could logically compare one candidate's positions and plans against the other's. Other than those differences, they are just two men.

But what if one of them was the Son of God? Suddenly the balance would swing dramatically. It is no longer a contest between equals. Now, no matter what arguments were put forth by the other candidate, the voter could always come back with, "Yeah, but the other guy is *God!*"

So for his Jewish congregation, it is imperative that the preacher establish that Jesus is not just a different equal to Moses, but far superior.

**v4**

And v4 reinforces this thought—

**Read v4.**

**v5-6**

—but vs5&6 really nail it.

**Read v5.**

It is as if the preacher feels the need to reassure his audience that he is not denigrating Moses by the comparison to Christ. Moses *was* faithful. He was a great guy who served in a vital role. Here he refers to Moses as a "servant," which may have sounded to Jewish ears like hearing that Jesus was made "lower than the angels" sounds to the ears of an evangelical Christian. But to emphasize his importance, the preacher chooses the Greek word *therapon* (ther-ahp'-own)—which is used nowhere else in the NT. *Therapon* does not refer to the typical, lowly, house-slave (e.g., *doulos*), but to an *honored* servant, a position of dignity, even freedom.

*Vincent:* An ethical character attaches to it: service of an affectionate, hearty character, performed with care and fidelity. Hence the relation of the *therapon* is of a nobler and freer character than that of the *doulos*, or bondservant. The verb is used of a physician's tendance of the sick.

The preacher goes on to say that

*Moses was faithful... for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later*

This too may have left the congregation scratching their collective noggins. The preacher understood this, and here just introduces the concept that will be further developed later in his sermon. Moses, without knowing it—and certainly unknown to the children of Israel—in his words and deeds was testifying, *foreshadowing* Christ and the gospel message. Nothing is wasted in Scripture, and the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt, and their long sojourn in the wilderness, foreshadows much of what the Son of God came to accomplish for man.

Jesus Himself spoke of this in His message to the religious leaders.

**Read John 5:45-47.**

Nevertheless, as great as he was, Moses was still a servant, while Christ was the Father's *Son*.

### Read v6a.

Note that the “His” in “His house” in vs5-6 refers to God the Father, as we see explicitly interpreted in the NIV.

The comparison requires little exposition. Pick a house, any house. Over here you have a servant of the house—an honored servant, but still a servant. He draws a paycheck; he does what he is told. Over here you have the son of the lord of the manor, second only to his father. He doesn’t draw a paycheck, because he doesn’t need to, and he tells others what to do. And in time he will inherit the entirety of his father’s estate—at which time the servants will belong to him.

### Read v6b.

The last portion of this verse reminds me of a series our two pastors preached a while back. This statement (and others like it) is often construed to mean that you remain in the house—i.e., remain saved—if and only if you “hold fast...until the end.” But it means just the opposite: If you hold fast to the end, this proves that you have been saved all along.” That is, those who are truly in God’s house *will* hold fast to the end.

*MacArthur*: Continuance is the proof of reality.

And for the congregation listening to this sermon the first time this was not just theoretical. They were living this every day: their lives required confidence and courage and holding firm *every day*.

Let’s close with what William Lane has to say about this passage.

The preacher then brings his exposition of the Scriptures to bear directly on the situation of his friends: “We are God’s household, supposing that we continue to hold firmly to our confidence and the hope of which we boast.” His point is clear: Jesus is faithful to God. We demonstrate that we are the people whom He has appointed if we also prove to be faithful. This calls for courage in a hostile world. It demands that we hold firmly to our hope of being the people whom Jesus does not blush to call His brothers and sisters (2:11). The preacher says, in short, Jesus was faithful. He asks, *Will you be faithful?*

## SESSION 9. HEBREWS 3:7-19 (PART 1)

### **Read 3:7.**

The Holy Spirit wrote Scripture. He speaks the words of God to generations upon generations of those who call upon Him. And even *within* Scripture the Spirit links together one passage to another—just as He links together and informs person to person in a never-ending tapestry for God’s purpose.

For example,

- Way back in the early '80s, seemingly out of the blue, for no specific reason, I wrote a monologue for the apostle Peter, based on his first epistle;
- I handed it to the pastor to read, asking if he might be remotely interested in having it performed.
- His answer: Yes—and now write eleven more and I will preach a three-month series on the disciples, accompanied each week by one of your disciple sketches.
- So my offer of one monologue was inspirational in the pastor’s idea for a 12-week series of sermons.
- And his request for those sketches was instrumental in the forming of His Company, a touring drama group that not only performed through the Southern California area in the eighties, but the plays and musicals of which have been and are still being performed around the world. [\[to-date our scripts have been downloaded more than a quarter-million times\]](#)

And as we will see in our study this morning, the Holy Spirit was doing the same thing during the ancient writing of Holy Scripture. One believer informs another; one passage of Scripture informs another.

Our study of this important passage of Hebrews 3:7-19 will be broken into two sessions. This morning we will lay the groundwork for this passage, focusing on the fascinating story that lies behind these verses quoted from Psalm 95 (3:7-11). Then next week we will dig into the preacher’s exposition of this text (3:12-19).

So permit me to paint a picture of our preacher’s thought process in the writing of this passage. Like all docudramas, the picture contains the skeletal structure of facts tied together by the muscles and connective tissue of informed imagination.

Like most men of God, the pastor who penned the written sermon we call the book of Hebrews began his day by reading the written word of God. And it is easy to imagine that around the time he was writing what we have as chapter three of his sermon, he had recently read, from his Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, the early chapters of Numbers.

As he began writing v1 of chapter three—

**Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession...**  
—his thoughts drifted back to his recent reading of Numbers 12, where the Lord Himself declared that His “servant Moses” is “faithful in all My household.” And the preacher says to himself, *Hey, that’s a good angle—a good point of comparison between Moses and Christ Jesus!*

So he uses that imagery of Numbers 12 in our vs2-6, demonstrating that while Moses was indeed faithful as a servant *in* the house, Christ was (is) faithful as a Son *over* the house.

Then as he draws to a close his remarks in v6, he concludes with

**...whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.**  
And he realizes that the Spirit has handed him a segue into something very important.

And again his thoughts return to his reading in Numbers—specifically chapters 13 and 14, which tell the story of how Jehovah was angered by Israel’s lack of faith in Him to see them safely into Canaan. He realizes he can’t quote that whole episode in his sermon, but he remembers that the main lesson from it is included in the traditional Jewish Call to Worship: Psalm 95.

This psalm did not just fill the bill as far as the point the pastor wanted to make to his congregation, but it also served well because it would have been familiar to them. Immediately upon hearing these words the people listening to his sermon would have nodded their heads in recognition of the call to worship used every Sabbath evening when the synagogue community gathered. The psalm served both as a joyful invitation to bow down in praise before the Lord, but also as a sobering reminder to pay due heed to what He has to say in return.

First the call to worship and praise:

**Read Psalm 95:1-7a.**

Then the admonition:

**Read Psalm 95:7b-11.**

Here in the latter part of the psalm is the text the preacher needs for his sermon. Again, as a faithful expositor of God's truth, it is not enough that he just drop the text in and move on. He needs to dig deeper into the historical inspiration for the psalm. Being a student of Scripture, he knows that the first portion of what he wants to quote is not from Numbers, but from the *Exodus* account of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness. The two proper names—Meribah and Massah—stand out like beacons directing him back to the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus. And there he refreshes his memory of the episode.

**Read Psalm 95: 7b-9.**

**Read Exodus 17:1-7.**

Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?"

**quarrel** = *rib* (reeb) = or ruwb, roob; a primitive root; properly **to toss, i.e. grapple; mostly figurative to wrangle, i.e. hold a controversy;** (by implication) to defend :- adversary, chide, complain, contend, debate, × ever, × lay wait, plead, rebuke, strive, × thoroughly.

**test** = *nasa* (naw-saw') = a primitive root; **to test;** by implication to attempt :- adventure, assay, prove, tempt, try.

Instead of submitting to the Lord's tests of their faith, Israel began to test the Lord, requiring Him to perform on demand.

So Moses named the place after what happened there.

**Massah** = rebellion, provocation, "bitter uprising"

**Meribah** = trial, temptation, quarrel, strife, contention, "wilderness test"

The pastor now returns to Psalm 95, where he continues reading where he left off.

**Read Psalm 95:10-11.**

These two verses—especially the last—take the preacher back to the book of Numbers, where he has been reading.

**Read Numbers 13:1-2.**

Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying,

"Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them."

We are familiar with the story. Moses sent these twelve men as a scouting party into the land of Canaan. Numbered among them were Caleb and Hoshea [ho-shay'-ah] (whom Moses called Joshua (v16)). And upon returning, their report was one of those good news/bad news kind of things.

**Read 13:27-31.**

Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified *and* very large; and moreover, we saw

the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan.”

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.”

Back nearer the beginning of their journey, Israel had become so used to the Lord’s miracles that they took them for granted, demanding that He perform for them like a trained monkey. They even went so far, as we saw in Exodus 17, as to put *Him* to the test. (“Is the Lord among us, or not?”) And now, later, it is almost as if they have *forgotten* what the Lord can do. The spies admit to the land being exactly what they have been looking for, but only Caleb and Joshua have faith that the Lord will give them victory over all the “-ites” already there.

And now to Chapter 14.

**Read 14:2-4.**

All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.”

Remember what got the preacher back into Numbers? At the end of the previous passage he had written for his sermon,

...Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Whatever trust Israel had had in the Lord was now in shambles. They had lost their confidence in Jehovah. As a result, they had lost their grip on hope. They were dejected, depressed, angry. They had lost their way, their direction. To put it in the vernacular of Hebrews 3:12, theirs was an “evil, unbelieving heart that [had fallen] away from the living God.”

Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb pleaded with them to regain their faith. They tried to get them to see that if the Lord was pleased with them—pleased with their faith—He would *give* them the land. *Those giants you are so worried about—they will become our prey!* Israel’s response?

**Read 14:10.**

But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

Uh-oh. God’s plan was to wipe out the lot of them and build a brand *new* nation through Moses. But Moses entreated the Lord not to do this, based on the negative press it would receive in Egypt. Then he plucks up his courage and quotes the Lord’s very words back to him in his effort to change His mind.

**Read 14:17-19.**

“But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared,  
‘The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.’ Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

It worked. And the Lord put into effect exactly what He had earlier prescribed in Exodus 34.

**Read 14:20-23.**

So the Lord said, “I have pardoned *them* according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.”



And three times the Lord uses the colorful word “corpses,” or “carcasses” to describe what will happen to the people. Everyone in that current generation would fall and be buried in the desert. Only their children would cross over into Canaan. But the Lord decided not to wait for simple attrition to get rid of the ten spies who brought back the bad counsel. Those He killed with a plague on the spot.

Then Moses passed along to the people of Israel what the Lord had said to him. But at least some of them did not quite get the import of the message.

### **Read 14:39-40.**

When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly.

In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, “Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised.”

Right. Well, *there’s* a good plan. *You’re right, Lord: We sinned, and we feel really bad about that. So let’s do this thing. We’ll square it with You by doing what you told us to do in the first place. How’s that for faith, God?*

### **Read 14:44-45.**

But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses left the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah.

Well, *duh!*

### **Back to Hebrews 3.**

### **Read Hebrews 3:10-11.**

*They always go astray in their heart...*

**go astray, err**<sup>KJV</sup> = from <G4106> (plane); to (properly cause to) **roam** (from safety, truth, or virtue) :- go astray, deceive, err, seduce, **wander**, be out of the way.

### **Hebrews 5:2**

**KJV:** For every high priest... can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.

**NASB:** For every high priest... can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided,

As we discussed in an earlier session, the writer of Hebrews is addressing a congregation that includes those with different levels of faith—and even those with an *absence* of faith—and this is directed at those who have heard all the explanations, they’ve heard Scripture, and all the specifics of doctrine—but have not yet placed their faith, their trust in Christ Jesus. They are not blatantly antagonistic to the Lord, rejecting Him outright, but they are still considering the arguments for unbelief.

They are “always going astray in their heart” and “do not know [understand] the ways of the Lord.”

And God in His wrath—“angry” here does not just mean a little piqued; He was furious, He *loathed* the unbelieving Israelites—God says, *You will not enter my rest*. And history shows that in their persistent disobedience of Him—in their repeated going astray and failure to understand—Israel never enjoyed that rest. Even those who *did* cross over into Canaan disobeyed by not expunging the land of God’s enemies, and so never had that promised rest.

Let’s close by making just one application for those of us who *do* believe. We dare not read a passage like this and sit back in smug contentment, saying, “Well this doesn’t apply to me.”



No, even though we do not reject Christ Jesus, we still “go astray” in our heart from time to time. And as a result, we miss out on (if even for just a short while) His “rest”. We wander away from His truth, we roam here and there, sampling arguments against Him. Oh, we may ultimately reject those arguments and return to His truth—but what were we doing there in the first place?

Let us resolve to *never* “be out of the way.”

## **SESSION 10. HEBREWS 3:7-19 (PART 2)**

I recently listened again to the very first sermon Pastor Jeremy preached here at MCC. It was so soon after his arrival that he and Serena were probably not yet unpacked from their journey here. Oddly enough, his first sermon was on our text this morning: Hebrews 3:12-14. Pastor Jeremy began that first message with an illustration that I would like to steal this morning to support what the pastor to the Hebrews preached to his congregation.

He likens the “rumble strips” he and Serena noticed on the edge of the roads to “warning passages” like the one before us this morning.

- rumble strips
  - For the driver in the middle of the road, they serve as a warning for where the edge is; if awake and alert, they do not frighten or concern.
  - For the driver who may be sleepy or distracted, not paying attention, and perhaps weaving over the road, those rumble strips may save his life.
- warning passages
  - For those walking faithfully in the Christian life, these are a reminder for where the boundary is. If my life starts looking like what is described here, then I need to be concerned, and get back on track.
  - For others—those who may think they are Christians, those who may have stopped with just an intellectual assent with the things of Christ—these warning passages may end up saving their very life.

Most of us have grown up with a phrase ringing in our ears: “Once saved, always saved.” That is true—and this text does not propose anything contrary to that. But, as we will see in a few moments, that aphorism is, nonetheless, simplistic. It is true that if you are truly saved you cannot lose that salvation. We find perhaps the strongest evidence for this in Jesus’ words in John 10.

### **Read John 10:27-30.**

Jesus declares: “they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand,” and “no one is able to snatch them out of the *Father’s* hand.” But note v27:

**“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”**

Those who are His *follow* Him. More on this later.

Just as with modern pastors, the pastor of the Hebrews (if he had been there in person) would have looked out over his congregation and assumed (or hoped) that he was gazing upon, predominantly, believers. Thus he would refer to them as “holy brethren,” as in v1. But this does not mean that literally everyone there was a true Christian. As we have discussed before, that congregation was made up of individuals of different levels of faith.

Let’s begin by reading our text from last week, the preacher’s quotation from Psalm 95:

### **Read Hebrews 3:7-11.**

The preacher is going to be sprinkling Psalm 95 into his message for quite some time; here he has just laid the foundation.

## **v12**

And now he turns the corner from ancient illustration to “modern” application. In vs12-14 we hear his pastor’s heart for the flock of God. He is essentially saying, *This is what happened to your forebears. Oh, please don’t let it happen to you! Don’t follow their path!*

### **Read vs12-14.**

What is unbelief? What is “hardness of heart”? What does “falling away” mean? And how do we apply these uncomfortable terms to us?

*Take care, brethren,*

(MacArthur points out that this is not a reference to their being in the community of Christ, but to their racial identity as brother Jews—which is how it is used throughout the book of Acts.)

**Take care**<sup>NASB</sup>, **Beware**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **Take heed**<sup>KJV</sup>, **See to it**<sup>NIV</sup> = *blepo* = a primary verb; **to look at** (literal or figurative) :- behold, **beware**, lie, look (on, to), perceive, regard, see, sight, take heed. Compare <G3700> (*optanomai*).  
[Be on the guard, keep your **eyes open** to danger]

About what?

*...that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart*

When I was a little boy, a fireman visited our grade school and gave a presentation on fire safety. He told the story about a boy who saved his family by smelling smoke in the middle of the night. That night when I went to bed I placed the red plastic fire helmet the fireman had handed out to everyone at the foot of my bed. And I didn't sleep a wink that night. I spent the whole night sniffing the air for smoke.

That is not what the writer of Hebrews is telling us to do. We are not to lie awake fretting over the condition of our salvation. We are not to lose sleep worrying over whether we are really a Christian.

**unbelieving** heart = *apistia* (ap-is-tee'-ah) = from <G571> (*apistos*); **faithlessness**, i.e. (negative) **disbelief** (want of Christian faith), or (positive) unfaithfulness (disobedience) :- unbelief.

The pastor is saying, Examine your heart. *Don't just keep mechanically attending church, hearing the gospel week after week, day after day, socializing and fellowshiping with the saints, but not placing your faith in Christ. Quit presenting yourself as a believer when you really are not. If you have heard the gospel—even if you agree that it is the truth—but reject Christ's Lordship over your life, then you have a hardened, evil, unbelieving heart, and have become apostate.*

**falls away**<sup>NASB</sup>, **departing from**<sup>KJV</sup>, **turns away**<sup>NIV</sup> = *aphistemi* (af-is'-tay-mee) = from <G575> (*apo*) and <G2476> (*histemi*); **to remove**, i.e. (active) **instigate to revolt**; usually (reflexive) to desist, **desert**, etc. :- depart, draw (fall) away, refrain, **withdraw self**.

The <sup>NASB</sup> "falls away" is too soft. What this word really describes is rebellion, rejection. And what the preacher describes here is not a believer just taking inventory of his or her behavior—periodically checking the balance sheet to deal with shortcomings. The preacher is looking out over his congregation saying, *You know who you are—you who are wolves in sheep's clothing. You who are rejecting the lordship of Christ, quit fooling yourselves—and others—into thinking you are a "partaker of Christ."*

## v14

For the moment I want to skip v13. The verb tense in v14 is critical.

### Read v14.

Imagine if you will that instead of saying "we **have become** partakers of Christ," it said "we **will be** partakers of Christ" *if* "we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." This change would make an incredible difference in this business of our salvation.

**will be** = our salvation is dependent on our future behavior

**have become** = our future behavior *affirms* that which happened in the past

So the relationship between v12 and v14 is this:

- v12 is the alarm, the warning, the red flag. It sets the condition for apostasy; it describes those who should be concerned for their lives.
- v14 sets the condition for faith, for security; it describes those who are driving in the middle of the road.

**hold fast, hold firmly** = *katecho* = from <G2596> (*kata*) and <G2192> (*echo*); **to hold down** (fast), in various applications (literal or figurative) :- have, hold (fast), **keep** (in memory), let, x make toward, **possess, retain**, seize on, stay, take, withhold.

**assurance**<sup>NASB</sup>, **confidence**<sup>KJV,NIV</sup> = *hypostasis* = from a compound of <G5259> (*hupo*) and <G2476> (*histemi*); **a setting under (support)**, i.e. (figurative) **concrete essence, or abstract assurance** (object or subject) :- confidence, confident, person, substance.

*Albert Barnes:* The hypocrite makes up in ardor what he lacks in sincerity; and he who is really deceived, is usually deceived under the influence of some strong and vivid emotion, which he mistakes for true religion. Often the sincere convert is calm, though decided, and sometimes is even timorous and doubting; while the self-deceiver is noisy in profession, and clamorous in his zeal, and much disposed to blame the lukewarmness of others. Evidence of piety, therefore, should not be built on that early zeal; nor should it be concluded that because there is ardor, there is of necessity genuine religion. Ardor is valuable, and true religion is ardent; but there is other ardor than what the gospel inspires. The evidence of genuine piety is to be found in what will bear us up under trials, and endure amidst persecution and opposition.

The institution of marriage gives us an excellent illustration of this:

[[Newlyweds compared to those long-married.](#)]

Let's use the word "devotion" since it applies to both the illustration and the principle.

- If a married couple hits a few rough patches and decide to divorce, were they ever truly devoted to each other in the first place?
- By way of contrast, if a married couple stays together through thick and thin, through both trials and joys, they have demonstrated their (original) devotion to each other.

Let me cite the succinct MacArthur quote for the third time:

Continuance is the proof of reality.

Let's look at a couple of passages that support this.

### Read John 8:31-32.

Jesus is **not** saying, *You become a disciple of Mine by continuing in My word,*  
but,  
*Because you continue in My word you show that you are a disciple of Mine.*

### Read 1 John 2:18-19.

Based on what John says here, what do we know about those he terms "antichrists"?

- They were "from us"—part of the group, part of those thought of as followers of Christ
- But in reality, they were not
- The fact that they "went out"—left the group—proved that they *never were* followers of Christ.

### Back to Hebrews 3.

The writer of Hebrews fears that there may be the same thing going on in *his* congregation.

## v13

What are we to do about this?

### Read v13.

**encourage**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **exhort**<sup>KJV</sup> = *parakaleo* = from <G3844> (para) and <G2564> (kaleo); **to call near, i.e. invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation or consolation)** :- beseech, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) exhort (-ation), entreat, pray.

**day after day** = every day

**"Today"** = neuter (as adverb) of a presumed compound of the article <G3588> (ho) and <G2250> (hemera); on the (**i.e. this**) **day** (or night current or just passed); general **now** (i.e. at **present**, hitherto) :- this (to-) day.

This is in quotation marks because the pastor gets it from his Psalm 95 quote. In fact, his whole thought here is from Psalm 95:7b-8—

Today, if you would hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
As in the day of Massah in the wilderness,

—and he paraphrases this in v15.

**Read v15.**

**hardened** = *skleryno* (sklay-roo'-no) = from <G4642> (*skleros*) ↓ ; to indurate, i.e. (figurative) **render stubborn** :- harden.  
*skleros* (sklay-ros') = from the base of <G4628> (skelos); **dry, i.e. hard or tough** (figurative harsh, severe) :- fierce, hard.

sclerosis = A thickening or hardening of a body part or system  
arterial sclerosis = hardening of the arteries

We have a few modern aphorisms that might help us understand this. When something is permanent, unchangeable, we say it is **“cast in stone or concrete” or “etched in granite.”**

The writer of Hebrews knows there may be some in his congregation who have an unbelieving heart, but he holds out hope that they can be moved toward a commitment to Christ before their condition becomes permanent—hardened. Once *sklerosis* has set in, it will be too late.

The pastor closes this passage of his sermon by tying together Psalm 95 with the historical events from the book of Numbers.

	Psalm 95	Numbers
<b>v16</b>	For who provoked Him when they had heard?	Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?
<b>v17</b>	And with whom was He angry for forty years?	Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?
<b>v18</b>	And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest,	but to those who were disobedient?

And he closes with v19:

**So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.**

It had been handed to them. Jehovah had declared that He would give it to them—not just the territory, not just dominion over a section of earth, but *rest*. The preacher himself defines this rest a little later in his sermon.

**Read Hebrews 4:8-11.**

And this is what Christ Jesus offers us through faith in Him: rest—a rest from vain works and striving. Just believe; just trust.

**Read MacArthur, p94, last paragraph.**

And I close with some pertinent challenges from William Lane:

**Read Lane, p65f.**

## SESSION 11. HEBREWS 4:1-7

The theme of our passage this morning is **Resting...by Faith**.

### **PREFACE**

Follow the preacher's line of thought:

He first quotes Psalm 95 in chapter 3, which refers to Israel's lack of faith in Jehovah's promises.

#### **Read Hebrews 3:10-11.**

The Lord declared that they would pay a price for their disbelief: they would never enter His rest. Physically, those who rejected His promise would not cross Jordan, but we know from history that even those that did, never enjoyed that rest because of their disobedience.

The chapter closes with the preacher reiterating this point.

#### **Read Hebrews 3:18-19.**

Israel's lack of faith meant they would never enjoy the Lord's rest. And now, as we begin chapter 4, the preacher continues along this line of thought.

### **v1**

*Therefore...*

#### **Read v1.**

*let us fear if, while a promise remains...*

This word "promise" is important to the writer of Hebrews, [\[he uses it 14 times\]](#) and this is where he introduces it.

**promise** = from <G1861> (epaggello); **an announcement** (for information, assent or pledge; especially **a divine assurance of good**) :- message, promise.

When Israel failed in the fulfillment of Jehovah's promise, the promise was not withdrawn. The promise still stands. And what is that promise?

*of entering His rest...*

How can we define this "rest"? Here are some of my thoughts; perhaps you can add some of your own:

Rest = **freedom from...**

- freedom from the futile struggle to earn our salvation
- freedom from the plague of worry over sin
- freedom from persistent guilt
- freedom from the enmity between God and man
- freedom from the vain search for spiritual philosophies

Rest = **security**

- our eternity is secure

Rest = **dependency**

- like John at the last supper [John 13:23], we can rest in the strong arms of the Savior

*...any one of you may seem to have come short of it.*

**come short** = *hystereo* = from <G5306> (husteros); **to be later, i.e. (by implication) to (be inferior; genitive to fall short (be deficient))** :- come behind (short), be destitute, fail, lack, suffer need, (be in) want, be the worse.

This word is translated a number of ways in the NT, but my favorite—and I believe the most apt—is found in the story of the prodigal son.

#### **Read Luke 15:11-14. (in NASB)**

The updated <sup>NASB</sup> translates this "impoverished." What better word could we have for someone who has walked away from the promise of God's fellowship.

And we must consider this from two perspectives: **regenerate** and **unregenerate**.

- In the context of this sermon to the Hebrews, the warning is to those who have thus far rejected true faith in Christ. Their “faith” was deficient; it was not a real substantive trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, and they should fear lest they procrastinate until the offer is withdrawn.

**Read Luke 13:23-27.**

- In the context of our application of this to the life of those redeemed, we can pass through times in which our faith is impoverished, dry, empty. We go through the motions, but the heart is cold, hard. The promise is not withdrawn, but we are missing out on its blessings.

**v2**

**Read v2.**

*For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also...*

While the verb is the same as when applied to the official Gospel of Christ, here the word is used more in the generic sense, referring to glad tidings.

**good news**<sup>NASB</sup>, **gospel**<sup>KJV5,NIV</sup> = *euangelizō* (yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo) = from <G2095> (eu) and <G32> (aggelos); **to announce good news** (“evangelize”) especially the gospel :- declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel).

What the ancient Hebrews had preached to them was God’s promise of rest; in this Christian era that good news equals Christ Jesus.

*...but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.*

The director of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Steven Spielberg, is Jewish, and in his interpretation of certain historical elements of the exodus we see a perfect illustration of what the writer to the Hebrews is saying in v2. For example, the characters in the movie consider the ark of the covenant strictly as a useful device: it is a “transmitter to God,” a powerful device to give supernatural power to whoever possesses it. And then, of course, they pry off the lid and everyone dies.

Spielberg repeatedly does this in his films: he removes the component of faith, of heart, reducing everything down to a mechanical device. And, as a Jew, this is part of his heritage.

**Read Mark 7:6-7.**

Isaiah wrote of it and even in Jesus’ time the Jews were primarily concerned with keeping the letter of the law and the human traditions of minutia heaped on top of it. But in that they had forgotten the condition of the *heart*. They had forgotten the most important thing; when asked Jesus said this was the most important commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.” Deuteronomy 6:5-6

Let’s look at just one example of this.

**Read Numbers 21:6-9.**

Now let’s see how the Israelites considered the bronze snake later in the time of Hezekiah.

**Read 2 Kings 18:4-5.**

Jehovah meant for the snake to be a physical type of His mercy and power, but Israel forgot about the God part—the faith part—and turned *it* into a god.

So in v2 the preacher declares that the Israelites had good news preached to them, but they didn’t profit from that good news because they did not receive it by faith. Even more specifically, Joshua and Caleb returned from across the Jordan with the good news that this promised land of rest was just as Jehovah had said. But the people did not believe, and thus missed out on the promised rest.

**v3**

At first glance v3 is a little confusing—like the preacher is going in one direction, then suddenly switches to

another. He begins in the positive, seems to justify this with a negative, then switches back to a positive.

### Read v3.

*For we who have believed enter that rest...*

This word translated “believe” means far more than just an intellectual agreement:

**believed** = *pisteuo* = from <G4102> (pistis); **to have faith** (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing), i.e. credit; by implication **to entrust** (especially one’s spiritual well-being to Christ) :- believe (-r), **commit** (to trust), put in trust with.

And this comes out in the J. B. Phillips paraphrase, which I found helpful in understanding the structure of this verse:

### Read v3 in Phillips.

The verb translated “enter” is in the present tense, so we are free to think of this rest as both a future hope—i.e., the eternal rest of heaven—and as the kingdom rest we enjoy even now.

And again the preacher quotes Psalm 95, and follows it with,

*...although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.*

The point he is making here is that Israel’s failure to enjoy that rest was all on them—because of their lack of faith. It was not because the rest wasn’t ready and waiting for them.

Perhaps Israel thought when God said that He was giving them the land that He meant that all of Canaan would be vacated of their enemies—just wide open and free for the taking. God said, *No, you’re still going to have to deal with those tenants—you’re still going to have to evict them—but I am giving you the land.* But they were afraid of the giants, and didn’t trust Jehovah’s promise.

God’s rest had been established since the “foundation of the world.”

**foundation** = from <G2598> (kataballo); a deposition, i.e. **founding; figurative conception** :- conceive, foundation.

I find it interesting that this word can include the idea of *conception*: God’s rest was established even when the world was little more than a twinkle in His eye! But more specifically to the writer’s argument, he refers in the next two verses to the Creator resting from His works on the seventh day.

### vs4-5

His points about the eternity of God’s “rest” are reinforced in vs4-5:

### Read v4-5.

William Lane points out the progression of this idea of rest:

- God’s creation rest is the **archetype**—the original model—of the promised rest;
- Israel’s settlement of Canaan under Joshua is the **type** of His promised rest;
- the Sabbath celebration at the consummation of history is the **antitype** rest—that is, the *actual* rest that had earlier been foreshadowed by the first two.

But then we could also layer onto this the rest we enjoy in the here and now, in Christ, through the ministry of the indwelling Spirit.

### vs6-7

### Read vs6-7.



*Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it...*

I like what John MacArthur says about this:

When man lost God's rest [in the Garden], God immediately began a recovery process. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, some would be brought back in. He created man for fellowship with Himself, and His plan would not be thwarted, either by a rebellious archangel or by disbelieving mankind. By divine decree, therefore, there has always been a remnant of believers, even among disbelieving Israel. The way of God's rest has always been narrow, and only a few, relative to all of mankind, have ever found it. But some must enter into it, because God's purpose must be fulfilled. By sovereign decree He designed a rest for mankind and some, therefore, are going to enter it.

*...and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,*

Sometimes I try to anticipate possible questions that might arise in class, and as I read this I could hear someone asking, "Does this mean that whenever I disobey God—whenever I sin against Him—my rest is threatened?"

The KJV helps us out here with a more literal rendering of this:

Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

**disobedience, unbelief<sup>KJV</sup> = from <G545> (apeithes); disbelief (obstinate and rebellious) :- disobedience, unbelief.**

The idea here is not the contemporary idea of disobedience in the form of occasional sin—as when a child disobeys his parents by not taking out the garbage when told—but, again, an obstinate rejection of God's truth.

*He again fixes a certain day, "Today,"*

There are two deadlines: *personal* and *corporate*. Each person has until the end of this one earthly life to decide. That is one "Today."

**Read Genesis 6:3.**

These days life spans are *less* than 120 years, but the point is that men and women, because they are flesh, have a finite number of years before they meet their eternity, and they must decide in that span of time.

The second "Today" is the day set by God for *all* mankind: Judgment Day, when the final curtain falls on a decision.

**Read Isaiah 2:11-12.**

**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3.**

*...saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,*

*"Today if you hear his voice,*

*Do not harden your hearts."*

And for one last time the preacher uses the words of Psalm 95 to implore his congregation not to reject the promised rest of God. If they hear Him calling, if they hear His voice, respond!

Every day we turn Him down, the callus on our heart just gets harder and thicker and tougher.

## SESSION 12. HEBREWS 4:8-13

### Read Hebrews 4:8-10.

#### vs8-9

Last week we discussed how God had established earthly types of His rest. The first, the original type of this rest was the rest He Himself took after creating the universe. The rest offered (but ultimately never realized) to Israel in Canaan was one of many types of His rest. The *actual* rest—not a type, but the real thing—is the believer’s rest in God, both in the eternity after the “consummation of history” (Lane) and in the earth-bound portion of the believer’s eternity.

When we read the word “Sabbath” [NASB, NIV, ESV], it is natural to think of the day of the week we call “the Sabbath”: Sunday. The KJV does not include “Sabbath,” but the word being translated “Sabbath rest” is *sabbatismos*, so it makes perfect sense to translate it this way.

***sabbatismos*** (sab-bat-is-mos') = from a derivative of <G4521> (sabbaton); a “sabbatism”, i.e. (figurative) **the repose of Christianity (as a type of heaven)** :- rest.

We humans have a bad habit—not unlike our ancient Jewish brethren—of compartmentalizing the things of God, and thus restricting His true concept of life in Him. For example, I was raised that Sundays were to be a “day of rest”—i.e., lying around, reading the paper, napping, playing board games, and not doing any physical work. I have held to that tradition to this day; perhaps the most sacred component of my “Sabbath” is my Sunday afternoon nap. If you want to experience the wrath of God in this lifetime, call me around 2:00 on a Sunday afternoon! Just kidding (sort of).

Last week we spoke of how God in His mercy gave the Israelites a bronze symbol to look to, to experience His salvation and healing—and then, over time, they turned that bronze serpent into a god named Nahushtan! Right we are to criticize them for that, but hold on:

God said in His Ten Commandments, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” But the Lord Jesus put this into context for us:

### Read Luke 13:10-16.

Our traditional Sabbath day, Sunday, is just another *type* of God’s rest. So to get bogged down in what day of the week the Sabbath should be, or what we can or cannot do on that Sabbath, misses the point. We use our Sabbath day for important, vital functions within the body. First we use it for corporate worship; after that, for education in the word, the building up and maturing of the body through the preaching and teaching of Scripture; and it is an opportunity to reconnect with our brothers and sisters, and thus nurture the bonds that hold us together as family. And, yes, for many of us it is a day of rest—a day in which we avoid heavy labor, a day to recharge our physical, as well as spiritual batteries.

But overarching all of that, the Sabbath is a reminder of God’s *ultimate* rest. And to restrict that Sabbath to just one day out of each week is to miss the point. God wants us to remember every day that *only in Him* will we find rest—rest for our soul, rest for our Spirit, rest *from* all the persistent ills of this fallen world. All of this—even Sunday—is just a foreshadowing type of what we will enjoy when in His literal, physical (if spirit can be physical) presence. Even the very real rest we enjoy in the here and now, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is but a mere shadow of what we will know in that Day.

And the writer to the Hebrews, in v8, says, *If the rest you experienced under Joshua had been the real, actual rest (not just a foreshadowing of the real), then God would not have kept offering you rest.*

### Turn please to Joshua 22.

The tribes that had settled east of the Jordan had kept their word and returned to help their brothers. So Joshua called them together before sending them back to the lands of their possession.

**Read Joshua 22:4.**

**Sidebar:** The name “Joshua” is the Hebrew form of the Greek “Jesus.” Leon Morris points out that “There had been a “Jesus” who could *not* lead his people into the rest of God, just as there was another Jesus who *could*.”

That was “Joshua’s” rest, but the preacher declares in v9 that there remains a *sabbatismos*—a Sabbath rest for God’s people. And again, there remains the ultimate, the actual rest of heavenly eternity with God—as well as the rest we can enjoy right now in Christ Jesus.

Back to Hebrews.

## v10

**Read v10.**

Here the word translated “rest” is the one the writer uses more often (10 times):

**rest** = *katapausis* (kat-aup’-ow-sis) = from <G2664> (*katapauo*) ↓ ; **reposing down**, i.e. (by Hebrew) **abode** :- rest.  
**rested** = *katapauo* (kat-aup-ow’-o) = from <G2596> (*kata*) and <G3973> (*pauo*) ↓ ; **to settle down**, i.e. (literal) **to colonize**, or (figurative) to (cause to) desist :- **cease**, (give) rest (-rain).  
*pauo* (pow-o) = a primary verb (“pause”); **to stop** (transitive or intransitive), i.e. restrain, **quit**, desist, **come to an end** :- cease, leave, refrain.

Notice the verb tense in this verse. An indication that this rest is not limited to the other side of the Pearly Gates is that it is in the past tense: this has already been accomplished. The ESV is more succinct:

...for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works  
as God did from his.

A couple additional points:

- Although I have mentioned the form of rest we experience in the here and now, the consensus is that the writer is really focusing on the final rest of the “people of God.”
- And MacArthur points out that that term—“people of God”—in this context refers specifically to Israel. The preacher is speaking to Jews, and in the OT Scriptures, “people of God” referred to them. We Christians can be a bit chauvinistic about our relationship with God in Christ, but God is not finished with Israel. Romans 1:16 states,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

## v11

**Read v11.**

**diligent** = *spoudazo* = from <G4710> (*spoude*); **to use speed, i.e. to make effort, be prompt or earnest** :- do (give) diligence, be diligent (forward), endeavour, labour, study.

At first I was amused by the KJV of this verse:

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest...

Just a moment ago, in v10, we were told to rest from our works. Now we’re told to *labor* to enter that rest? But then I remembered what *Vine’s* had to say about this rest:

Christ’s rest is not a rest *from* work, but *in* work.

Here again we need to emphasize that to be faithful to the context this is speaking of our *final* rest, which makes sense for v11, because the alternative is to “fall” through “disobedience”—our same term for obstinate disbelief. So

it is saying, let us earnestly seek our salvation (final rest) through this good news that has been proclaimed.

Still, it is hard not to make contemporary application. In this life, God's rest does not mean the absence of labors, of challenges, of hard times. But it means that we have a "rest"—and God's rest is always spiritual, not physical—in our labors, our challenges, our hard times.

### vs12-13

And speaking of labors, I don't know about you, but I had to do some work to understand the preacher's flow of thought here as he segues into what is for us a familiar passage.

#### Read vs12-13.

The "Therefore" (of which this preacher is so fond) makes it clear that these two thoughts—vs8-11 and vs12-13—are connected, so it is incumbent upon us to figure out how. Let's back up and see if we can discern his train of thought.

Remember, the overarching point of this sermon is to present Christ Jesus as superior to anything or anyone else. Throughout the preacher implores his listeners to choose Jesus and His salvation. At the beginning of chapter three he exhorts them to fully examine Him.

#### Read v3:1.

And further down in chapter three he supports his argument by quoting Psalm 95, which paints a picture of a rebellious generation that though they were going through the motions of faith, did not really trust God in their hardened hearts.

So then he vamps on this for a while:

#### Read v3:12.

And he reiterates for clarity just who and what he is talking about:

#### Read v3:16-19.

As we turn the page to chapter four, the preacher is still at it:

#### Read v4:1.

And in v6 he again speaks of their missing out on the promised rest because of disobedience:

#### Read v4:6.

In v7 he again quotes Psalm 95, beseeching his congregation to check the condition of their heart. *Please don't have a hard heart—don't just go through the motions, don't just believe intellectually, but sincerely trust in God and His Son Jesus Christ.*

#### Read v4:7.

*Please don't reject the One who will give you rest.* And the kicker is v11, where he again brings up the real reason that their forefathers missed out on this rest:

#### Read v11.

**disobedience, unbelief<sup>KJV</sup>** = from <G545> (apeithes); **disbelief (obstinate and rebellious)** :- disobedience, **unbelief**.

So his thread of thought is that he is warning the people in his congregation that it is not enough to just mouth the words, not enough to just go through the mechanical motions of obedience; they must truly believe—have faith—in their heart.

Why? Because the Lord is not fooled by outward appearances. He has a way to get beneath them to examine the true condition of the heart.

#### Read vs12-13.

How does He do this?

*For the word of God...*

His spoken and written word.

**logos** = from <G3004> (lego); **something said (including the thought); by implication a topic (subject of discourse), also reasoning** (the mental faculty or motive; by extension a computation;

*...is living and active and sharper...*

**living, quick**<sup>KJV</sup> = *zao* = a primary verb; to live (literal or figurative) :- life (-time), (a-) live (-ly), quick.

**active, powerful**<sup>KJV</sup> = *energes* (en-er-gace') = from <G1722> (en) and <G2041> (ergon); **active, operative :- effectual, powerful.**

**sharper** = *tomos'* = comparative of a derivative of the primary *temno* (to cut, more comprehensive or decisive than <G2875> (kopto), **as if by a single stroke**; whereas *kopto* implies repeated blows, like hacking); more keen :- sharper.

How sharp is it?

*...sharper than any two-edged sword,*

**two-edged** = *distomos* (dis'-tom-os) = from <G1364> (dis) and <G4750> (*stoma*) ↓; double-edged :- with two edges, two-edged.

*stoma* = probably strengthened from a presumed derivative of the base of <G5114> (tomoteros); **the mouth (as if a gash in the face); by implication language** (and its relations); figurative an opening (in the earth); specially the front or edge (of a weapon) :- edge, face, mouth.

So there is a kind of play on words here: God's word—*logos*: that which He speaks—is sharper, more effective than a two-edged—"double-mouthed" sword. In physical terms, compare the belly wounds made with a single-edged sword and a double-edged sword. To widen the wound with the former you would have to withdraw, flip the sword, and stab again, whereas with the latter you would just push in the opposite direction without having to withdraw. It was a marvelous invention for the warrior. It would take just seconds to lay a man open.

*and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow*

The word of God is really something. A literal sword can eviscerate, laying open the flesh, but the sword of God's word can cut down even into the unseen—the soul and the spirit. There is no place in the person it cannot go.

*...and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

**judge** = *kritikos* = from <G2923> (krites); **decisive** ("critical"), i.e. **discriminative :- discerner.**

*MacArthur*: The Word of God is not only saving and comforting and nourishing and healing, it is also a tool of judgment and execution. In the day of the great judgment His Word is going to penetrate and lay bare all hearts who have not trusted in Him. The sham and hypocrisy will be revealed and no profession of faith, no matter how orthodox, and no list of good works, no matter how sacrificial, will count for anything before Him. Only the thoughts and intentions of the heart will count... All disguises will be ripped off and only the real person will be seen.

MacArthur rightly focuses on the final, no-going-back judgment seat of God. But let us again consider this work of the word of God in the here and now.

*Matthew Henry*: It is sharper than any two-edged sword, for it will enter where no other sword can, and make a more critical dissection: it pierces to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, the soul and its habitual prevailing temper; it makes a soul that has been a long time of a proud spirit to be humble, of a perverse spirit to be meek and obedient. Those sinful habits that have become as it were natural to the soul, and rooted deeply in it, and become in a manner one with it, are separated and cut off by this sword. It cuts off ignorance from the understanding, rebellion from the will, and enmity from the mind, which, when carnal, is enmity itself against God. This sword divides between the joints and the marrow, the most secret, close, and intimate parts of the body; this sword can cut off the lusts of the flesh as well as the lusts of the mind, and make men willing to undergo the sharpest operation for the mortifying of sin. It is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, even the most secret and remote thoughts and designs. It will discover to men the variety of their thoughts and purposes, the vileness of them, the bad principles they are actuated by, the sinister and sinful ends they act to. The word will turn the inside of a sinner out, and let him see all that is in his heart. Now such a word as this must needs be a great help to our faith and obedience.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.**

V13 concludes this passage.

**Read v13.**

*And there is no creature hidden from His sight,*

There is not one person, no beast of the field, no standing tree or bush, no building—no created thing that can escape this vivisection.

His **sight** = neuter of a compound of <G1722> (en) and a derivative of <G3700> (optanomai); **in the face of** (literal or figurative) :- **before**, in the presence (sight) of, to.

*...but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*

**open** = *gymnos* (goom-nos') = of uncertain affinity; **nude** (absolute or relative, literal or figurative) :- **naked**. [Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden]

**laid bare** = *trachelizo* = from <G5137> (trachelos); **to seize by the throat or neck, i.e. to expose the gullet of a victim for killing** (genitive to lay bare) :- opened.

[a word with uncertain meaning]

**have to do**<sup>NASB,KJV</sup>, **give account**<sup>NKJV,NIV</sup> = *logos*

["give an account" is favored]

Let us not bother about to whom this is addressed, whether it applies to believers, etc. Let us just focus on the powerful sovereignty of our God.

## SESSION 13. HEBREWS 4:14-16

Up until now the preacher has twice teased us with the image of Jesus as our “High Priest.”

**Read Hebrews 2:17 & 3:1.**

In each instance he just put it out there, leaving it hanging in mid-air. But now, from chapter four into chapter ten, he is going to run with it. There will be other, important things mixed in, but it is going to be a recurring theme from here until almost the end of his sermon.

### v14

But before we launch into an examination of this important topic, we need to connect the preacher’s ubiquitous “Therefore…” and the thought behind v14 with the text leading up to it. In truth, even though it reintroduces Christ as high priest, this verse connects more to what has come before than to what is coming up. And we find the key to that at the end of the verse.

**Read Hebrews 4:14.**

*...let us hold fast our confession.*

The preacher broached this theme back at the beginning of chapter three. Let’s look at that again.

**Read v3:1.**

As we learned when we studied this passage, because of everything He experienced and suffered, Jesus became the ultimate High Priest for all who would believe.

The word “confession” used here in the NASB, KJVS, and ESV, is not the idea of confessing to a human priest, but rather in the sense of confessing or agreeing with a statement of faith. The NIV actually clarifies it.

NIV: ...Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

In other words, we do not confess *to* Him, but confess *Him*. And in v2 the writer begins to press the point of Christ’s faithfulness:

**Read vs3:2-6a.**

Then he defines “His house.”

*...whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.*

So in this passage the writer is marrying Christ’s faithfulness with the need for *us* to be faithful—holding fast our confidence and our confession. In this, Christ is both example and motivation.

*Do you need to have the concept of faithfulness **demonstrated** for you?*

Look to your high priest, Christ Jesus.

*Do you need a **reason** to be faithful to Him?*

See how faithful He has been to you!

Then down in v14 of this chapter he hits it again:

**Read v3:14.**

Our faithfulness to Him—“holding fast our assurance firm until the end”—demonstrates that we have been partakers of Christ. And now we come to v4:14.

**Read v4:14.**

*...we have a great high priest*

**great** = *megas* = big (literal or figurative, in a very wide application) :- (+ fear) exceedingly, great (-est), high, large, loud, mighty, + (be) sore (afraid), strong, x to years.

**high priest** = *archiereus* (ar-khee-er-yuce’) from <G746> (arche) and <G2409> (hiereus); the high-priest (literal of the Jews, typical Christ); by extension a chief priest :- chief (high) priest, chief of the priests.



And once again he implores us to “hold fast our confession.” Did you catch the transparency in this thread? Did you notice the we/our? This pastor is no stern, self-righteous pulpiteer, raining down fire and brimstone on his whimpering, cringing flock. He includes himself. He says, *We must do this together, my brothers and sisters*. And he gives three reasons why they should hold fast:

1. **Jesus is their “high priest”** (which we will examine further in a moment).
2. **Jesus “has passed through the heavens”:**
  - a. plural; to put a fine point on it, after His resurrection, he passed through the first heaven of earth’s atmosphere, the second heaven of space, and into the third heaven of God’s abode (MacArthur). The point is that Jesus passed all the way up to *His* resting place. Earlier in our study we discussed that unlike earthly priests, when Jesus entered the *real* holy of holies He sat down, as Hebrews 1:3 states: “When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” There was no chair in the holy of holies of the earthly temple; the priest’s work was never done. But Jesus’ work was finished; *He sat down*. Thus He is a superior high priest.
3. **Jesus is “the Son of God.”**

## v15

This whole concept of Jesus as a high priest is unique to the writer of Hebrews—in fact, if you do a search on the word priest, the only other reference after the gospels and The Acts (in which the term refers to a literal human priest) is in Romans, where the apostle Paul refers to himself as a priest of the gospel. Every other use of the word “priest” in the epistles is found in Hebrews, and here it is the word for *high* priest (17 times).

Throughout his sermon, the writer of Hebrews emphasizes different aspects of Jesus as high priest, and here he highlights Christ’s *empathy*.

### Read v15.

**sympathize** = *sympatheo* (soom-path-eh’-o) = from <G4835> (sumpathes); to feel “sympathy” with, i.e. (by implication) **to commiserate** :- have compassion, **be touched with a feeling of; “to have a fellow feeling with.”**  
**weaknesses, infirmities**<sup>KV</sup> = from <G772> (asthenes); **feebleness (of body or mind)**; by implication malady; **moral frailty** :- disease, infirmity, sickness, weakness.

*Vincent*: Not sufferings, but *weaknesses*, moral and physical, which predispose to sin and facilitate it.

*Lane*: The significance of the verb the preacher uses in 4:15 is to share the experience of someone. It must not be understood in a psychological sense, as in the translation, “sympathize with our weaknesses.” It must be understood in an experiential sense: *our high priest suffers together with the one being tested, and brings active help*. When the lash is falling on you, He rushes in so that it falls upon Him as well. When you are treated with contempt, He experiences the humiliation that you feel. When you are bruised, He feels the pain. *He is able to feel our weaknesses with us*.

### Turn to Isaiah 53.

We typically reference this familiar passage in the context of Christ’s passion and crucifixion. But it applies here as well.

#### Read Isaiah 53:3-6.

Perhaps no other quality of God so sets Him apart from so-called other “gods.” Nowhere in history will you find a god that combines such power and might (*megas*) with gracious empathy (*sympatheo*). There is no god more powerful than God, yet there is no god more gracious and tender. This sets Him apart.

And Jesus does not just *show* God’s empathy—He *is*, in His person, God’s empathy. The very fact of Christ’s existence on earth demonstrates the gracious love the Godhead feels for created beings. But that was not enough; to just exist was not sufficient for our Savior. He had to *experience* what it felt like to be human. He had to go through the same trials of the flesh.

**tempted** = *peirazo* = from <G3984> (peira); to test (object), i.e. endeavor, scrutinize, **entice, discipline** :- assay, examine, go about, **prove**, tempt (-er), try.



And I don't believe for a minute that Jesus' temptation ended after His wilderness experience. I think He, just like His brethren, was tempted and tried every day He was on earth. The preacher already suggested this earlier.

**Read Hebrews 2:18.**

Jesus was tempted *in* His suffering. But here it is stated explicitly: He was tempted *in all things*. Just think about it...

- He was tempted by the adulation of His immediate followers;
- He was tempted by animosity of His detractors;
- He was tempted to short-circuit the whole painful business;
- He was tempted in all the ways any human is tempted.

## v16

And what is and should be our response to this incredible fact?

**Read v16.**

...draw near

The tense of the verb translated "draw near" means that it could be read *draw near again and again, constantly, repeatedly, as a habit*.

Lane points out that

"throne of grace" is a Semitic expression for the place of God's presence. It designates the place from which grace flows to the people of God.

The *New English Bible* translates this

**Let us approach the throne of our gracious God.**

While we (sadly) kind of shrug this off as no big deal, this was a mind-blowing statement to the Jews hearing this sermon. *This idea of "let us" draw near to the mercy seat—are you kidding?!* Only the high priest, after meticulous preparation and purification—and then only once per year (the Day of Atonement)—could, with fear and trembling, approach the holiest place in all Israel: the throne of grace, the mercy seat of God, located in the holiest of holies in the Jerusalem temple.

But now the preacher is telling them that *every* believer, *any* believer, is to make it a habit to repeatedly, at any time of any day or night, come before the throne of God with confidence.

**confidence** = *parresia* (par-rhay-see'-ah) = from <G3956> (pas) and a derivative of <G4483> (rheo); all **out-spokenness**, i.e. **frankness, bluntness**, publicity; by implication assurance :- **bold** (× -ly, -ness, -ness of speech), confidence, × **freely**, × **openly**, × **plainly** (-ness).

First, this means we can approach the throne of God *without* fear and trembling. We have been invited; there is nothing to fear; the door to the throne room is unlocked and unattended. No secret word is required for entry. Just come on in.

Second, this means that once we are there, we may speak in our natural language. No flowery, *uber*-spiritual words are necessary. Just say what's on your mind.

*Lane:* The term that he uses [*parresia*] has a long history in secular Greek to signify the free and open speech of citizens with one another. It was never, however, used in the context of prayer. [But] this is precisely the attitude that the preacher encourages in his friends when they speak with God in prayer. Since they have a high priest who empathizes with them they can turn to God with frankness and receive timely help in their distress.

We can't overemphasize this. This was utterly unheard of to the ancient Jew—and it is an astounding privilege granted to every child of God in Christ. It is far more than just having permission to speak to Him directly, without going through a human priest.

Think of the comparison:

Before Christ: Priest (formal) → God (public oblivious)

After Christ: Public (informal) → God

*Jesus* is our high priest. He does not prevent us from approaching the throne of grace (as did the human priests), but encourages us to pass on through to the throne and speak for ourselves. But then, once we get there, we require no ritual cleansing.

**Read portions from Leviticus 16.**

Only once a year, after painstaking, ritualistic cleansing, could only the high priest “draw near” the throne of grace to receive mercy for himself and the nation of Israel. If he didn’t perform the ritual perfectly, he would die.

But *our* high priest, when He supplied His *own* blood for our atonement—so that, as the preacher states in 2:9, “by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone”—it was sufficient for all time. Right at the beginning of his sermon the preacher stated that “When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” His work was done. No more sacrifice was necessary. And in our passage today he states that not only did this put an end to the bloody sacrifice, but it removed the barrier of the priesthood. Now anyone, at any time, “may receive mercy and find grace to help *in time of need*.” Whenever we need it; whenever we require it.

Do you need God’s mercy? Do you need His grace? Go ahead; don’t stand on ceremony. Just go on in and ask. Don’t be afraid: say whatever is on your mind. And He will hear.

## SESSION 14. HEBREWS 5:1-6

So far in his sermon the writer of Hebrews has declared and proven that

- Christ is superior to angels
- Christ is superior to Moses
- Christ is superior to Joshua

Today we begin chapter five, but before we do I'd like to show the arc of the preacher's thought-process in this neighborhood of his sermon.

<b>4:14-16</b>	begins treatise on Christ as great high priest
<b>5:1-4</b>	describes human high priests
<b>5:5-10</b>	describes Christ as high priest, mentioning Melchizedek <i>but he interrupts his train of thought to interject a parenthetical sidebar; he'd like to launch into an examination of the fascinating Melchizedek, but instead he...</i>
<b>5:11-6:20</b>	launches on them for their lack of maturity and understanding
<b>6:20/7:1</b>	returns to Melchizedek

So, as we get begin chapter five, the preacher is going to demonstrate how Christ Jesus is superior to Aaron—and, by extension, *any* high priest from among men. His emphasis in our text this morning is on the fact that both human high priests and our *great* high priest are called by God to the position. The preacher begins—in the first four verses—with human high priests—or, as he states it, those “taken from among men.”

In the first portion of our text today we'll see the fundamental requirements for the human high priest:

- had to be **a man** (v1), which meant he was susceptible to the temptations and weakness (v2) as other men
- this made him **sympathetic** (or empathetic) (v2)
- he **offered gifts and sacrifices** (vs1 & 3)
- had to be **called** by God (vs1 & 4)

**Read vs1-4.**

**v1**

*For every high priest taken from among men is appointed...*

Right off the bat I am struck by the word translated “taken.” The NIV is too soft here, with “selected”; God *takes hold* of certain men—very often against their wishes—and says, “You will serve me.”

Every high priest is taken and appointed.

**taken** = *lambano* = to take (in very many applications, literal and figurative [properly object or active, **to get hold of**; whereas <G1209> (*dechomai*) is rather subject or passive, to have offered to one; <G138> (*haireomai*) is more violent, to seize or remove]) :- accept, + be amazed, assay, attain, bring, × when I call, catch, come on (× unto), + forget, have, hold, obtain, receive (× after), take (away, up).

**appointed, ordained**<sup>kv</sup> = from <G2596> (*kata*) and <G2476> (*histemi*); **to place down (permanently)**, i.e. (figurative) **to designate**, constitute, convoy :- appoint, be, conduct, make, ordain, set.

Chuck Swindoll has said (and I paraphrase) that if you can be happy being anything else, do not be a pastor. Only be a pastor if God has called you to serve Him in this way. If you are not called to be a pastor, you will be miserable in that role. But if He has called you to it, you will be miserable if you try to do anything else.

*...on behalf of men in things pertaining to God*

A high priest is, in one sense, called to be *over* a group of people as a spiritual leader, and the word translated “on **behalf** of” can be used for that. But here it emphasizes another role of the high priest, that is to *represent* the people under his charge to God—to speak for them, to confess for them, and in turn to represent God to the people, demonstrating His forgiveness and mercy.

**pertaining to, related to**<sup>NIV</sup> = *pros* = a strengthened form of <G4253> (pro); **a preposition of direction; forward to, i.e. toward** (with the genitive the side of, i.e. pertaining to; with the dative by the side of, i.e. near to; usually with the accusative the place, time, occasion, or respect, which is the destination of the relation, i.e. whither or for which it is predicated) :- about, according to, against, among, at, because of, before, between, ([where-]) by, for, × at thy house, in, for intent, nigh unto, of, which pertain to, that, to (the end that), + together, to ([you]) -ward, unto, with (-in). In comparative it denotes essentially the same applications, namely, **motion towards**, accession to, or nearness at.

...*in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins*

**offer** = *prosphero* = from <G4314> (pros) and <G5342> (phero) (including its alternate); **to bear towards**, i.e. lead to, **tender** (especially to God), treat :- bring (to, unto) deal with, do, offer (unto, up), **present unto**, put to.

**gifts** could be any freewill offering made by the people, such as money, jewelry, or other valuables, but MacArthur is of the opinion that in this context it refers to the *bloodless* offerings of grain or meal—thanksgiving and dedication offerings—contrasted to the atonement *sacrifices* of blood.

## v2

*he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness*

It is easy to track the description of a high priest found in v1, but v2 gave me pause, for this does not comport with the descriptions we have of the high priests from the historical record. Quite the opposite. But William Lane speaks to this.

The thought expressed in v2 has no clear parallel in Jewish sources roughly contemporary with Hebrews. Those sources reflect upon the exalted status of the high priest but not upon his gentleness or weakness. The emphasis on the inner disposition of the high priest and his awareness that he too is subject to weakness, which are the distinguishing features of v2 is remarkable. It stems from the pastor's reflection on the character of Jesus as high priest in v4:15. *That reflection led him to recognize what God intended priesthood to be.*

**deal gently with**<sup>NASB, NIV</sup>, **have compassion on**<sup>KJV</sup> = *metriopatheo* = from a compound of the base of <G3357> (metrios) and <G3806> (pathos); **to be moderate in passion, i.e. gentle** (to treat indulgently) :- have compassion.

*Leon Morris*: It is not easy to translate [this word]. It refers to taking the middle course between apathy and anger. A true high priest is not indifferent to moral lapses; neither is he harsh.

**ignorant** = *agnoeo* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G3539> (noieo); **not to know** (through lack of information or intelligence); **by implication to ignore (through disinclination)** :- (be) ignorant (-ly), not know, not understand, unknown.

In our vernacular, "ignorance" means uninformed—one is ignorant of this or that simply because there is a lack of information. But "ignorance" has a deeper meaning here; here it's not just "I don't know," but "I may not want to know."

Even so, this and the word translated "misguided" do not describe those who willfully, deliberately committed sin. The priest could only make atonement for those who sinned in "ignorance"; no provision is made in the OT law for those who defiantly broke the law.

## Read Numbers 15:28-31.

**misguided**<sup>NASB</sup>, **going astray**<sup>NKJV, NIV</sup> = *planao* = from <G4106> (plane); to (properly cause to) **roam** (from safety, truth, or virtue) :- go astray, deceive, err, seduce, **wander**, be out of the way.

Why could the high priest deal fairly, equitably, moderately with those who unintentionally committed sin? Because he was well aware that he was guilty of the same. He too was "compassed with infirmity."

**beset**<sup>NASB, ESV</sup>, **subject**<sup>NKJV, NIV</sup>, **compassed**<sup>KJV</sup> = *perikeimai* = from <G4012> (peri) and <G2749> (keimai); **to lie all around, i.e. enclose, encircle, hamper** (literal or figurative) :- be bound (compassed) with, hang about.

**weakness, infirmity**<sup>KJV</sup> = from <G772> (asthenes); **feebleness (of body or mind)**; by implication malady; **moral frailty** :- disease, infirmity, sickness, weakness.

We saw this word last week in v15 of chapter four.

**Read Hebrews 4:15.**

*Vincent*: Not sufferings, but *weaknesses*, moral and physical, which predispose to sin and facilitate it.

**v3**

**Read v3.**

*Because of it/this... by reason thereof...*

Although it is hard to get it from the NASB, the consensus seems to be that this refers to the priest being a sinner himself. The NIV and ESV capture it:

NIV: This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

ESV: Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.

And we saw this last week from Leviticus 16:

"Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself.

"Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.  
(Leviticus 16:11,15)

Human priests have the same sin nature as those they represent to God.

**v4**

**Read v4.**

The priesthood was a gift to the people, and a gift to the Levitical tribe—and both gifts were from God.

**Read Numbers 18:6-7. (NKJV or NIV)**

**vs5-6**

And now we turn the corner to Christ Jesus as high priest. Christians like to say that in Christ we have no need of an intermediary—a priest, a confessor. But that is not really true. It is more accurate to say that we have a *superior* high priest in Jesus Christ.

As is often the case with the NASB, the translation of these two verses is accurate, but the grammar is awkward—it is missing a helpful verb. I believe the insertion of one small word clarifies the meaning:

So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but *He* [did] who said to Him, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"; just as He says also in another *passage*, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."

the NKJV inserts two words to get the job done:

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, *but it was He* who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You..."

—which means that God the Father was the one who "called" His Son to be priest.

This is the second time the preacher has used this quotation from Psalm 2. This first time, in chapter one, he used

it to prove that Jesus was superior to angels. Here he uses it to prove that Jesus, like Aaron, was called to the priesthood by God the Father. [\[D. A. Carson\]](#)

The honor and the glory of Christ's priestly status was not something He bestowed upon Himself; it was a gift from His Father.

**Read John 8:54.**

Let's pause and think about that for a moment. Let's extend the thought to *our* lives. In John 8 Jesus says,

*"If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing..."*

Just a few verses earlier He says something similar:

**Read John 8:50.**

Now look at John 7.

**Read John 7:16-18.**

In Hebrews 5:5-6, the preacher is making the point that Jesus, in His role as great high priest, is doing this in service to His father. There is a measure of prestige, of glory that comes with that office, but Christ—even though He is God!—isn't interested in seeking glory for Himself. Glory that comes from ourselves is worthless (John 8:54); it is not righteous, nor is it true (John 7:16-18).

So let's close by drawing application from this. Do you seek your own glory? Do you make it a point to make sure people know about the good things you are doing? It is probably a safe bet that no one in this room will be called by God to be a high priest, but we are called by Him to serve in other ways. When we perform that service, do we do it for *His* glory, or are we glorifying ourselves? Jesus said that even if *He*—Son of God, second member of the Godhead—glorified Himself, it was worth nothing. If that is true—and it is—what is it worth when we seek our own glory? Is there a value less than zero? One more reference:

**Read Matthew 6:1.**

When we seek our own glory, the return is worth less than nothing. But when we serve for God's glory, He glorifies us—and the glory and reward we receive from Him is worth more than anything we can imagine.

## SESSION 15. HEBREWS 5:7-10

From time to time I hit passages of Scripture that make it a challenge to prepare them to teach. The problem with these is that they lead one to repeatedly drift off into deep contemplation of the subject matter. And it's hard to make coherent notes for class when one keeps zoning out. The text before us today is just such a passage.

From the beginning of his sermon, the writer of Hebrews has been emphasizing Christ Jesus as *Son*.

**Read Hebrews...**

**1:1-2**

**1:5**

**3:5-6a**

In 4:14-15 he begins to turn the corner from emphasizing Jesus as *Son* to Jesus as *High Priest*.

**Read Hebrews 4:14-15.**

And in our last session in Hebrews we noted the two OT passages quoted in 5:5-6, which the preacher uses to again associate these two titles as he completes the turn in his train of thought.

**Read Hebrews 5:5-6.**

Now, although Christ as Son will still be mentioned from time to time (as in v8), the preacher is shifting his focus to Jesus as High Priest.

Vs7-10 give us a picture of the true depth of Christ's experience "in the days of His flesh." The behavior described here is not of the Son in His glorified, heavenly state, but of the dutiful Son in His *human* state.

v7

**Read v7.**

*In the days of His flesh...*

Meditations:

- infinity... "the days of His flesh" ...infinity.
- The second member of the trinity is the only One to go through so many changes. God the Father has always been just that; God the Spirit has always been just that. But God the Son, without losing any of the fullness of His deity,
  - visited earth several times in a pre-incarnate state
  - then came to earth as a human child, experiencing three things (among others) the other two members of the Godhead never have: birth and death, and submission to humans.
  - returned to heaven, glorified as King of kings and Lord of lords, Advocate, head and foundation of the church, Alpha and Omega.
- this was the only time in His existence that His time was measured.

*He offered up both prayers and supplications...*

The preacher purposely uses a technical term of the temple sacrifice here when he says Christ "offered up" prayers and supplications. This ties back to v1.

**Read v1.**

**offer** = *prosphero* = from <G4314> (pros) and <G5342> (phero) (including its alternate); **to bear towards**, i.e. lead to, **tender** (especially to God), treat :- bring (to, unto) deal with, do, offer (unto, up), **present unto**, put to.

So we are to think of His "prayers and supplications" in the same way we think of an earthly priest offering "gifts and sacrifices" at the altar. This is not just Jesus speaking from His heart, but Jesus serving as a priest.

Though we might be forgiven for thinking immediately of Christ's anguish in the garden shortly before His death, this verse does not describe any one event, but speaks to "the totality of His high priestly service" (Lane). This is the behavior of someone dedicated to speaking to God for others, but it is also the behavior of a human being. How did He do it?



*with loud crying and tears...*

At first glance this seems redundant: “loud crying” and “tears.” But it is not.

**loud**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **vehement**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **strong**<sup>KJV</sup> = from <G2479> (ischus); **forcible** (literal or figurative) :- boisterous, **mighty** (-ier), **powerful**, strong (-er, man), valiant.

**crying**<sup>NASB,KJV</sup>, **cries**<sup>NKJV,NIV</sup> = *krauge* = from <G2896> (**krazo** ↓); **an outcry** (in notification, tumult or grief) :- **clamour**, cry (-ing). **krazo** = a primary verb; properly to “**croak**” (as a raven) or **scream**, i.e. (genitive) to call aloud (shriek, exclaim, intreat) :- cry (out).

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.  
(Matthew 27:50)

**tears** = or *dakruon*, *dak'-roo-on*; of uncertain affinity; a tear :- tear; a **teardrop**.

I think we need to subdivide the deep emotion being described here; there are two things going on.  
First, v7 makes it clear that Jesus was praying so earnestly for Himself—

*...to the One able to save Him from death*

This is the phrase that takes us back to Gethsemane. We immediately hear His anguished words just before His arrest.

**Read Mark 14:32-36.**

**Sidebar:** The JFB commentary gives us important clarification on this moment:

There is no intimation in the twenty-second Psalm, or the Gospels that Christ prayed to be saved from the mere act of dying. What He feared was the hiding of the Father's countenance. His holy filial love must rightly have shrunk from this strange and bitterest of trials without the imputation of impatience. To have been passively content at the approach of such a cloud would have been, not faith, but sin. The cup of death He prayed to be freed from was, not corporal, but spiritual death, that is, the (temporary) separation of His human soul from the light of God's countenance.

John MacArthur makes essentially the same point in a different way:

He was not hoping to escape either the cross or the grave. It was for this very purpose that He came to earth. A more accurate translation of Hebrews 5:7 is, “...save Him *out* of death.” Jesus was not asking to be saved from dying but to be saved out of death—that is, to be saved from remaining in death. He was not asking to avoid the cross but to be assured of His resurrection.

But along with praying for Himself, the preacher is also going out of his way to associate Jesus' behavior with that of a priest—who makes these entreaties on behalf of others.

*Albert Barnes:* He wept that he might redeem us; we should weep that our sins were so great as to demand such bitter woes for our salvation. That we had sinned; that our sins caused him such anguish; that he endured for us this bitter conflict, should make us weep. Tear should answer to tear, and sigh respond to sigh, and groan to groan, when we contemplate the sorrows of the Son of God in accomplishing our redemption.

*...and He was heard because of His piety.*

Because in our cynical world the word “piety” has taken on a negative connotation, this is an unfortunate translation in the NASB. Mind you, there is nothing wrong with the word—it is this society that is in the wrong. Piety is a good thing. But the other translations offer better words for our ears today—and the NIV is best.

**piety**<sup>NASB</sup>, **godly fear**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **reverence**<sup>ESV</sup>, **reverent submission**<sup>NIV</sup> = *eulabeia* (yoo-lahb'-ee-ah) = from <G2126> (eulabes); properly **caution**, i.e. (religiously) **reverence** (piety); by implication dread (concrete) :- **fear** (-ed).

Reverent submission—an appropriate, holy fear of God. How arrogant have we become that we, as a society, consider beneath us something Jesus was not ashamed to feel. How did the text in the gospel of Mark end?

“...yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt.”

Later in his sermon the preacher uses the same word but applies it to us.

**Read Hebrews 12:28-29.**

**v8**

**Read v8.**

*Although He was a Son...*

We have a pretty narrow concept of this word “Son.” To us it means the offspring of a father and mother. But to the ancient middle-eastern, this word would have encompassed far more. As D. A. Carson points out, the “son” language in the Bible is incredibly diverse. We think of “son” as being primarily a *biological* distinction, whereas in the ancient world it is more a *functional* distinction. For example, in almost every case a son followed in the vocation of his father; if the father was a baker, the son was a baker. Thus to be a “son” meant that you did what your dad did—you *functioned* in society as your dad. James and John were fishermen because their dad, Zebedee, was a fisherman.

We could pursue this even further, but for our purposes let it suffice that the predominant way Jesus was the “Son” of God—from a human perspective—was that He behaved, He acted, He *functioned* the way God functioned. This does not preclude the biological connection, where it exists, but is just another way the ancient oriental would have thought of it.

John 8 gives us a very good example of this way of thinking of “son.” There is son language peppered throughout this passage.

**Read John 8:31-44a.**

When Jesus declares that they are sons of the devil, He is not suggesting that Satan came down and copulated with their mothers to produce them, He is saying that *they are behaving as if Satan were their father*.

So one way to interpret v8 is that even though Jesus was *functionally* God, this **did not excuse Him** from what He needed to learn through human suffering.

Another way to interpret this verse is that even though He had the *omniscience* of God, it required **the experiential knowledge** of human suffering to fully learn obedience.

**obedience** = from <G5219> (hupakouo); **attentive hearkening, i.e. (by implication) compliance or submission** :- obedience, (make) obedient, obey (-ing).

Jesus was heard (v7) because of His “reverent submission.” Where did He learn this? In “the things which He suffered” (v8).

William Lane points out that

in Hebrews the verb “to suffer” is used only of the passion of Jesus, and takes on the nuance of “to die.” Consequently, in the statement that Jesus “learned obedience from what He suffered,” the term “obedience” has a very specific meaning. It signifies obedience to the call to suffer death in accordance with the revealed will of God. Jesus learned experientially through His passion what obedience entails in order to achieve salvation and to become fully qualified for His office as eternal high priest.

**v9**

**Read v9.**

*Leon Morris:* There is a perfection that results from having actually suffered; it is different from the perfection that is ready to suffer. Innocence differs from virtue.

It is not that Jesus was *imperfect*, then became perfect. He was always perfect, sinless God. So what is he saying here?

The writer of this sermon we call “Hebrews” uses this word translated “made perfect”, or variants of it, with the greatest frequency in the NT—18 times. And each instance must be examined for its contextual meaning. If we trace the path of this word to its source we discover the general meaning of *completeness* or *finish*.

**made perfect, perfected**<sup>NTV</sup> = *teleioo* (tel-ee-ah'-oh) = from <G5046> (*teleios*) ↓; to **complete, i.e. (literal) accomplish**, or (figurative) consummate (in character) :- **consecrate, finish, fulfill**, make) perfect.

*teleios* = from <G5056> (*telos*) ↓; **complete** (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.); neuter (as noun, with <G3588> (ho)) **completeness** :- **of full age**, man, perfect. [illust: marriage]

*telos* = from a primary *tello* (**to set out for a definite point or goal**); properly **the point aimed at as a limit**, i.e. (by implication) **the conclusion of an act or state** (termination [literal, figurative or indefinite], result [immediate, ultimate or prophetic], purpose); specially an impost or levy (as paid) :- + continual, custom, end (-ing), finally, uttermost. Compare <G5411> (*phoros*).

As we have seen earlier in this passage, our context here is cultic—that is, Jesus as high priest. So here we see the word *teleioo* used in the sense of the “perfection” of consecration, sanctification. The human priests could come before God only after they had made a sacrifice of blood, thus consecrating, sanctifying—“perfecting”—themselves for a holy God. In the same way, Jesus during “the time of His flesh” was perfected through suffering (death) so that He could be the source of eternal salvation for His people.

We hear this in His final declaration on the cross in John 19:30:

Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished [*teleo*]!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

What was “finished”—completed, concluded, accomplished—was His consecration as the once and final blood sacrifice for the salvation of

*...all those who obey Him...*

This is not the obedience to commandments, rules and regulations; Jesus died to do away with that. It is the obedience of *faith* (Romans 1:5), of *believing* in the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. (MacArthur)

## v10

And the preacher closes this passage by repeating in his own words the quote from Psalm 110.

### Read v10.

This substantiates the perspective of the passage: Christ as cultic priest. And because of its placement right before v11, we see it as another tease: as he wrote this line he knew his very next would shoot off into a parenthetical interruption about the lack of spiritual maturity in his congregation.

## SESSION 16. HEBREWS 5:11-14

One of the distinctive characteristics of the written and mailed sermon we call Hebrews is the preacher's emphasis on God speaking and our hearing.

**Read...**

**1:1-2**

In a list of OT references in chapter 1 he repeatedly uses the verb "says" or "say":

**1:5,6,7,8,13**

He continues the thought in Chapter 2:

**2:1,2,3**

In v6 he doesn't say, as we might expect, "one has written," but "one has *testified*."

Look at Chapter 3:

**3:5**

And the oft-repeated passage from Psalm 95:

**3:7,15**

**4:7**

In last week's lesson the preacher again emphasizes the audible:

**5:7**

William Lane has pointed this out from the beginning:

**Read Lane, p18 and 84f.**

**v11**

So now, at the beginning of this week's passage, he is still at it:

**Read Hebrews 5:11.**

The preacher has much to **say**, but his congregation is not ready to **hear**.

Before we go any further I should note that among all the resources available to me, only one commentator disagrees with the common—and, to me, obvious—interpretation that this passage is addressed to *immature believers*. That one exception is John MacArthur, who is convinced this passage is addressed to *nonbelievers*. I personally do not see this at all, but I thought I would mention it.

*Concerning him/Him/whom/which...*

For a while I got stuck on whether this is referring to Christ or Melchizedek. (For what it is worth, between the two, the consensus is with Melchizedek.) But I soon realized that the better interpretation is that this is concerning the comparison itself—the discussion as a whole about Christ and Melchizedek. The NIV captures it:

**We have much to say about this,**

**hard to explain** = difficult, even grievous, to translate or interpret

*...you have become dull of hearing.*

**dull** of hearing, **slow** to learn<sup>NIV</sup> = *nothros* (no-thros') = from a derivative of <G3541> (nothos); **sluggish**, i.e. (literal) **lazy**, or (figurative) **stupid** :- **dull, slothful**.

**Read Luke 24:25.**

The word translated "slow of heart" (*bradys* [brad-ooce']) is considered synonymous with our word *nothros* in Hebrews 5:11—but with an important difference, as pointed out by Trench in *Vines*:

...no moral fault or blame is necessarily involved in [*bradys*]. There is a deeper, more inborn sluggishness implied in *nothros*, and this bound up as it were in the very life, more than in either of the words of this group.

*Matthew Henry*: It was not a mere natural infirmity, but it was a sinful infirmity.

Plato calls some students *nōthroi* (stupid).

Here is William Lane's take on this:

**Read Lane, p87, para3.**

I am dwelling on this because it is an obvious and excellent point of application. Here is one of those invaluable moments in Scripture where we must—we *must*—turn the light around and let it shine on ourselves. These people had been taught the gospel, the basics of life in Christ. Moreover, these were religious people—Jews; they were familiar with the law and the prophets. They weren't ignorant barbarians just crawling out of their caves, but sophisticated, educated city folk. As we will see in a moment, by now they should have been teaching others, but they had become slow of thought, thick-headed, dim-witted where it came to spiritual matters.

Permit me to ask some pointed and perhaps uncomfortable questions:

- How long have you been in school, but still can't pass the tests?
- How many years have you been taught, but still leave the teaching to others?
- How many times do you hear a teacher or preacher say something you do not understand—but do not follow up for clarification?
- In other words, is the teaching and reading of decades really sinking in and changing your relationship with God and man—or is it just bouncing off?
- Do you think you are too old to learn more? Or that you are to the point where you now know enough?
- Are you attentive and sharp in temporal things, but still sluggish and dull-witted in the eternal things of God?

The preacher's congregation was not ready to hear and grasp the supernatural intricacies of the relationship Christ the high priest had with the mysterious priest Melchizedek.

## v12

Then he goes into more detail:

**Read vs12-14.**

**by this time** = lit, "because of the time"—i.e., because of the extended time you've sat under instruction...

*you ought to be teachers,*

**ought** = *opheilo* (of-ay'-lo) = or (in certain tenses) its prolonged form *opheileo*, of-i-leh'-o; probably from the base of <G3786> (*ophelos*) (through the idea of accruing); **to owe** (pecuniarily); figurative **to be under obligation** (ought, must, should); morally to fail in duty :- behove, be bound, (be) debt (-or), (be) due (-ty), be guilty (indebted), (must) need (-s), ought, owe, should. See also <G3785> (*ophelon*).

**teachers** = *didaskalos* = from <G1321> (*didasko*); **an instructor** (genitive or special) :- doctor, **master**, teacher; *used of Jesus 41 times in NT.*

*...you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God,*

**again** = they had already heard them before

**teach** = root of word from above

**elementary principles**<sup>NASB</sup>, **first principles**<sup>KJV</sup>, **elementary truths**<sup>NW</sup> = *stoicheion* (stoy-kay'-on) = neuter of a presumed derivative of the base of <G4748> (*stoicheo*); **something orderly in arrangement**, i.e. (by implication) a serial (basal, fundamental, initial) constituent (literal), proposition (figurative) :- element, principle, rudiment; **one of a row, hence a letter (of the alphabet), by ext. the elements (of knowledge).**  
*[we might say, the "ABCs of faith"]*

Regarding our *civic* first principles, the following is from the "Statement of Purpose" from *The Heritage Foundation*:

The future of liberty depends on reclaiming America's first principles. Widespread ignorance of American history is but the most recognized symptom of the troubling decline in popular knowledge of fundamental principles. We face an education system that upholds mediocrity in the name of relativism; an ever-expanding and centralized government,

unmoored from constitutional limits; judges openly making laws and shaping society based on pop-philosophy rather than serious jurisprudence; and growing confusion over America's legitimate role in the world, made all the more apparent by the fundamental threat posed by radical Islamists. At the root of all these problems is a pervasive doubt about the core principles that define America and ought to inform our politics and policy.

Just about everything stated there regarding our *national* situation is true, as well, of our relationship with God:

- Widespread ignorance of [God's word and the history of our faith]
- mediocrity in the name of relativism
- unmoored from [biblical] limits
- [religion] based on pop-philosophy rather than serious [knowledge of God's word]
- growing confusion over [Christianity's] legitimate role in the world
- a pervasive doubt about the core principles that define [our faith] and ought to inform our [behavior and direction]

**oracles of God** = God's utterance; what He says

*...and you have come to need milk and not solid food.*

Babies live on a diet of milk. Adults eat solid food. You should be dining on steak, but you're still on the teat.

### v13

Then the preacher expands on this thought, (mixing his metaphors in the process).

*For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.*

**not accustomed** = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G3984> (peira); **inexperienced, i.e. ignorant :- unskillful; without experience of.**

What does it mean, spiritually, to be on a steady diet of "milk"? It means your digestive system—i.e., your mind, your spirit—cannot handle the tough chewing necessary for the consumption of real meat. Even at the point of intake: Physically, when you go an extended period without chewing, it can actually be painful in the teeth to begin chewing solid food again.

Essentially, the "**word of righteousness**" means the truth—the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—about God and His ways, no matter the medium. But in the context of the Hebrews sermon it takes on an additional importance. Remember that the preacher was addressing people living in tough times—with all the persecution going on, it was a tough time to be a follower of Christ. His sermon, taken as a whole, is a call for them to *endure for God*; the climax of this is Chapter 11, where he chronicles the trials and murder of the saints that have gone before.

"The word of righteousness" became the technical expression in the early church for the teaching that the Christian must never deny his relationship with Christ, even if he must sacrifice his life. As Polycarp, the senior pastor at Smyrna, wrote in the early second century,

I therefore exhort you to carry out the word of righteousness and to practice endurance to the limit... as he then cites the examples of a number of martyrs.

This has its foundation in the words of Jesus that we find in the gospel of Mark.

**Read Mark 8:34-38.**

So in this setting of Hebrews, the expression "word of righteousness" signifies not just faithful instruction, but instruction concerning a willingness to experience martyrdom for Christ. If one is not accustomed to this teaching, then "he is an infant."

**infant, babe**<sup>KJV</sup> = *nepios* (nay'-pee-os) [British, "nappies"] = from an obsolete particle ne- (implying negation) and <G2031> (epos); **not speaking, i.e. an infant** (minor); figurative a **simple-minded person, an immature Christian :- babe, child (+ -ish).**

### v14

And the preacher concludes his thought in v14, contrasting the infant with the mature.

*But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*

Interestingly, the word translated “mature” is the same applied to Christ in last week’s lesson.

**Read v9.** (“made perfect”)

**mature, full age**<sup>KJV</sup> = *teleios* = from <G5056> (*telos*) ↓; **complete** (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.); neuter (as noun, with <G3588> (ho)) **completeness** :- **of full age**, man, perfect. [illustr: marriage]

So here is the comparison:

- The mark of the infant is a diet of milk, resulting in ignorance of the word of righteousness
- The mark of the mature is a diet of solid food, resulting in senses trained to discern good and evil.
- The infant is “not accustomed”—i.e., unskilled.
- The mature “practice”—i.e., they *are* “accustomed to,” skilled with the word of righteousness

**trained, exercised**<sup>KJV</sup> = *gymnazo* (goom-nad'-zo) = from <G1131> (*gumnos*); **to practice or exercise naked (in the games)**, i.e. train (figurative) :- exercise; **discipline**.

**Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.**

**Read 1 Corinthians 2:14-16.**

**appraises**<sup>NASB</sup>, **judg**<sup>\*KJV, NIV</sup> = from <G303> (*ana*) and <G2919> (*krino*); properly **to scrutinize**, i.e. (by implication) **investigate, interrogate**, determine :- ask, question, **discern, examine**, judge, search.

“Discern,” in Hebrews 5:14 is not the same Greek word, but is used essentially the same way. Solid food—the real meat of God’s word—gives us the means to differentiate between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and heresy because it disciplines the senses through repeated practice.



## SESSION 17. HEBREWS 6:1-3

### A CODA

Before we launch into Chapter Six of Hebrews, I have a coda for the end of Chapter Five that we didn't have time for last week. After reading my notes, Pastor Jeremy shared what he thought was the important take-away from the passage.

#### **Read Hebrews 5:13-14.**

*Pastor Kidder:* The only thing I might add is to emphasize how very important it is for us to regularly practice holding all things up to the light of Scripture so that we can see what is good and evil in them. This can be done by discussing a movie after watching it, it can be done by thinking through the issues of our times (is it really a violation of conscience for an employer to subsidize his employees contraceptive and abortion cost, and why?). As Christians we should be building a culture within our midst that regularly discusses and thinks through the theology of all things, so that all things may be done for the glory of Christ. So often we are uncritical of the things we watch and read and see going on around us yet this passage makes it clear that that is a sign of being a baby Christian. The three ingredients necessary for maturity is a knowledge of the word (being "accustomed" to it), and interest and zeal in the matter (not being dull of hearing) and then the regular practice of discerning all things. Sorry to go on and on with this point but it is one that the body (every body) really need's to hear again and again. We can't let others do our thinking and discerning for us. If that is the case we might as well have a pope and magisterium.

### A PARADOX

#### **Read Hebrews 6:1-3.**

Sometimes we come across passages in Scripture that are more opaque than others—and one sign of their opacity is a chorus of conflicting interpretations from established authorities. A red flag may be raised when scholars cannot agree. Then we add into that our *own* reading, counseled by the Holy Spirit. And we may be left with the unsettling conclusion: "I just don't know." Unfortunately, the teacher cannot let it go at that.

Last week I made the mistake of saying that because his congregation was not ready to hear about Christ and Melchizedek, the preacher would need to back up and review the basics with them. I don't know why I said that, because that is not at all what he does. He begins this passage, beginning at 6:1, by stating flat out,

**Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ...**

So we are left wondering "Why?" If the preacher states at the end of Chapter 5 that—

**you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (v12)**

—but then he doesn't do that, instead beginning Chapter Six with

**Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ...**

we have to ask, "Why?"

Then we add into this the seeming paradox of vs1-2, where he speaks of their

**leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ...**

but then relates to this (as something they must leave behind) a list of items he places under the heading of "foundation" that are more pertinent to their former Judaism than Christianity (although there are some parallels to both faiths).

One of the things we discussed last week was, just who are these people? Are they, as John MacArthur claims, **unbelievers**? Are they, as the consensus claims, **immature believers**? Or are they, as William Lane claims, **mature believers who are pretending they are immature**? For this, Lane cites Hebrews 10.

#### **Read Hebrews 10:32-34.**

In other words, the members of this congregation had, in the past, demonstrated behavior that would have shown them to be solid, mature believers.



The preacher already stated (5:12) that these fundamentals had been taught them. They had already been schooled in the “oracles of God”—that is, not just the gospel, but the fundamentals of everything Jehovah had spoken. Based on that, the preacher now encourages them to “press on to maturity,” because, if we are to believe Lane, they already *were* mature! What’s a body to do?

Perhaps one way to approach this is to remember with courageous clarity our own respective walks with Christ. Page back through your Christian journey:

- Was there a time when you were actually a babe in Christ, requiring the “ABCs” of the faith?
- Did you, over time, learn the meatier aspects of the faith, becoming more mature?
- After that, did you ever regress—to the point where an observer might think you were either an unbeliever, or at least a “babe in Christ”? [*“Oh, are you a Christian?”*]

The Christian walk is rarely pursued in a straight line painted only in blacks and whites. It is more often than not a *circuitous* path painted in shades of gray. We can move forward, but then fall back; we can one day demonstrate maturity and understanding, and the next day act like children. Even the venerated apostle Paul, as recorded in Romans 7, can bemoan the fact that he is not traveling in a straight line.

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.  
(Romans 7:19)

The members of the preacher’s congregation, sitting under this long-distance sermon, were being pulled in multiple directions. Their fundamental faith may have been solid, and had, in the past, been so demonstrated by their behavior. But they had been born and raised Jews, under the law, and this would have exerted tremendous force, pulling them back in the direction of Judaism.

Then too, their faith was taking body-blows from the society in which they lived. They were daily suffering alienation, persecution, even torture and death—and we can safely assume from the sermon that not all were handling this well. There would have been tremendous pressure to act the innocent, the uninformed—or even *deny* their Christian faith.

So, once again, let us strive to understand the text from a direct and applicable perspective.

## v1-2

It’s been many years since I’ve gotten in a car to drive across country. In fact, I can’t recall the last time. But I do remember the signs one might see when passing from one state into another. As you approach the state line, you might see a sign stating, “You are now leaving Arizona.” Then you cross the state line and are greeted with another sign stating, “Welcome to New Mexico!”

The preacher to this congregation of Hebrews now encourages each of them, in v1, to do much the same thing regarding their faith.

*Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity...*

**leaving** = *aphiemi* (ah-fee’-ah-mee) from <G575> (apo) and hiemi (to send; an intensive form of eimi, to go); **to send forth**, in various applications (as follow) :- cry, **forgive**, forsake, **lay aside**, leave, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, remit, suffer, yield up.

This word *can* refer to total detachment from something. It is often translated “forgive” because when God forgives us He absolutely “sends or puts away” our sins; they are utterly forgotten. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians in speaking of a man divorcing his wife; divorce is a complete abandonment of the marriage relationship.

But here the preacher says to his congregation—as Robertson translates it—“Let us cease to speak of the first principles of Messiah.”

**elementary** = *arche* = from <G756> (archomai); (properly abstract) **a commencement**, or (concrete) chief (in various applications of order, time, place or rank) :- **beginning**, corner, (at the, the) first (estate), magistrate, power, principality, principle, rule.

**teaching(s)**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **principles**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **doctrine**<sup>KJV</sup> = *logos*.

elementary teaching = lit., “word of the beginning”

The preacher is not telling them to forget or dissociate themselves from the basics of Christianity. When we leave Arizona and move into New Mexico, we don’t forget all the wonderful sights we saw in Arizona. We don’t forget the breathtaking grandeur of the Grand Canyon; we are just moving on to *new* sights in New Mexico.

*Matthew Henry*: Here observe, In order to their growth, Christians must leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ. How must they leave them? They must not lose them, they must not despise them, they must not forget them. They must lay them up in their hearts, and lay them as the foundation of all their profession and expectation; but they must not rest and stay in them, they must not be always laying the foundation, they must go on, and build upon it. There must be a superstructure; for the foundation is laid on purpose to support the building.

And that’s just the metaphor the preacher uses.

*not laying again a foundation...*

The foundation of their faith had been laid. It is important—indeed, vital—but it is not where we are to *live*. It can be frustrating and maddening to sit under a preacher who, week after week, delivers an evangelistic sermon designed to win new believers. At some point you say, “All right already. I got it. I need to move on to the deeper stuff. I need steak and you keep getting out the bottle!” Instead we are to...

*press on to maturity*

**press** on = *phero* = a primary verb (for which other and apparently not cognate ones are used in certain tenses only; namely, oio, oy’-o; and enegko, en-eng’-ko); **to “bear” or carry** (in a very wide application, literal and figurative, as follows) :- be, bear, bring (forth), carry, come, + let her drive, be driven, endure, **go on**, lay, lead, **move**, reach, rushing, uphold.

**maturity**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **perfection**<sup>KJV</sup> = *teleiotes* (tel-a-aw’-tace) = from <G5046> (teleios); (the state) **completeness** (mental or moral) :- perfection (-ness).

How does the Christian press on? By letting go:

- by letting go of the past to make way for the future (maturity)
- by letting go of human effort and permitting the Spirit of God to work in his life

*...not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.*

Then beginning at the end of v1 and into v2 he itemizes some of the basics they should be moving on from—that is, these are the essentials that are necessary for the foundation of faith, but once that foundation has been laid, it is now time to *build* on it. These basics include:

### **repentance from dead works and faith toward God**

(i.e., our relationship with **God**)

Repentance is just the door cracking open onto salvation; our relationship with God goes nowhere without true faith, trust in Him.

### **instruction about washings (baptisms) and laying on of hands**

(i.e., our relationship with the **church**)

The word is *baptismos*, and in the plural, as here, usually refers to the ceremonial temple ablutions.

**Read Hebrews 9:8-10.** Here the same word is translated “washings” by all the versions. So the versions that translate this “baptisms” in Hebrews 6 are assuming it refers more to the Christian faith, instead of the baptism employed by Jews for converts.

These two represent the fundamentals of community in the house of God.

*...the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.*

(i.e., our relationship with the **future**)

Part of what we learn when just a babe in the faith is about death and heaven and God's judgment of both unbelievers and believers. These, like the preceding, represent the basics of faith—things that we are to accept as fundamental truth. But we are not to get stuck there. Our thinking should *not* be

*Tell me again about baptism and the resurrection of the dead.*

but,

*In light of these truths, how am I now to live and grow in Christ?*

The Hebrews cannot “press on to maturity” in Christ until they let go of the old ways of Judaism and quit rehashing the fundamentals of the new faith.

**v3**

Notice the grace of the preacher. In v1 he begins, “let **us** press on” and in v3 he closes this point with,

**And this we will do, if God permits.**

The “we” expresses not just the preacher's desire to teach them, but expresses his association *with* them.

Real spiritual maturity is not the result of human effort.

**Read Philippians 2:12-13.**

**Read John 15:1-5.**

Let's close by reading the apostle Paul's take on this. It has a slightly different basis, but is a very similar appeal to that which we find in Hebrews 6.

**Read Philippians 3:7-15a.**

## SESSION 18. HEBREWS 6:4-8

### DOGMATISM (OR LACK THEREOF)

It occurred to me this week what an odd relationship the average believer has with established commentators. For example, where is the dividing line (if there is one) between respecting scholarship and respecting the work of the Holy Spirit in each Christian? We evangelicals do believe, after all, in the “sainthood of the believer”—that everyone with the indwelling Spirit is capable of hearing God’s voice in Scripture by means of the illumination of the Spirit. At the same time we must acknowledge that some among us have studied longer and harder—and perhaps even *prayed* harder—to come to a deeper understanding of God’s written word.

A common method for preparing to teach a passage is to, first, dig into the text for oneself, examining, ferreting out word meanings and structure, then, second, comparing one’s interpretation with established and well-respected commentators—to check, for one thing, if one is way off in left field or not. This is a pretty straightforward process when commentators are in general agreement—or if only one of them, for example, is way off in left field himself. But what is one to do when a passage is so challenging for the teacher that there is a far greater dependency on published scholars—*yet each one of them has virtually a unique interpretation?*

Never, in all my studies, have I come across so many different interpretations for a passage of Scripture—and all these from established, respected scholars. My first conclusion was that, based on the Spirit’s counsel to my own mind, I was going to have to choose one. My second conclusion was that no matter which interpretation I chose, I could not be dogmatic about the position, but only make the case as I see it.

### THREE POSITIONS

First, let’s read our passage, beginning at v1.

**Read Hebrews 6:1-8.**

With minor variations within each camp, there are essentially three positions where it comes to establishing who the preacher is addressing in, specifically, Hebrews 6:4-8, but also the broader scope that includes 6:1-3, and even 5:11-14. This is important because knowing the audience is essential to correctly interpreting what they are told.

Those three positions for vs4-8 are

- **Christians:** real believers who have committed apostasy;
- **Non-Christians:** those well-versed in the gospel and doctrine, but not real believers, who then, ultimately reject Christ;
- **Hypothetical:** this is a hypothetical case study used by the preacher to make a point.

One way the Spirit helps us understand God’s word—especially when there seems to be multiple interpretations of a passage—is with the “But what about...?” method. For example, when I was reading the explanations of commentators espousing the “Christians” position, my response was, “Hmmm... I can see that. But what about...?” This was also my response to the explanations for the “Non-Christians” position.

But after reading several versions of the “Hypothetical” position, there was no “But what about...?” (In fact, the Hypothetical position seemed to clarify earlier passages for which I had a lingering “queasy gizzard.”) Now, this is not always definitive, not always conclusive, for it still depends on the individual’s knowledge of doctrine and *other* passages of Scripture. But it is one way the Spirit may give us counsel regarding a challenging passage. Sometimes when we weigh the various interpretations, one way rises to the top and just seems to make sense.

Thus the position that makes the most sense to me is the Hypothetical. So we are going to approach this important passage with that in mind.

## MARKERS

We have several “markers” that buttress the position that the preacher’s argument in vs4-8, even if not hypothetical, at least refers to those *outside* his congregation.

- I am grateful to Thomas Hewitt, in his commentary on Hebrews for the *Tyndale* series, for pointing out the change in pronouns that takes place from vs1-3 to vs4-8. Note in the first passage,
  - v1: let **us** press on...
  - v3: and this **we** will do...
  - v4: in the case of **those** who...
  - v6: impossible to renew **them**... and since **they** again
- Notice the critical v9—not just the change back to more personal pronouns, but what he says immediately after laying out this hypothetical illustration about “them”:

**Read v9.**

## WHY?

One of the advantages to the Hypothetical position is that it is not so dependant on the audience being of a certain type. Although this interpretation is more effective if those in the hypothetical *are* Christians, it is not necessary to determine whether the preacher’s *actual* audience is comprised of believers or non-believers, for the warning and admonition applies to both.

But we still need to discover *why* the preacher needed to use this hypothetical illustration. We find clues to that in the preceding verses. Let’s back up and review our context. At least some in his long-distance congregation

v5:11 – had become dull of hearing

v5:12 – by now should be teachers, but still needed to review the basics of faith

vs5:13-14 – were still drinking milk (immature), when they should have been feasting on meat (mature)

So their spiritual growth was stunted, and the beginning of Chapter 6 offers clues to how this was being manifested.

**Read Hebrews 6:1-2.**

The members of this church were being regularly persecuted for being Christians. Even if some in their midst were not true believers, they would be considered guilty by association. This would have exerted tremendous pressure on them to return to Judaism. So there were *external forces* giving them reason to consider a return to their old faith.

Then there would have been the *internal* forces. Try to put yourself in their shoes: born and raised under the law, now living under the grace of Christ. This would have been a real culture shock, and many would have been reluctant to leave the past entirely. So, as we found in our study of Galatians, where some felt they still needed to be circumcised to be good Christians, some in this congregation were trying to add back into their Christian faith some elements of Judaism.

Think about someone today born and raised a catholic for thirty, forty years, someone accustomed, for example, to regularly confessing their sins and failures to a local priest. That would be ingrained in them. Even if they subsequently became a protestant, at least for a while they would have a hard time accepting that they no longer needed to confess their sins to a human priest, but could go to their *heavenly* Father on their own.

It would have been very hard for these Jews to, seemingly overnight, leave behind entirely all elements of their old faith. And what was central to their Jewish faith? The temple sacrifices. Imagine how difficult it would have been for them to accept the central tenet of their new Christian faith—the once and final sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross as atonement not just for the sins of their past, *but the sins of their present and future!* They grew up with the priests *repeatedly* making sacrifices for sins, over and over again, until the blood flowed like a river. Now they are trying to accept the doctrine that *no more sacrifice was needed*.

And this supposition is substantiated by the preacher's arguments in subsequent chapters—specifically chapters 9 to 10:18. There he goes into detail, making the case that Christ's *one* sacrifice is sufficient.

With that in mind, we're now ready to dig into vs4-8. [\[And this we will do, if God permits.\]](#)

#### vs4-6

The preacher sets forth a list of conditions. For those who have determined that this passage describes those who are *Christians*, each of the key words can be interpreted to support that. For those who believe this is addressed to *non-Christians*, they can also be accurately interpreted to support *that*. This is one of the reasons for the disparate views.

*For in the case of those who have once been enlightened*

**enlightened** = *photizo* = from <G5457> (phos); to shed rays, i.e. to shine or (transitive) to brighten up (literal or figurative)  
:- enlighten, illuminate, (bring to, give) light, make to see.

*and have tasted of the heavenly gift*

**tasted** (2) = *geuomai* (goo'-oh-my) = a primary verb; to taste; by implication to eat; figurative to experience (good or ill)  
:- eat, taste.

Here is a perfect example of the dichotomy inherent in this passage. When we looked at **Hebrews 2:9 (read)**, I pointed out that the word taste in that context meant "to know fully by experience." At the cross Jesus did not just *sample* death; He experienced it fully.

But the same Greek word, *geuomai*, is also used in Matthew 27:34.

**Read Matthew 27:33-34.**

Jesus tasted the wine and *rejected* it.

"Heavenly gift" means nothing more nor less than just that: a *gift* that comes *from above the sky*. Some have conjectured it refers to the Spirit—but why, then, would explicitly mention the Holy Spirit later? Some think it may refer to baptism, or communion—but we really don't know.

*and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,*

**partakers** = *met'-ochos* = from <G3348> (metecho); participant, i.e. (as noun) a sharer; by implication an associate :- fellow, partaker, partner.

Those in the "Christian" camp point to this as conclusive evidence for the writer of Hebrews addressing true believers. But Wayne Grudem points out that

It is not always clear to English-speaking readers that this term has a range of meaning and may imply very close participation and attachment, or may only imply a loose association with the other person or persons named.

So this could mean an indwelling in the believer—or simply be referring to someone who has been in general proximity to the work of the Spirit in real believers.

*and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,*

Same word for "taste."

"Good word" here is not the word for gospel or logos, but *kalos rhema*:

**good** = *kalos* = of uncertain affinity; properly **beautiful**, but chiefly (figurative) **good (literal or moral), i.e. valuable or virtuous** (for appearance or use, and thus distinguished from <G18> (agathos), which is properly intrinsic) :- × better, fair, good (-ly), honest, meet, well, worthy.

**word** = *rhema* = from <G4483> (rheo); **an utterance** (individual, collective or special); by implication **a matter or topic** (especially of narration, command or dispute); with a negative naught whatever :- + evil, + nothing, saying, word.

So this could refer to fully experiencing (i.e., placing faith in) the inspired word of God—or just sampling the preacher’s sermons and finding them pleasing to the ear (“Doesn’t he speak well!”). The “powers of the age to come” could refer to ultimate resurrection for the believer, the indwelling Spirit giving power over temptation and sin, or it could refer to supernatural gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues.

*and then have fallen away,*

Now, for the Hypothetical position to work best, we should assume that the foregoing described a true Christian. But precisely *because* it is hypothetical, we need not spend hours debating whether or not a true Christian can become apostate—fall away from the faith.

**fallen away** = *parapipto* = from <G3844> (para) and <G4098> (pipto); **to fall aside, i.e. (figurative) to apostatize** :- fall away.

What the preacher is saying is, *if this could happen*, it would be impossible

*to renew [or restore] them again to repentance*

There is no going back. Why?

Let’s back up for a moment. What does it mean, in both spiritual and practical terms, that you, a Jew who has converted to Christianity, just can’t get past this business of Christ’s death on the cross being the once and final atonement for sin. You struggle so with the concept that you keep

**laying again a foundation of repentance (v1)**

You keep returning to the fundamentals of the faith—and there is nothing more fundamental to Christianity than Christ’s atoning death. The Hypothetical position assumes that you *are* a true believer, but you are entertaining the possibility that—just like in Judaism—*Christ must die again and again!* Those who think this way

**again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. (v6)**

This is apostasy, and disgraces the Son of God, trivializing the sacrifice and death He *did* make. If a true Christian could fall away to the point that they believed this, there is no going back for them.

“If... could.” That doesn’t make it so in the congregation; it just illustrates for them how foolhardy it is to remain stuck on these fundamentals.

*Pastor Jeremy:* What is keeping the preacher’s hearers from pressing on is their belief that they can lose their salvation and thus their constant re-salvation (they keep laying a foundation of faith and repentance over and over again) they cannot move on beyond that because they assume the New Covenant is like the Old, you need a new sacrifice for new sins. Thus the Preacher for the moment enters into their view to demonstrate that if one could lose his salvation that he would never again be able to regain it. If the sacrifice of Christ was not good enough for you the first time round it will not be the second time.

## **vs7-8**

The preacher reinforces his point with an agricultural illustration.

**Read vs7-8.**

**Read Genesis 1:11-12.**

Two plots of ground, side by side. Both receive blessings from above in the form of rain. One plot receives and embraces what comes from God, and thrives. The other plot receives the same thing, but does not embrace, but ultimately rejects the blessings. As a result,

**it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.**

**Read Genesis 3:17-19.**

Adam and Eve rejected the blessings, and there was no going back. They were shut out of the Garden. From that point on the ground of this earth has been cursed.



## SESSION 19. HEBREWS 6:9-12

Last week we made the case for verses 4-8 of chapter six being not a description of the preacher's congregation, but a hypothetical illustration presented to drive home a point. As was shown in the handout last week, one of the predominant themes of this sermon we call "Hebrews" is for those in its hearing to remain committed, to hang in there during tough times. During this time of persecution the members of this church had many reasons to get wobbly on Christian doctrine.

In the preceding passages, the pastor has mentioned that their growth/maturity in the faith has been stunted because of their unwillingness to move beyond the basics. They keep revisiting the ABCs of life in Christ—perhaps even mixing back into it elements of their *old* faith, Judaism. He presents verses 4-8 to illustrate the folly and futility of this—how, if that path were played out in earnest to the end, they would be dangerously chipping away at the very primal roots of Christianity: that is, believer's sanctification through the once and final sacrifice of Christ to atone for the sins of those who place their trust in Him.

And in our next passage the preacher emphasizes again this thread of commitment, of diligence.

### **Read Hebrews 6:9-12.**

v9

The preacher is "convinced," he is "persuaded" that what he has just described in his hypothetical illustration does not describe most of those in his flock.

v9 NIV: Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation.

William Lane translates this:

But even though we speak like this, dear friends, in your case we remain sure of the better things which accompany your salvation.

**convinced**<sup>NASB</sup>, **confident**<sup>NKJV, NIV</sup>, **persuaded**<sup>KJV</sup>, **feel sure**<sup>ESV</sup> = *peitho* (pay'-tho) = a primary verb; **to convince (by argument, true or false)**; by analogy to pacify or conciliate (by other fair means); reflexive or passive to assent (to evidence or authority), to rely (by inward certainty) :- agree, assure, believe, have confidence, be (wax) confident, make friend, obey, persuade, trust, yield.

...and things that accompany salvation,

**accompany, belong to**<sup>ESV</sup> = *echo* = a primary verb; **to hold** (used in very various applications, literal or figurative, direct or remote; such as **possession, ability, contiguity, relation or condition**) :- be (able, x hold, possessed with), accompany, + begin to amend, can (+ -not), x conceive, count, diseased, do, + eat, + enjoy, + fear, following, have, hold, keep, + lack, + go to law, lie, + must needs, + of necessity, + need, next, + recover, + reign, + rest, return, x sick, take for, + tremble, + uncircumcised, use; a common Greek idiom meaning to hold one's self to a person or thing; hence to be closely joined to it (Vincent).

In the *next* passage that we will study, the writer emphasizes the promise and hope we have in Christ, and he uses the same word (*echo*) in a way that helps us understand its meaning.

### **Read Hebrews 6:19.**

This **hope** (*echo*) is "an anchor of the soul." This really expresses the idea of *attachment* in this word.

C. H. Spurgeon: Before we begin, let us just make this caution. When the Apostle speaks of virtues and of Graces, he calls them "things that *accompany* salvation," not things which *cause* it. Our faith does not cause Salvation, nor our hope, nor our love, nor our good works. They are things which attend it as its guard of honor. The origin of Salvation lies alone in the Sovereign will of God the Father—in the infinite efficacy of the blood of Jesus—God the Son—and in the Divine influence of God the Holy Spirit. There are, however, "things that accompany salvation."

## v10

And in vs10-12 the writer discusses some of “the things that accompany salvation” in his congregation. And it hearkens back to something Jesus said—albeit in the negative.

**Read Matthew 7:15-20.**

Some of the things that accompany our salvation are our “fruits”—those things we bear, or produce, as a result of our salvation. And now the preacher assures his flock that they have been producing good fruit. How can the preacher say what he did in v9? Because of this church’s demonstration of faith in the past.

**Read v10.**

The preacher assures them that their “work and the love which [they] have shown” is certainly evidence that they have *not* “fallen away” (v6).

**Sidebar:** One thing leaped out at me in this verse.

**Question:** To whom is this work and love directed?

It does not say, *your work and the love which you have shown to the saints*. The “saints” may be the temporal beneficiaries of our work, but ultimately we do it not for them, but for God.

This is what Paul expressed in Romans 12.

**Read Romans 12:1.**

The engine of our service is our devotion to God; fraught with peril is service performed strictly on the horizontal plane. The saints can let us down; they can be ungrateful, or forget what we do, but...

*God is not unjust so as to forget...*

**unjust** = *adikos* (ad'-ee-kahs) = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G1349> (dike); unjust; by extension **wicked**; by implication treacherous; **specially heathen** :- unjust, unrighteous.

God does not behave as a pagan God, a tyrant, wicked and ungrateful. He is righteous, and makes note of...

*your work and the love which you have shown toward His name...*

**NIV:** ...he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

**work** = *ergon* / **love** = *agape* / **name** = all of God

**Sidebar:** Virtually all scholars agree that “labor of” should not modify “love”—as in the *KJVS*—since it was not present in earlier manuscripts. Most agree that it crept into *later* manuscripts because of the influence of 1 Thessalonians 1:3, where Paul writes that he gives thanks for their “work of faith and labor of love.” But the writer to the *Hebrews* says that God is mindful of their *love*—not their labor of love.

*Spurgeon:* For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister. If you have proven by your works that the Grace of God is within you, God will not forget you. He will not leave you, He will not cast you away. You know the contrast in the speech between different persons concerning this doctrine. One will wickedly say, “If I am a child of God, I may live as I like.” That is damnable doctrine! Another will say, “If I am a child of God, I shall not want to live as I like, but as God likes, and I shall be led by the Grace of God into the path of holiness! And through Divine Grace I shall persevere in that way of holiness right to the end.” That is quite another doctrine and it is the true teaching of the Word of God.

**ministered** = *diakoneo* = from <G1249> (*diakonos*); **to be an attendant, i.e. wait upon** (menially or as a host, friend or [figurative] teacher); techn. to act as a Christian deacon :- (ad-) minister (unto), serve, **use the office of a deacon**.

The **NIV** “helped” is a little too thin a translation of *diakoneo*.

Let’s read the passage that describes in better detail what he refers to here.

**Read Hebrews 10:32-34.**

## v11

### Read v11.

**desire, want**<sup>NIV</sup> = *epithumeo* = from <G1909> (epi) and <G2372> (*thumos*) ↓; **to set the heart upon, i.e. long for** (rightfully or otherwise) :- covet, desire, would fain, lust (after).

*thumos* = from <G2380> (thuo); **passion (as if breathing hard) :- fierceness**, indignation, wrath. Compare <G5590> (*psuche*). Again, the <sup>NIV</sup> is thin.

**each one** = every person

**diligence** = *spoude* = from <G4692> (speudo); “speed”, i.e. (by implication) despatch, **eagerness, earnestness** :- business, (earnest) care (-fulness), diligence, forwardness, haste.

**full assurance** = entire confidence

“Hope,” here, is not the Greek *echo* we saw in 6:19, but the customary word to describe the faith-grounded confidence believers enjoy.

**hope** = *elpis* (el-peace') = from a primary *elpo* (to anticipate, usually with pleasure); **expectation** (abstract or concrete) **or confidence** :- **faith**, hope.

The pastor earnestly, *passionately*, desires that every last person in his congregation—even though compassed about with persecution—will remain actively strong in his or her faith to the very end. This revisits something similar he stated earlier, in Chapter 3.

### Read Hebrews 3:5-6.

We demonstrate we *are* of Christ's house when “we hold fast our confidence” to the end.

## v12

The writer of a mystery novel will artfully *foreshadow* events that will occur later in the story. He will drop hints early on that point to plot turns that will happen later. And that is what the preacher does in his sermon. In v12, and the passage that immediately follows, he foreshadows something on which he will later expound at greater length—especially in Chapter 11. But here he just teases it.

### Read v11-12.

My usual first choice for extra-curricular reading material is not the novel, but the biography. Not only do I enjoy reading history, but by reading biographies of great men and women I am unfailingly inspired to imitate in my own life the better qualities from theirs. In this, reading the lives of such figures as Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Edward R. Murrow, Queen Victoria, John Adams, becomes not just entertaining escapism, but a process that can, potentially, make a positive contribution to character.

And this is what the preacher sets up in v12. He begins by contrasting this process of imitating greatness with the flip-side: becoming “sluggish” in faith. We have looked at this word before; in Chapter 5 it was translated (in the NASB) “**dull** of hearing.”

### Read Hebrews 5:11.

**dull** of hearing, **slow** to learn<sup>NIV</sup> = *nothros* (no-thros') = from a derivative of <G3541> (nothos); **sluggish**, i.e. (literal) **lazy**, or (figurative) **stupid** :- **dull, slothful**.

Here the same word is translated “sluggish,” “slothful” (KJV), “lazy” (NIV).

Reading vs11-12 as a progression of steps from point A to point B to point C doesn't work very well. That is, it doesn't make good sense to interpret the structure as:

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence

Why?

so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

Why?

so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

But here is the structure that seems to make better sense:

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence

Why?

so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end—

so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

In other words, v12 *reinforces and expands* the counsel of v11b.

Why are we to be diligent?

- So we realize (and enjoy) the full assurance of hope we have in Christ
- So that our faith will not become dull and listless, but be energized by the example of the greats who came before.

**imitate** = *mimetes* (mim-ay-tace') = from <G3401> (mimeomai); an imitator :- follower.

Let's close by looking at where Paul uses this same word.

**Turn please to 1 Corinthians 10.**

**Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-6.**

This is the negative example, and it is true that we can learn *not* to make mistakes by reading about those who did. But the positive example is better:

**Read 1 Corinthians 11:1.**

There is the healthier pattern: We learn from the lives of those who have demonstrated faithfulness toward God. But ultimately these are, admittedly, imperfect human beings. We can imitate their better qualities, but must remain resolute not to imitate their *lesser* qualities—and it takes discernment, sometimes, to know the difference.

Therefore our supreme example to imitate is Christ Himself. With Him we need not concern ourselves with gleaning the good from the bad, for it is *all* good. This Paul expressed in Ephesians 5.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

(See the chart on the next page.)

## SESSION 20. HEBREWS 6:13-20

### PREFACE

In vs 11-12 of Chapter six, the preacher expresses his passionate desire for every person in his long-distance congregation to have the kind of faith that endures to the end.

**Read Hebrews 6:11-12.**

Let us be clear about what he is—and is *not*—saying:

**not** grit your teeth, tough it out, prove your worthiness for the promises by your efforts;

**but** have and exhibit in your life true faith that *will* inherit the promises.

He wants them to imitate the “faith and patience” of not just some in their midst (though he may have some of them in mind), but the ancient saints who lived like this. He wants them to imitate—to live like—those who inherited the promises of God by means of two things: **faith** and **patience**.

### *faith and patience*

The second is the result of the first. There is no “patience”—longsuffering, fortitude—without “faith.”

**faith** = *pistis* = from <G3982> (peitho); **persuasion**, i.e. credence; **moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher)**, especially **reliance upon Christ for salvation**; abstract **constancy in such profession**; by extensive the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself :- assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.

Not by toughing it out in the flesh, but by *faith*—reliance upon the truth of God in Christ—be diligent and thus “inherit the promises.”

### vs13-14

Now we come to our next passage, where the preacher offers an example from the past of what he is talking about: the revered Abraham.

**Read Hebrews 6:13-20.**

### SIDEBAR: THE PROMISE

It is fascinating to watch the Spirit of God at work in a study of His word. Just moments after realizing that the length of this passage would discourage much time spent on minutia, I was struck by the presence—and meaning—of one three-letter word in the first sentence!

**For when God made the promise to Abraham...**

In truth, Jehovah God made several promises to Abram/Abraham:

- that he would have many descendants—numbered as the stars, as the “dust of the earth”
- that he would be the father of *many* nations
- that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan—and beyond
- that Sarah would bear a son named Isaac

Thus one would imagine that v13 would begin “When God made the *promises* to Abraham...”, even “the *many* promises.” But no, it is “the promise.” As if there were just one. Why?

**Turn please to Genesis 15.**


Just after the war of the kings, and Abram’s introduction to the mysterious king/priest Melchizedek, God took him aside and promised him that his rightful heir would *not* be his servant Eliezer, but that he would have a son from his own body. And then we have this most remarkable statement:

**Read Genesis 15:6.**

Now the NIV and ESV let down the team a little on this—and admittedly it is a fine point; my point is not to quibble over translations, but to use the inclusion of a word in some of the translations to buttress an important truth

# HEBREWS

## BE COMMITTED! HANG IN THERE! PERSEVERE!

<b>2:1-3</b>	(esp. v1)	so we do not drift away; if we ignore such a great salvation*
<b>3:1-6</b>	(esp. vs1 & 6)	fix your thoughts on Jesus; if we hold on to our courage and hope
<b>3:7-8</b>		do not harden your hearts
<b>3:12-15</b>		see to it that none of you...turns away from the living God; hold firmly to the end
<b>4:1</b>		be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short
<b>4:6-7</b>		do not harden your hearts
<b>4:11</b>		make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall
<b>4:14</b>		let us hold firmly to the faith
<b>5:11-14</b>		you are slow to learn
<b>6:1-12</b>	(esp. vs1 & 11-12)	go on to maturity; show this same diligence; we do not want you to become lazy
<b>10:19-25</b>	(esp. vs22-23)	let us draw near to God; Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess
<b>10:35-39</b>		do not throw away your confidence; you need to persevere
<b>12:1-13</b>	(esp. vs1-3,7,12)	let us run with perseverance; endure hardship; strengthen [yourself]
<b>12:14-17</b>	 <b>More-specific Exhortations</b>	live in peace and be holy; see to it that no one misses the grace of God
<b>12:25</b>		see to it that you do not refuse him who speaks
<b>12:28-29</b>		be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe
<b>13:1-9</b>		[love] each other; remember those in prison; honor marriage; be content
<b>13:15-19</b>		continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise; do good, share with others
<b>13:22</b>		bear with my word of exhortation

\* and following, from the NIV

about Abraham's faith. But the NASB and KJV, as well as YLT, include another small word: "in": Abram "believed **in** the Lord." The difference? It is one thing to believe just one thing the Lord says to you—*You will have a son, Abram, from your own loins*. Even after believing that, the next promise could come along and your response might be, *Well, I believed You on the last one, but this one seems a bit farfetched*.

Abram did not just believe one or more promises made to him by Jehovah, He believed **in** the Lord—the person of the Lord, the entirety of His being, no matter *what* He did with his life. Put another way, it is the difference between simple belief or assent, and true faith—placing one's unequivocal trust in Almighty God. Abraham did not just believe that God would *do* one thing or another; he believed that *God was God!*, and as such had full and unrestricted sovereignty over him.

This is the kind of faith that God rewarded in a most astonishing way: "He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

The point is this: Abraham's faith was such a reliable template for imitation (Hebrews 6:12) because he didn't just believe God would keep a particular promise to him, but from the very beginning of their relationship he placed everything he was in trust to the Lord.

### **Back to Hebrews 6.**

This is why, I believe, the writer of Hebrews employed the definite article "the" in v13, v15, and v18 ("the hope"). There is, for every one of us, really just one foundational promise and hope: that the Lord *is* God, and as such He is due not just our belief, but our very will and unfiltered devotion.

So over the many years of their relationship, God made a number of promises to Abraham. Though the quotation in v14 refers back to a specific occasion—God's call to Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac—the passage as a whole refers to the "faith and patience" the patriarch exhibited over a span of 100 years. [\[answered God's call at 75, died at 175\]](#)

Let's look at the background for vs13-14.

### **Keep your finger in Hebrews 6, but turn please to Genesis 22.**

Here we have the familiar story of God's testing, or *proving*, of Abraham by the command that he offer his own son as a burnt offering at Mount Moriah. And just as an aside, don't forget to inject into this story the humanity and pain that is not related in the printed narrative (v2 to 3)...

Let's pick up the story at its climax.

#### **Read Genesis 22:9-14.**

**The Lord will Provide** = Jehovah-jireh

And the "**angel of the Lord**" = preincarnate Christ, There are at least two clues for this:

v11: the "angel of the Lord" said, "...you have not withheld your son from *Me*."

v15-19: lack of single quotes ( ' ' )

But for our purposes, v16 is the phrase quoted in Hebrews 6:

#### **Read vs15-16a.**

### **Back to Hebrews.**

#### **vs16-17**

Human beings swear with their hand on the Bible, or they swear by the honor of a forbear—that is, something greater than oneself. God cannot do that, because there is no one or no thing greater than Himself. So all He can do is swear by Himself. The preacher explains v13 in the parenthetical vs16-17.

## Read vs16-17.

**interposed**<sup>NASB</sup>, **confirmed** = from <G3316> (mesites); **to interpose (as arbiter)**, i.e. (by implication) **to ratify (as surety)**  
:- confirm.

God said, *I'm going the extra mile on this because I want you to be thoroughly convinced of my veracity.*

*William Lane:* The divine oath is an expression of the intensity of God's speaking. It signifies the extent to which God commits Himself to His spoken word. God's oath solemnly guarantees that he will fulfill His promises and that His word is truth.

## v15

### Now back up to v15.

Remember, the preacher closed the previous passage with a call for those in his congregation to become

**imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

And v15 is the tie-in, connecting the two passages.

### Read v15.

After Christ, Abraham is the perfect example of someone to imitate, because he patiently waited (at least 25 years) for the fulfillment of God's promise of a son and he obtained it. God kept His word. More than that (since "promise" is in the singular), God kept *the* promise that Abraham never really witnessed on earth. It was only fulfilled in glory, when God kept His word that He had many years before declared Abraham "righteous."

## v17-18

I want to bring out a little more from v17. Note that God,

*desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise...*

The promise was not just for Abraham; it was not just for his blood kin. The promise was even for those hearing this sermon for the first time *and* for everyone sitting in this room.

### Read Galatians 3:26-29.

**immutability** = unchangeableness

**counsel** = purpose

God does not change—His counsel, His purpose, stands—nor does He lie (v18).

### Read Isaiah 46:9-11.

### Read Numbers 23:19.

*...so that by two unchangeable things...*

*John MacArthur:* The two unchangeable things are God's promise and His pledge, His promise and His oath. They are immutable, without a possibility of change or variance. The term *ametathetos* (am-et-ath'-et-os), translated "immutable" or "unchangeable," was used in relation to wills. Once properly made, a will was *ametathetos*, unchangeable by anyone but the maker. God has declared His promise and His pledge to be *ametathetos* even by Himself. They cannot be turned around or altered. "You're secure," He says. "Come to Christ; there's nothing to fear. I'll hold you; I'll never let go of you." Our security is not in our never letting go of God, but in His never letting go of us.

*...so that by two unchangeable things...we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.*

God's promise and His oath give us confidence to claim the hope by which we live.



v19-20

**Read v19-20.**



## SESSION 21. HEBREWS 7:1-3

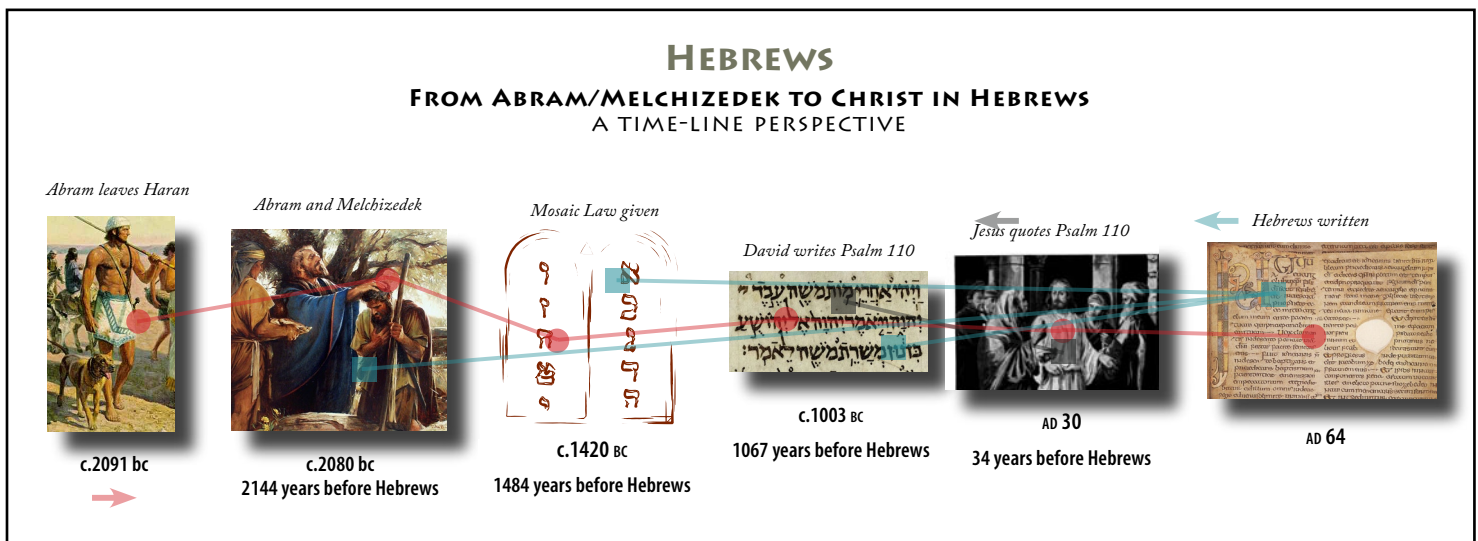
### PREFACE

The deeper I dig into this book we call “Hebrews” the more respect I have for its author. His insight into the history of the Jews, the giving of the law, the events surrounding Abraham, Moses, David, and the interplay between them and the Son of God is—without hyperbole—simply breathtaking, staggering. I never sampled LSD in my youth, but I can imagine its effect, because this portion of Hebrews is nothing less than mind-blowing.

In this next chapter the preacher raises issues that have never been discussed before anywhere in Scripture. This is new teaching. He shines a light on an aspect of Christ Jesus that have never been illumined before. And beyond that, he makes his point by linking together critical historical elements that span more than 2,110 years. It is all truly astonishing.

J. R. R. Tolkien once said that the first step to writing a story is to draw a map. And invariably the first step in understanding a portion of God’s word is to get one’s historical bearings; this is especially important for a study of Hebrews 7.

See the chart below.



The key to understanding not just Chapter 7, but much of the letter and sermon we call “Hebrews,” is to keep in mind the flow of history, the sequence in which critical events in God’s word occurred. Note that the older the date, the more approximate—and possibly disputed—it is.

- The earliest of the events key to our study is the meeting between Melchizedek and Abram. Abram was called out of Haran **c.2091 bc**. The meeting with Melchizedek took place after Lot and Abram go their separate ways, **c.2080 bc**.—approximately **2144 years before the writing of Hebrews**.
- Somewhere between 1446 and 1406 bc—thus I have settled on a midpoint of **1420 bc**—the Mosaic Law was given by God to Moses. This was approximately **1484 years before the writing of Hebrews**.
- Somewhere around the year **1003 bc**, King David is made king over all Israel, brings the ark—and the priesthood—to Jerusalem, and writes Psalm 110, which mentions Melchizedek—approximately **1067 years before the writing of Hebrews**.
- Next, sometime during the final days of Jesus’ ministry on earth (**AD 30**), he validates David’s authorship of Psalm 110, and quotes from it (Matthew 22:41-46). This would be approximately **34 years before the writing of Hebrews**.
- Finally our text, written around **AD 64**, brings all these events together and draws powerful theological lessons from them.

**Read Hebrews 7:1-3.**

## WHO WAS MELCHIZEDEK?

### vs1-2

The first two verses of Chapter 7 are a fairly straightforward retelling of the narrative from Genesis 14:17-24. While you turn to that passage ([and you may wish to keep a finger in both Hebrews and Genesis](#)), I want to point out a few of the reasons this first mention of Melchizedek is so astonishing.

- The Melchizedek portion (vs18-20) interrupts the flow of the narrative. **Read vs17 & 21.**
- Melchizedek himself is utterly detached from the historical narrative; we don't know who he was, where he came from, or what happened to him after this. He just appears, then disappears from the OT narrative.
- Nevertheless, these few verses—especially when expounded by King David, Jesus Himself, and the writer of Hebrews—speak volumes about the work of God in Christ.

### Read Genesis 14:17-24.

*For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God...was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.*

Our preacher encapsulates in the first two verses a number of important points:

- The name “Melchizedek” means, literally, “king of righteousness.”
- He was also “king of Salem” = king of *shalom* = king of peace (*shalom* = not necessarily mental peace, but completeness, wholeness)
- “Salem” *may* (and probably does) refer to what will later become “Jeru-salem”.
- Moreover, Melchizedek was not just a king, but a priest ([more on this later](#))—“priest of *hypsistos theos*” (as translated in Greek in Hebrews), or “priest of *El Elyon*” in the Hebrew. That is, he, like Abram, was a monotheist. Abram worshipped Yahweh, or Jehovah, which is the proper name, as it were, of the more nondescript *El*, or *El Elyon*. In v22, Abram connects the two.

### Read Genesis 14:22.

That Melchizedek refers to God as *El Elyon*, only meant that he did not know His proper name; both he and Abram worshiped and served the one God who “possessed heaven and earth.”

It also need not be surprising that Melchizedek was a monotheist; Abram was not the first. In fact D. A. Carson points out that the traditional notion of pantheism > monotheism is incorrect; really the reverse was more common.

- It was also not uncommon in this time and place for someone to be both king *and* priest.

Regarding this priesthood,

The Law	Melchizedek
Priest must be from the tribe of Levi. King (later, after David) must be from tribe of Judah.	Both priest and king. (first priest mentioned in Bible)
The High Priest must be able to trace his lineage, through his father, back to Aaron.	No lineage at all.
After death of Aaron, there was always a predecessor and a successor.	Neither mentioned.

This means that the priestly “order of Melchizedek” represented not something attained by tribal connection, family lineage, or succession, but was an *appointment by God*. Additionally, because it *was* an appointment by God, with no mention of successor, it was *permanent*.

### Read Hebrews 6:20.

*...who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,*

At their meeting, Melchizedek, bestowed a priestly blessing on Abram—but of course it is couched in praise of “God Most High”:

### Read Genesis 14:19-20a.

In his greeting, Melchizedek blesses both Abraham and God Most High.

## Sidebar:

Abram <b>of</b> God (KJVS, NASB)	<i>come from, associated with</i>
Abram <b>by</b> God (NIV, ESV)	<i>God blesses you</i>
Abram <b>to</b> God (YLT)	<i>your life is dedicated as an offering to God</i>

**Possessor, Creator**<sup>NIV</sup> = *qānā* = a primitive root; **to erect, i.e. create**; by extension to procure, especially by purchase (causative sell); by implication **to own** :- attain, buy (-er), teach to keep cattle, get, provoke to jealousy, possess (-or), **purchase**, recover, **redeem**, × surely, × verily.

*...to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils...*

After Melchizedek blessed Abram, the latter gave the former a tithe.

Please note the difference between Abram's response to Melchizedek and the king of Sodom:

The king of Salem was grateful for Abram's victory that brought peace to his domain and offered him an expression of his gratitude <b>(v18a)</b> .	So did the king of Sodom <b>(v21)</b> .
Abram <i>accepted</i> the gift from the king of Salem (implied)	Abram <i>rejected</i> the (customary) gift from the king of Sodom <b>(vs22-24)</b> .
The king of Salem blesses Abram—the act of a priest and <i>superior</i> (the father blesses the son, not the other way around) <b>(vs19-20a)</b> .	The king of Sodom offers no blessing.
Abram gives the king of Salem a tithe, acknowledging his higher status <b>(v20b)</b> .	No tithe offered the king of Sodom.

This difference effectively exalts Melchizedek in the narrative. He is not just a spiritual brother to Abram—which the king of Sodom most certainly is not—but a superior. He is special. He is due a tithe.

v3

### Read v3.

Note that Melchizedek did not just magically appear. He is certainly mysterious, but not supernatural. Melchizedek is not *literally* without lineage; he is *literarily* without lineage; it is just not mentioned in the narrative—the literature. But that silence on his lineage is both deafening and important.

Why is he here? Why does this mysterious king/priest so oddly disrupt what should be a pretty straightforward narrative of post-battle accounting? Well, why is *anything* in the Bible? To bring glory to God and His Son, Jesus Christ!

Melchizedek is inserted into the narrative of Genesis as a type of Christ—to illuminate certain important aspects of who and what He is.

Words are important in the Bible. We begin reading v3 and our inclination is to have in mind Jesus—who did *not* have a human father; his “dad,” so to speak, was the Holy Spirit. But then it says without mother, and we think, quite rightly, that Jesus did indeed have a human mother. And Jesus certainly *did* have a beginning of days and end of life.

But our preacher is not talking about Jesus of Nazareth, but “the Son of God.” Ah, well, that’s different, isn’t it.

V3 applies accurately to the second member of the Tri-unity of the Godhead, who was *not* born of a father and mother, did *not* have any forebears, had no beginning and will most definitely not have an “end of life.” V3 speaks *literarily* of Melchizedek; it speaks *literally* of the Son of God.

Beyond recounting the historical information about Melchizedek, the first three verses of Chapter 7 serve as a preamble for the rest of the chapter. From v4 on the writer expands on what is mentioned here—especially in v3. So we will dig deeper as we proceed into the chapter.

For today let’s close with this phrase,

*...but made like the Son of God,*

Some have thought that the mysterious Melchizedek was indeed supernatural—a visitation by the pre-incarnate Christ. But the Genesis 14 account bears none of the standard marks for that. Remember last week I pointed out that the “angel of the Lord” who stayed Abraham’s hand on Mt. Moriah *was* such a visitation. One way we know this is by examining the pronouns used by the angel, as He identifies Himself with God, and the lack of certain quotation marks in the translations.

We have none of that in the Melchizedek event of Genesis 14. In addition, we have Hebrews 7:3, which states that he was made “like” the Son of God. The word translated “like” means “similar,” to “resemble.”

## SESSION 22. HEBREWS 7:4-10

### PREFACE

Before we move on in Chapter 7, I want to reinforce the importance of v3.

#### Read v3.

Note the time line I passed out last week. One of the really remarkable aspects of this meeting between Abram and Melchizedek is that it prefigures *not* the coming priesthood through the Mosaic Law, but it prefigures the better priesthood of Christ which will replace it! Just think about that for a moment: When God handed down the Law through Moses, He went into excruciating detail about the creation and conduct of this brand new priesthood. But roughly 660 years *before* that Mosaic priesthood is inaugurated, the Lord demonstrated to the ultimate patriarch, Abram, a type for the superior priesthood that would supersede it in Christ!

King David, writing in the Spirit, acknowledged this in his writing of Psalm 110—1,077 years later—during a time when the Mosaic Law was in full effect, and roughly 1,000 years before Jesus was even born.

In Melchizedek God skips right over the economy of the priesthood, temple sacrifices, keeping of the detailed Mosaic requirements—and prefigures the better way that man will have in Christ Jesus!

Now to our text for this week...

### v4

In vs4-10 our preacher explains the importance of this tithe that Abram paid to Melchizedek. And he begins in the very first sentence by drawing a comparison between the two men.

#### Read v4.

#### Sidebar:

**observe**<sup>NASB</sup>, **consider**<sup>KJV</sup>, **think**<sup>NIV</sup>, **see**<sup>ESV</sup> = *theoreo* = from a derivative of <G2300> (theaomai) (perhaps by addition of <G3708> (horao)); **to be a spectator of, i.e. discern**, (literal, figurative [experience] or intensive [acknowledge]) :- behold, consider, look on, **perceive**, see. Compare <G3700> (optanomai).

When you are reading Scripture, don't just read the words and move on.

**Linger** over what is said,

**Consider** its real meaning,

**Peer** around the corner to discern that which is not immediately obvious, and

**Apply** what you learn to your own situation and life.

For example, notice how he describes Abraham: **the** patriarch. Not just *a* patriarch, but *the* patriarch. In the text that follows, this will serve to elevate the importance of Melchizedek himself.

In this paragraph, vs4-10, the preacher zeroes in on a discussion of the tithe, and in so doing he offers four ways that Melchizedek represents a superior priesthood. Remember: the writer of Hebrews, the preacher's foundational premise is the preeminence of Christ over any one or any thing else.

vs5 & 6:	<b>lineage</b>
v7:	<b>status</b>
v8:	<b>longevity</b>
vs9 & 10:	<b>superiority</b>

## v5: LINEAGE

Because it follows closely the organization of the original text, v5 is very hard to understand in the NASB. It reads like a sentence written by a committee. The NIV helps:

**Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham.**

According to the Mosaic Law, the tithe was not a freewill offering, but a requirement, and it was to be collected and received by the Levitical priests. Let's trace this.

### **Read Deuteronomy 14:22.**

The original concept of the tithe was not just as a payment to the temple, but as an act of sanctification, of dedication to the Lord. We read in this passage that the annual tithe would end up in their own pocket; they could buy anything they want with it, but it was to be dedicated as an act of rejoicing and thanksgiving to the Lord.

### **Read Deuteronomy 14:26.**

But every three years their tithe was to be given to the Levites—not just the priests, but the entire tribe, because the Levites were not given an inheritance in the land. And in Numbers I see a parallel between this tithing to the Levites and our tithe today.

### **Read Numbers 18:21-24.**

The Levites, in their service to the tabernacle (and, later, the temple) bore the burden of the holy place. Not just the burden of doing the work, but of dealing with the iniquity of their fellow Israelites. And, if they didn't do things just right, they would die. So they were due the support of those for whom they bore this burden.

### **Read James 3:1.**

### **Read 1 Corinthians 9:13-14.**

Because we are under grace, rather than law, our clergy may not die if they make a mistake, but, like the ancient Levites, they bear a heavier burden before the Lord, and are thus due our tithe. But because we are not under law, our motivation to tithe is different.

*John MacArthur:* Under grace we are free of the demands of the law. The New Testament specifies no definite amount or proportion of our money that we are to give to God. But this does not mean that our giving is optional, or that it should depend on our whim or personal feeling. It means that the basis of our giving should be our love and devotion to God, in gratitude for His inestimable gift to us. Just as Melchizedek's priesthood is a type of the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, so Abraham's giving to Melchizedek is a type of what our giving to the Lord should be. It is not a type in its being a tenth, but in its being from his choicest possessions and being given freely, not because of legal requirement.

This is what we see in Abram's tithe to Melchizedek in v4. It was voluntary, from the heart, and it was out of the very best he had. He didn't give from the leftover scraps, but off the very top.

**choicest spoils**<sup>NASB</sup>, **spoils**<sup>KJV, ESV</sup>, **plunder**<sup>NIV</sup> = *akrothinion* = from <G206> (akron) and this (a heap); properly (in the plural) **the top of the heap**, i.e. (by implication) **best of the booty** :- spoils.

### **Read Leviticus 19:23-25.**

The *first* fruits, the very best goes to the Lord. When our offering to God is drawn from the scraps, the leftovers, we betray the *true* devotion of our heart—ourselves.

## v6: LINEAGE

Now, in v6, the preacher contrasts the Levitical priesthood with Melchizedek.

### **Read v6.**

Melchizedek was *not* a Levite—he wasn't even in the ancestral line of Israel. Even so, he served as a priest to Abram—the one who had received the special covenant promises from God. Melchizedek accepted the tithe and blessed Abram—just as any good and rightful priest would.



And did you notice our word “the” again?

...from Abraham...**the** one who had the promises.

In sometimes subtle, sometimes more obvious ways the preacher continues to stress the importance of Abraham.

#### **v7: STATUS**

**Read v7.**

*beyond all contradiction, without doubt, without any dispute...*

In other words, *I think we can all agree...*

Here is the surprising thing (the writer is saying): It is a hard fact that the greater blesses the lesser—the priest blesses the suppliant, the father blesses the son—not the other way around. This means that even though Abram was *the* covenant patriarch, the root of all that would become God’s chosen people, he was ranked lower than Melchizedek!

We shrug this off easily, but just think how hard this would have been for the Hebrews to contemplate. *Abraham!* their father; no one was greater to a Jew. And here their pastor is telling them that this total stranger, this mysterious figure from ancient history was greater than Abraham!

#### **v8: LONGEVITY**

When looking at Melchizedek as a type of Christ, and his priesthood as a type of Christ’s priesthood, there are few aspects more important than that of longevity, or permanence.

**Read v8.**

In the case of the Levitical priesthood under the Law, the tithe is collected by mere mortals: they, with their respective priesthood, eventually die and are followed by a successor. But in the case of Melchizedek—in “the order of Melchizedek”—the priest does not die. Now remember, Melchizedek is not *literally* immortal; he is *literarily* immortal. He was not Christ, just a type of Him—he prefigures the priesthood of Christ—and as such the priesthood of Melchizedek lives on because we have no record of his death, nor is there any record of a successor.

Hebrews 5:6, quoting Psalm 110:4:

**“You are a priest forever  
According to the order of Melchizedek.”**

Christ Jesus, as our great High Priest according to “the order of Melchizedek” lives and serves forever—not *literarily*, but *literally*. He will not and cannot die, thus will never have a successor.

#### **vs9-10: SUPERIORITY**

In the last two verses of this paragraph, the writer of Hebrews goes a little weird on us, but though the manner in which he makes his point is uncommon, it is not without precedent.

**Read vs9-10.**

This technique has been used before in Scripture—if sparingly.

For example, we have this regarding Isaac’s wife Rebekah’s pregnancy with twins:

**Read Genesis 25:23.**

Not two babies, but two *nations*—that is, two individuals from which two warring nations will emerge.

Our preacher is employing a similar allegorical technique, but compounding it by going *backwards* in time, rather

than looking into the future.

In a manner of speaking, Melchizedek was superior to *all* priests because he received a tithe from Levi (that is, the *tribe* of Levi: Aaron, et al) through his great-grandfather, Abram. Thus the whole tribe of Levi paid homage to Melchizedek, demonstrating his superiority.

Just so—and the real point of this—Christ Jesus, *our* great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the highest human priest.

So Melchizedek, who represents as a type, Jesus Christ, is acknowledged to be superior by Abram, who represents as the patriarch of all priests and believers.

And what does a priest do? He intercedes between God and man.

**Read Romans 8:32-34.**

## SESSION 23. HEBREWS 7:11-19

We find the first occurrence of the phrase “the order of Melchizedek” in Psalm 110. The writer of Hebrews got it from there. Beginning with v11 in Chapter 7 he leaves the scene of the historical meeting between Abram and Melchizedek in Genesis 14, and focuses on Psalm 110.

This means that he switches from a discussion of the greatness of Melchizedek the person (vs4-10) to the preeminence of the one he prefigured—the one who is “like” Melchizedek: Christ Jesus. In vs11-19, the preacher sets forth, in **four steps**, an argument for the insufficiency of the old Levitical priesthood compared to the sufficiency of the new priesthood in Christ.

### vs11-12

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need *was there* for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.

**perfection** = *teleiosis* (tell-ay'-oh-sis) = from (phusioo); (the act) **completion**, i.e. (of prophecy) *verification*, or (of expiation) *absolution* :- perfection, performance.

We saw the verb form of this in Hebrews 2:10.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to **perfect** the author of their salvation through sufferings.

**perfect** = *teleioo* = from <G5046> (teleios); **to complete, i.e. (literal) accomplish**, or (figurative) consummate (in character) :- consecrate, **finish, fulfill**, make perfect.

To the follower of Christ, the existence and practice of the Mosaic Law serves a number of roles. It

- systematically lays out the kind of life God would have for His people
- demonstrates the inability of man to faithfully obey the Lord's commandments
- reveals and describes sin (Romans 7:7)
- foreshadows atonement through the blood sacrifice of Christ

To the ancient Jew, however, the Law represented

- the only way to remain in God's good graces
- the only way to enjoy His blessings
- the only way to properly conduct society (religious, medical and secular)

Nowhere does the Law state that by keeping it one would be (what we refer to as) “saved.” That is, nowhere does it guarantee that by keeping it one will enjoy eternal life in God's presence. The Law never had the power of *new life*; it was simply regulation. It never produced true righteousness, for that comes by *faith*, not regulations.

So *perfection*—completion, fulfillment—could never come through the Levitical priesthood, which served the Law to the people. Thus there was a need for a *new* priesthood—a new system, a new covenant—which, as the preacher explains in this sermon, is the one God had in mind from the beginning, setting in place Melchizedek to foreshadow not the coming *Mosaic* priesthood, but the superior priesthood of Christ Jesus.

With the advantage of hindsight we can see right off that there was indeed a need “for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek.” Even if Israel could have faithfully kept the Law, the sacrificial system in place did nothing for its eternity. Beyond that, even the design of the priesthood almost *encouraged* corruption in its ranks.

*...and not designated according to the order of Aaron.*

According to the Law, the priesthood must come from the Levitical tribe, and the *high* priest must be able to trace his lineage back, through his father, to Aaron himself. But 1,000 years before Christ the oracle of David in Psalm 110 prophesied a new order, a new kind of priest ordained not by lineage but by God, an *eternal* priest on an eternal throne. And through this new order of priesthood—which, by its very nature, required a new “law”—man

would have a brand new kind of access to God, because, as v22 states, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

### Read Hebrews 7:24-25.

*He is able also to save forever...*

**forever<sup>NASB</sup>, to the uttermost<sup>KJV</sup>, completely<sup>NIV</sup> = eis (ice)**

### vs13-14

For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Let's return to Psalm 110 to get our footing. This is an extraordinary oracle by King David, and I want to review its key elements for our study. Remember, this is David writing this. In v1 he states:

The LORD [Jehovah God] says to my [David's] Lord:  
[Jehovah God speaking to "Lord"] "Sit at My [Jehovah's] right hand  
Until I make Your [David's Lord] enemies a footstool for Your [David's Lord] feet."

When David wrote this he was the sovereign of all Israel. There was no human he would have referred to with the term "Lord." What is truly remarkable is that he is speaking of a *descendant*—someone in his line who will be born 1,000 years later. Yet he refers to this "son of David" as his Lord! And in v2 David speaks of this descendant's sovereign might:

The LORD [Jehovah God] will stretch forth Your [David's son and Lord's] strong scepter from Zion, saying,  
"Rule in the midst of Your [David's son and Lord's] enemies."

V4 begins with David speaking again:

The Lord [Jehovah God] has sworn and will not change His mind,  
"You [David's son and Lord] are a priest forever  
According to the order of Melchizedek."

Then in v5, right after the prophecy of God declaring Christ "a **priest** forever," he describes Him as a sovereign **king**:

The Lord [David's son and Lord] is at YOUR [Jehovah God's] right hand;  
He [David's son and Lord] will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.

Of whom is he speaking? Well, let's ask a certain man from Nazareth. He'll tell us in His own words.

### Read Luke 22:66-71.

### Back to Hebrews.

*For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar.*

As we've stated before all priests came from the tribe of Levi—only. Later, beginning with David, all kings came from the tribe of Judah. Under the law, someone from the tribe of Judah officiating as priest would either die or at least have God's wrath come down upon him (Saul).

*For it is evident that our Lord was...from Judah*

Jesus of Nazareth was from the tribe of Judah. That is obvious:

**evident, clear<sup>NIV</sup> = prodelos** (prod'-ay-loss) = from <G4253> (pro) and <G1212> (delos); **plain before all men, i.e. obvious**  
:- evident, manifest (open) beforehand.

## vs15-17

And this is clearer still \*, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.

For it is attested of Him,

"You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek."

\* **clearer still, far more evident** = *katadelos* = from <G2596> (**kata**) intensive and <G1212> (delos); manifest :- **far more evident**.

*...on the basis of a law of physical requirement*

That is, on the basis of lineage, of being a Levite, etc.

"indestructible life" = the resurrection = "priest forever"

*William Lane*: The preacher certainly knows that Jesus suffered death; He was exposed to destruction. There is repeated reference to the Cross of Christ in Hebrews. Consequently, when he describes Jesus as possessing an "indestructible life" he does not mean that Jesus never died. He means that He died a death that was unable to hold Him. It was a death that was followed by the resurrection. To proclaim that Jesus is high priest on the basis of the power of an indestructible life is to say that He is high priest on the basis of His resurrection.

## vs18-19

For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

**setting aside**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **annulling**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **disannulling**<sup>KJV</sup> = *athetesis* = from <G114> (atheteo); **cancellation** (literal or figurative) :- disannulling, put away; **used in a legal sense of making void; to cancel completely**.

*Thomas Hewitt*: God's establishment of a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek meant that the commandment referring to the Levitical priesthood had been made void; it no longer had God's authority, and was deprived of any legal force.

**weakness** = *asthenes* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and the base of <G4599> (sthenoo); **strengthless** (in various applications, literal, figurative and moral) :- more **feeble, impotent, sick**, without strength, weak (-er, -ness, thing).

*Adam Clarke*: It had no energy; it communicated none; it had no Spirit to minister; it required perfect obedience, but furnished no assistance to those who were under it.

**uselessness**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **unprofitableness**<sup>KJVS</sup> = *anopheles* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and the base of <G5624> (ophelimos); useless or (neuter) **inutility** :- unprofitable (-ness).

One could be forgiven for thinking at this point, *Well, then why did God bother with the Law at all? What was the point?* I earlier referred to Romans 7. Let's look at that now, as in it the apostle Paul answers this.

**Read Romans 7:4-7.**

If for no other reason (and there *are* others) the now-void Law defined sin for us.

*...and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*

So the old Law was made null and void. Did this leave a vacuum? No, it was replaced with something far better. It was replaced by a "better hope, through which we draw near to God."

*Matthew Henry*: There is a change in the efficacy of the priesthood. The former was weak and unprofitable, made nothing perfect; the latter brought in a better hope, by which we draw near to God. The Levitical priesthood brought nothing to perfection: it could not justify men's persons from guilt; it could not sanctify them from inward pollution; it could not cleanse the consciences of the worshippers from dead works; all it could do was to lead them to the antitype. But the priesthood of Christ carries in it, and brings along with it, a better hope; it shows us the true foundation of all the hope we have towards God for pardon and salvation; it more clearly discovers the great objects of our hope; and so it tends to work in us a more strong and lively hope of acceptance with God. By this hope we are encouraged to draw nigh unto God, to enter into a covenant-union with him, to live a life of

converse and communion with him. We may now draw near with a true heart, and with the full assurance of faith, having our minds sprinkled from an evil conscience. The former priesthood rather kept men at a distance, and under a spirit of bondage.

## **SESSION 24. HEBREWS 7:20-28**

Here is how our study last week finished:

**Read Hebrews 7:18-19.**

The preacher is saying that the original covenant was imperfect by design—it was powerless to make anything or anyone perfect—so it was replaced by a *new* covenant that offered a “better hope.” This new hope would actually draw us *toward* God, rather than keep us away from Him.

### **REGARDING VARIANT TEXTS**

You will notice differences among the various translations in our passage today—but none of which change any significant meaning.

- The NIV and ESV include the beginning of v21 at the end of its v20, and do not include parentheses. This does not change the text; it just changes the position of the verse divisions.
- The KJVS add “according to [or after] the order of Melchizedek” to v21. This simply completes the quotation from Psalm 110, but is not in the more reliable (and older) manuscripts.

### **vs20-21**

The writer of Hebrews continues to co-mingle the law and the priesthood, rendering them almost synonymous. And this leads to a third textual variant. The KJV is reasonably faithful to the original text in its first part of v20:

**And inasmuch as not without an oath...**

If the KJV had stopped there, it would be the most literal translation, because (as far as I can determine) there is no subject in the original text. So the various translations are left to conjecture what the subject might be, and add words to clarify for the reader:

KJV - **And inasmuch as not without an oath** *he was made priest:*

NKJV - **And inasmuch as *He was not made priest* without an oath...**

NIV - **And it** was not without an oath!

NASB - **And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath**

ESV - **And it** was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath,

Here is the complete thought in the NASB:

**And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him,  
“The Lord has sworn  
And will not change His mind,  
‘You are a priest forever’”);**

The essential point is this: Not only did God never swear to Israel that an individual priest would be permanent, He did not swear that the Levitical *priesthood* would be permanent. The subsequent priests under the law held their office “on the basis of a law of physical requirement” (v16)—that is, as a successor to the previous priest, by lineage, by tribal connection. The “physical requirement” was that they had to be Levites.

But this new covenant and priesthood—which was not by the order of Aaron, but by the order of Melchizedek—instead of being based on “a law of physical requirement” would be based on “the power of an indestructible life”—that is, the resurrection of Christ Jesus and His eternal seat at the right hand of God (Psalm 110:1,5).

And our text today introduces a new word into the mix: “oath.” The writer gets this from the statement, “The Lord [Yhwh] has sworn...” In the Hebrew of Psalm 110, the word “sworn” means

**sworn** = *shaba* (shaw-baw') = a primitive root; properly to be complete, but used only as a denominative from <H7651> (sheba'); **to seven oneself, i.e. swear (as if by repeating a declaration seven times)** :- adjure, charge (by an oath, with an oath), feed to the full [by mistake for <H7646> (saba')], **take an oath**, x straitly, (cause to, make to) swear.

As strong and declarative as that is, it is strengthened further with the phrase “and will not change His mind...”

**change** His **mind** = *naham* (naw-kham') = a primitive root; prop. **to sigh, i.e. breathe strongly; by implication to be sorry**, i.e. (in a favorable sense) to pity, console or (reflex.) rue; or (unfavorably) to avenge (oneself) :- comfort (self), ease [one's self], **repent** (-er, -ing, self).

In the Greek of Hebrews 7, the word is

**change** His **mind** = *metamelomai* (met-am-el'-lom-ahee) = from <G3326> (meta) and the middle of <G3199> (melo); **to care afterwards, i.e. regret** :- repent (self).

The idea is that the one who has sworn might pick up some different feelings later on, and thus change his mind. *People* do this all the time: the marriage vow ends in divorce; the politician reneges on a backroom deal. The text says that the Lord God will not do that. He has taken an oath that He will not. And what is that position? That every child of God in Christ will have a priest forever. Not just *a* priest, as it was under the law, but *the* priest—the ultimate priest, the only one who could be eternal: Christ Jesus. v22 states this.

## v22

### Read v22.

This is another of those moments where your head could begin to swim with the wonder of it all if you didn't break it down somewhat, for there are a number of things going on here.

**guarantee** = *engyos* (eng'-goo-os) = from <G1722> (en) and *guion* (a limb); **pledged** (as if articulated by a member), i.e. a **bondsman** :- **surety**.

This word can represent either the pledge itself—e.g., the \$10 in “I promise to pay you \$10.”—or the third party who guarantees the pledge will be carried out (guarantor)—e.g., the enforcer who promises to break your legs if you *don't* pay the \$10.

The fascinating thing about this passage is that the guarantee is also the guarantor! (In fact the <sup>ESV</sup> translates it “guarantor”.) Our forever Priest, Jesus the Christ, is *what* we are guaranteed on oath by Jehovah God. At the same time Jesus is the surety, the bondsman ensuring the pledge, of this new covenant—just as He is both the High Priest making the sacrifice and the sacrifice itself!

### Sidebar:

We know the Holy Spirit as another guarantor, but God's word does not subdivide the Godhead into a neat triangle—Father, Son, Spirit—but into an endlessly faceted diamond. For example, look how the apostle Paul gives the Spirit three different names in Romans 8.

**Read Romans 8:2. (“Spirit of life”)**

**Read Romans 8:9. (“Spirit of God,” “Spirit of Christ”)**

So it is hard to draw a neat, hard line between Christ and the Spirit when we read of our “guarantee” in Hebrews 7, or the “pledge of our inheritance” in Ephesians 1.

**Read Ephesians 1:9-14.**

## vs23-25

This guarantee/guarantor of Christ/Spirit ensures not just longevity, but *consistency*.



## Read vs23-25.

Just think about it: Under the Law there was a seemingly endless parade of different high priests. One would die, and another would take over. And each one would bring with him his own baggage—his own nature, his own likes and dislikes, his own peccadilloes, personality, temperament.

And his own brand of the sin nature.

So even when the priestly line was unbroken—and there *were* times it was broken—it was inconsistent at best.

And that inconsistency occurred immediately!

### Read Leviticus 10:1-3.

Jesus is not just consistent, since He is never replaced by someone else, but He is perfect, without any of the human frailties of His earthly colleagues. As such, He is able to save, *eis*:

**forever**<sup>NASB</sup>, **to the uttermost**<sup>KJV</sup>, **completely**<sup>NIV</sup> = *eis* (ice)

## v26

At a surface reading of v26 I was troubled by the word “fitting” in the NASB.

### Read v26.

This sounds disturbingly like we *deserved* such a high priest. And the KJV was no help:

For such an high priest **became** us...

I found a small measure of relief when I dug deeper into the word:

**fitting** = *prepo* = apparently a primary verb; to tower up (be conspicuous), i.e. (by implication) **to be suitable or proper** (third person singular presumed indicative, often used impersonally, it is fit or right) :- become, comely.

Still not much help. But *The Message* paraphrase helps us understand the meaning of this word:

So now we have a high priest who perfectly fits our needs:

My paraphrase would be *necessary*: It was *necessary* for us to have Christ Jesus as high priest—not after the order of Aaron, but the order of Melchizedek. The old order was weak and useless (v18), and offered no perfection, no completion; its priesthood was impermanent, and as sinful as the supplicants it represented to God.

The old priesthood offered no perfection because it, itself was imperfect.

So it was necessary for us to have a *better* priesthood—not another parade of weak-kneed humans, but just one, final *perfect* priest: Jesus, very Son of God, who is

**holy** = *hosios* = of uncertain affinity; properly right (by intrinsic or divine character; thus distinguished from <G1342> (*dikaio*s)), which refers rather to human statutes and relations; **from** <G2413> (*hieros*), which denotes **formal consecration**; and **from** <G40> (*hagios*), which relates to **purity from defilement**), i.e. **hallowed** (pious, sacred, sure) :- holy, mercy, shalt be.

**innocent** = *akakos* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G2556> (*kakos*); **not bad**, i.e. (objective) **innocent or** (subjective) **unsuspecting** :- **harmless, simple; without guile**.

**undefiled** = *amiantos* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a derivative of <G3392> (*miaino*); **unsoiled**, i.e. (figurative) **pure** :- undefiled.

**separate(d)** from sinners = *chorizo* = from <G5561> (*chora*); **to place room between**, i.e. part; reflexive to go away :- depart, **put asunder, separate**.

**exalted** above the heavens = *hypselos* = from <G5311> (*hupsos*); **lofty** (in place or character) :- high (-er, -ly) (**esteemed**).

## v27

v27 further describes this “fitting” priest.

### Read v27.

Read Leviticus 16:11,15.

Read Isaiah 53:10-12.



v28

In Hebrews 5, the preacher describes the weakness of the high priests in a positive way.

**Read Hebrews 5:1-3.**

Their own fleshly weakness gives them the advantage of empathy and compassion, for they see in their parishioners only the mirror image of their own struggles with flesh and sin.

But in our final verse today (5:28) that same weakness, when compared to the qualities of our great High Priest, are described in a *negative* way.

**Read Hebrews 7:28.**

Does this mean that because He is perfect, Jesus *cannot* empathize with us in a compassionate way? Indeed not.

**Read Hebrews 2:17-18.**

**Read MacArthur, p203.**

## SESSION 25. HEBREWS 8:1-6

For some time now we have been examining the similarity between Christ Jesus and the mysterious Melchizedek—how the king/priest of Salem was a type for the kingship and priesthood of Christ. But now, in chapters 8 & 9 of Hebrews we enter an area where Melchizedek did *not* go; there is no mention of cultic sacrifice in his story. But at the tail end of Chapter 7, the preacher broached the subject on which he will dwell for a while. Let's read that again.

### Read Hebrews 7:26-28.

Even if cultic sacrifice *had* been a part of the Melchizedek narrative, one point at which he and Christ would part company would be that he certainly did not offer *himself* upon the altar, as did the Lord.

And now we begin Chapter 8—and what reassurance and confidence we have from its first two verses! I think what really stands out—if you are one to mark in your Bible, underline these two words—“**we have**.”

### Read Hebrews 8:1-2.

v1

*Now the main point is...*

**main point**<sup>NASBJNKIV</sup>, **sum**<sup>KIV</sup> = *kephalaion* = neuter of a derivative of <G2776> (kephale); **a principal thing**, i.e. main point; specially **an amount (of money)** :- sum.

*When you add up all that has been said, this is what you get...*

*we have such a high priest...*

In those last three verses of Chapter 7 we had the following description:

**holy** = *hosios* = of uncertain affinity; properly right (by intrinsic or divine character; thus distinguished from <G1342> (dikaios), which refers rather to human statutes and relations; **from** <G2413> (*hieros*), which denotes formal consecration; and **from** <G40> (*hagios*), which relates to purity from defilement), i.e. **hallowed** (pious, sacred, sure) :- holy, mercy, shalt be.

**innocent** = *akakos* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G2556> (*kakos*); **not bad**, i.e. (objective) **innocent or** (subjective) **unsuspecting** :- **harmless, simple; without guile**.

**undefiled** = *amiantos* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a derivative of <G3392> (*miaino*); **unsoiled**, i.e. (figurative) **pure** :- undefiled.

**separate(d)** from sinners = *chorizo* = from <G5561> (*chora*); **to place room between**, i.e. part; reflexive to go away :- depart, **put asunder, separate**.

**exalted** above the heavens = *hypsos* = from <G5311> (*hupsos*); **lofty** (in place or character) :- high (-er, -ly) (**esteemed**).

- He does not need to sacrifice for sins daily—either for others or for Himself; that was accomplished for all time at the cross.
- He is not weak, but strong.
- He is not appointed by men, but a Son, appointed by God His Father.
- He is “perfect forever”—that is, not only the pure, spotless Lamb, but the complete fulfillment of God’s atoning grace and mercy; He did it all, and all was accomplished in Him.

*...who has taken His seat...*

This is one of the most glorious, most powerful aspects of Christ’s superiority as High Priest: Every earthly priest entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement, made the sacrifice, then left. There were no chairs in the holy of holies because the work was never done; before he had even left the room someone in Israel had committed another sin that would require another sacrifice! Perhaps even *he*, the high priest, sinned before leaving the room. The need for a blood sacrifice of atonement for sin never ended. The priest had to keep coming back.

But *our* High Priest made the sacrifice—just once—*then sat down*. Job done. End of story. Period. Full stop. Finito.

Clearly to the preacher, the writer of Hebrews, this was an important point that he wanted to drive home to his parishioners, for he mentions it (by my count) four times in his sermon. Let's look again at the first.

**Read Hebrews 1:3.**

He...sat...down.

*...at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,*

Where? At the foot of cross? On a bench carved out of the tomb? On a throne in the Jerusalem temple? Nope. At the "right hand"—the hand of power—"of the Majesty in the heavens." Capital "M"—*the* Majesty. That is a word we do not use or think of very much, never having been subject to an earthly king or queen. So let's look at a fuller picture what this means.

And, by the way, if you ever need a reminder of what true worship is, just revisit this passage.

**Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-13.**

That is a picture of real *majesty*.

v2

And once more we are reminded that the members of the Godhead are multi-taskers. Just because the Son of God sat down, that doesn't mean He stopped work. Along with His other job descriptions—to put it in crass, earthly terms—the Son is a "minister."

*...a minister in [or of] the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle,*

**minister** = *leitourgos* (lay-tur-gos') = from a derivative of <G2992> (laos) and <G2041> (ergon); **a public servant**, i.e. **a functionary in the Temple** or Gospel, or (genitive) a **worshipper** (of God) or **benefactor** (of man) :- minister (-ed). The two roots from which this word is formed make it, literally, "people worker." We get our word "liturgy" from this, which is the form or ritual for public worship.

**sanctuary** = *hagios* = **from hagos (an awful thing)** [compare <G53> (hagnos), <H2282> (chag)]; **sacred (physical pure, moral blameless or religious, ceremony consecrated)** :- (most) holy (one, thing), saint.

#### Sidebar:

The room in which we gather every Sunday for what is termed a "worship service" was traditionally called the "sanctuary." Over recent decades there has been an effort to de-mystify the space, referring to it as, for example, an "auditorium."

There are, perhaps, laudable motives behind this. It is true that, under grace and free of the law, we are free to worship God anywhere, so the room in which we congregate on Sunday mornings is essentially no different from any other room.

But I would propose that it is not necessarily a bad thing to think of this room differently—especially on Sunday mornings. It is where we gather for public, corporate worship of our God, and *when it is being used for that purpose*, it is, indeed a "sanctuary." It is special. It is holy. It is *hagios*.

For example, my reference room doubles as my prayer closet. Now, I can pray to God and worship Him while I am out mowing the lawn, or plowing the drive. I often do. But when I want to really get serious about it, when I want to really intensify my reverence before the throne of God, I retire to my prayer closet. In that moment the space is no longer my reference room; it is my sanctuary. A holy place. A *hagios*.

It is not a bad thing to have moments when we are less casual with our God, when we realize a sense of holy awe in His presence.

**tabernacle** = *skene* (skay-nay') = apparently akin to <G4632> (skeuos) and <G4639> (skia); **a tent or cloth hut** (literal or figurative) :- **habitation**, tabernacle.

The ESV puts this in generic terms—which is perfectly fine:

*...a minister in the holy places, in the true tent,*

What is the "true tabernacle"?

...[the one] which the Lord pitched, not man.

We need to be reminded from time to time that the “design” (as it were) of the original (tent) tabernacle and the subsequent Jerusalem temples, is after the *first* of its kind, located in heaven. We’ll delve deeper into this in v5.

And just one more small sidebar before we leave the first two verses.

#### Sidebar:

Did you catch the dramatic juxtaposition in the first two verses that so perfectly describes our Lord and Savior?

v1: taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens

v2: a minister (servant)

**Read Matthew 20:20-28.**

#### v3

We also will not spend much time with v3 right now, because the preacher will expand on this later in chapters 9 & 10. But the implication is clear.

**Read v3.**

Reading the Law, it is clearly stated that the role of the priest is to bring gifts and sacrifices to be presented to God. This means that if Christ Jesus is *our* high priest, He, too, must bring something to the altar.

**Question: And what *did* He bring?**

#### vs4-5

The preacher’s purpose in this extended middle section of his sermon is to demonstrate the superiority of Christ’s priesthood over the priesthood under the Law. In v4 he expresses one aspect of this in a negative way.

**Read v4.**

The preacher emphasizes two superior aspects of Christ by explaining what He is not.

- First, if this priestly service was being offered on earth, He couldn’t be a priest at all, because under the Law He would need to be a Levite—and Jesus was a Judean. **But it’s not; He ministers in the sanctuary and true tabernacle which was pitched by the Lord—i.e., in heaven.**
- Second, if the gifts we are talking about were the standard gifts specified under the Law, well, we’ve got plenty of priests already doing that. We don’t need another (and they didn’t do any good, anyway). **But His gifts and sacrifice are of a superior nature, and unique.**

Continuing in this vein, he next follows on the subject broached in v2—comparing the earthly tabernacle to the heavenly one.

**Read v5.**

No matter where we formally worship or serve God here on earth, it is nothing but a “copy and shadow” of the real thing in heaven.

**copy** = from <G5263> (hupodeiknumi); an **exhibit for imitation or warning** (figurative specimen, adumbration) :- en- (ex-) ample, **pattern**.

**shadow** = *skia* = apparently a primary word; “shade” or a shadow (literal or figurative [darkness of error or an **adumbration**]) :- shadow.

**adumbration** = to produce a faint image or resemblance of; to outline or sketch.

*Albert Barnes:* That is, in the tabernacle where they served there was a mere shadow of what was real and substantial. Compared with what is in heaven, it was what the shadow is compared with the substance. A shadow—as of a man, a house, a tree—will indicate the form, the outline, the size of the object; but it has no substance, or reality. So it was with the rites of the Jewish religion. They were designed merely as a shadow of the substantial realities of the true religion, or to present the dim outlines of what is true and real in heaven.

...according to the pattern...

Hebrew: **pattern** = *tabnith* = from <H1129> (banah); **structure**; by implication **a model**, *resemblance* :- figure, form, likeness, pattern, similitude.

The word used to describe the manner in which Man was first designed “according to Our **likeness**,” denotes “appearance, form, or representation of that which is not visible,” whereas this word, translated “pattern,” means a “structure, mode of building; model, pattern after which anything is built, or...has been built.” [i.e., blueprint, scale drawing, etc.]

Greek: **pattern** = *typos* = from <G5180> (tupto); **a die (as struck), i.e. (by implication) a stamp or scar**; by analogy a shape, i.e. a statue, (figurative) style or resemblance; specially a sampler (“type”), i.e. **a model (for imitation)** or instance (for warning) :- en- (ex-) ample, fashion, figure, form, manner, pattern, print; the mark (of a blow), **an impression, stamp (made by a die)**

*Thomas Hewitt*: The earthly tabernacle at its best is merely a “copy” or “model” of the true tabernacle in which Christ now ministers. This earthly tabernacle was not false, but incomplete, and represented imperfectly its heavenly counterpart. It was just a *shadow* of the reality or, as Moffatt says, “a shadowy outline,” a secondhand inferior reproduction.

## V6

Verse 6 concludes the paragraph by stating what it all means.

### Read v6.

*Everything* is better with Christ Jesus as our priest:

- a more excellent **ministry** than the human priests
- He is the mediator—the “go-between”—of a better **covenant**
- a covenant enacted (“made law”) on better **promises**.

And in our next passage the preacher expands on this by quoting—in the longest OT quotation in the NT—from Jeremiah 31. We will get into this in two weeks.

## **SESSION 26. HEBREWS 8:7-13**

Why replace what still works? That is Linda's and my philosophy regarding most things—and especially our vehicle. Our 16-year-old Jeep still works fine, so why replace it?

So let's apply the Lampel Replacement Doctrine to the Mosaic Law. Even the most cursory reading of the OT reveals that the Mosaic Covenant did not work [e.g., its dictates did not produce righteousness].

So God replaced it with a *better* covenant.

Our last study ended at v6 of Hebrews 8.

### **Read Hebrews 8:6.**

Our high priest, Jesus Christ, is not just a superior priest; He is the high priest of a superior *covenant*—a new agreement between God and man based on superior promises.

### **v7**

The writer of Hebrews states in v7 that God subscribes to the Lampel Replacement doctrine.

### **Read v7.**

**faultless** = *amemptos* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a derivative of <G3201> (memphomai); **irreproachable** :- **blameless, faultless, unblamable.**

First, in v7 the point is made that the first covenant—i.e., the Mosaic Covenant, the Law—*was* blamable, it *was* reproachable. This means that the Lord God, Jehovah, proposed something He knew wouldn't work! (Perhaps a more comfortable term would be that the first covenant was "inadequate"—that is,

*Leon Morris:* The old covenant was lacking not so much in what its terms spelled out, as in the fact that it was weak and unable to bring men to God.

### **Question: Why would He do such a thing?**

- Like the rest of Scripture and God's history with man, the Law points us to Christ. It's "imperfections" lead us to the perfect Christ.
- The Law did nothing to change bad behavior [ref. [deplorable behavior of Israel \(e.g., in Judges\)](#)] but it was meant to illumine the sin dwelling in us.

### **Read Romans 7:5-12.**

So how do we reconcile what the preacher says in Hebrews 8:7 with what the apostle Paul says in Romans 7:12?

### **Read passages from Barnhouse.**

### **v8A**

In v8, the writer suddenly switches from the Law to the people.

### **Read v8a.**

In v7 he implies that the Law was at fault—but then in v8 he claims that God found fault with the people! Why? Because, as Paul states (and Barnhouse and Phillips help us understand), sin begins *in us*. The Law did not invent sin; it just let it develop to full fruition.

### **v8B-9**

Then, the preacher develops—and substantiates—this idea of God replacing the old covenant with a new one by quoting the prophet Jeremiah—specifically, Jeremiah 31:31-34.

### **Timeline:**

The Law handed down through Moses:	<b>c.1420 BC</b>
Jeremiah prophesies:	<b>625 BC to c.583 BC</b>
New Covenant in Christ Jesus:	<b>AD 26</b> (c.616 years after Jeremiah's prophecy; established at Last Supper [ <b>Luke 22:20</b> ])
Hebrews written:	<b>AD 64</b>

## Read Hebrews 8b-12.

### v8B

Israel and Judah = divided kingdom  
Applies to us, as well

## Read Romans 9:6-8; see also Philippians 3:2-3 and Galatians 3:6-9.

### v9

This new covenant will be different from the one given through Moses.

*I took them by the hand*

a picture of a mom or dad “taking a little child by the hand to lead them safely to the place where he is going” (Morris).

*I did not care for them*

NASB: I did not care for them

NKJV: I disregarded them

NIV: I turned away from them

a strong expression with a meaning like “I ignored them,” or perhaps “I abandoned them” (NEB). This was illustrated in my reading in Judges just this last week.

### Read Judges 10:10-14.

Even then the Lord’s compassion and longsuffering could not be squelched by Israel’s sin, and He finally relented.

### Read Joshua 10:15-16.

11:17

### v10-12

Then the preacher, using Jeremiah’s prophecy, offers three reasons why this new covenant is superior to the old.

### **v10: WRITTEN NOT ON STONE, BUT ON THE HEART**

#### **Read v10.**

The Law of the Mosaic Covenant was external. It was initially handed down by way of stone tablets. Portions of it were to be written out and placed at doorposts, on the forehead, on the wrist. And without the indwelling Spirit—who would not come to be that until the Pentecost after Christ’s death and resurrection—there was no way for them to effectively internalize God’s Law.

But now every believer—who would be under this new covenant in Christ—*would* have the Spirit, and this new relationship with God in Christ would be one of the heart, rather than stone and paper. The prophet Ezekiel, in a different setting, most eloquently describes this.

### Read Ezekiel 11:19-20.

God says, *With this new covenant in My Son, with My Spirit living within you, you will at last be able to live a life of righteous faith.* Under the old covenant, Israel could only *try* to obey God, out of fear of retribution, under their own steam. But now our relationship with God would be based not on fear, but on love.

### **v11: PRIVATE TUTOR**

The Spirit is not just a facilitator of righteousness, but a teacher of all things about God.

#### **Read v11.**

*The Message: They won’t go to school to learn about me, or buy a book called God in Five Easy Lessons. They’ll all get to know me firsthand, the little and the big, the small and the great.*

John the disciple recorded Jesus speaking of this—

**Read John 14:25-26.**

—and in his first epistle John expanded on this, tying together our verses 10 and 11:

**Read 1 John 2:27.**

## **v12: SIN? WHAT SIN?**

Jeremiah saved the best for last.

**Read v12.**

In the flesh, it can be difficult at times to fully grasp what this means. We can forget that God the Father now sees us, under the new covenant, in and through His righteous Son. We can imagine His anger when we sin, when we “miss the mark,” and feel the need to immediately assuage that anger by confession and repentance (not necessarily a bad move on our part).

But to better grasp how things have changed, zoom out for a wider perspective—taking in not just the failures of our one, pitiful life, but the pitiful lives of all. Imagine yourself as God the Father—Jehovah—gazing down on the nation of Israel the day just before the annual Day of Atonement. What do you see? You see a swarming, pulsing, filthy mélange of black sin from border to border—an image that will only be removed (and for just a moment) the next day when the blood is smeared on the altar in the temple Holy of Holies.

Now imagine yourself as God today, looking down on all the Christian believers of the entire world on *any* day of the year. What do you see?

Christ.

**Read Romans 3:21-26.**

Paul is more succinct in his second letter to the Corinthians:

**He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**  
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

In one sense (getting back to our hypothetical) what you see as God is... yourself. You see in all those below who have come to you through your son, “the righteousness of God.”

## **v13**

The preacher places a period at the end of this with v13, which is a little clumsy in the NASB. So let’s read it in the NIV:

**By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.**

The covenant under the Mosaic Law was an old man gasping his last breath. When he died, just like in a science fiction movie, he just dried up and blew away. All that was left was the new covenant in Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

I want to close with two points that illustrate how all of this was by God’s design from the beginning:

1. All this that is so familiar to those of us born and raised with the new covenant was put down by Jeremiah some 600 years before it was established in Christ Jesus.
2. The Law—by design—required of man things that were impossible to obey. One can trace, in at least 3 instances in the OT (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, & Deuteronomy), where God requires a certain impossible behavior of Israel, then many chapters later states that *He* will be the one to fulfill this impossible requirement. From the beginning God was clear—in His own mind and in His decrees to His people—that *He* would have to be the one to do it. Look again at our passage—especially v10:



“...I will put My laws into their minds,  
And I will write them on their hearts.  
And I will be their God,  
And they shall be **My** people.”

This was not something dreamed up by the writer of Hebrews; this was God’s plan from the beginning.

## **SESSION 27. HEBREWS 9:1-5**

Chapter nine of the Hebrews sermon reminds us of the preacher's audience: Jews. As Gentile Christians we begin reading this chapter and respond, not surprisingly, *Hey, we get it! Enough already.*

But this message, while still of inestimable worth to modern believers, was directed not to gentile, but to *Jewish* Christians. And the preacher rightly thought it important to explain—and explain again—how Christ Jesus introduced a way for man to have a better relationship with God.

Last week we concluded that the first covenant—the Mosaic Law—was insufficient by design, that even as far back as Deuteronomy the Lord was sending signals that made this clear. My purpose in this lesson, in keeping with our text, is to examine the implements of tabernacle worship—not historically, but to emphasize how each of them prefigured this new relationship we have with God in and through Christ. Even in the details of the tabernacle/temple Jehovah God was declaring from the beginning, *This will only be fulfilled when I send My Son.*

**Read Hebrews 9:1-5.**

**For the following, please refer to the chart on the next page.**

### **vs1-5**

The preacher focuses immediately on the Holy Place and Most Holy Place—that is, the tabernacle proper, the tent referred to in the drawing as the “temple,” the place of meeting. But let's back up and come in the front door of the tabernacle complex. First notice that the size of the enclosure was no larger than roughly one quarter of a football field. [\[for a lot of what follows I am indebted to John MacArthur.\]](#)

### **THE ENTRANCE**

Imagine yourself standing outside the entrance curtain. You are just your average Jew, say from the tribe of Dan. The first feature we want to consider is the one and only entrance to the enclosure. It was thirty feet wide and seven and a half feet high. It was a wide entrance that allowed many people to enter at once, and prefigures Christ as the only way to God:

**Read John 14:6.**

but also that He is available to any and all that will come to Him:

**Read John 7:37.**

And, by the way, just as our Jew from the tribe of Dan bringing his sin offering, we come to Christ *with* our sin.

### **THE BRONZE (BRAZEN) ALTAR**

It was upon this altar that the daily sin offerings were sacrificed, and is a picture of Christ Jesus, who was Himself the sacrifice for our sin.

**Read 1 Peter 1:18-19 NIV.**

### **THE BRONZE (BRAZEN) LAVER (BASIN)**

In the large laver the priests would wash themselves as they went about the bloody service of sacrifice. Here is a picture of Christ as the cleanser of His people. Even though we have received forgiveness of our sins through His once and final sacrifice, we still need His daily cleansing. With it our fellowship and joy are restored.

**Read Psalm 51:7-10.**

The courtyard was for everyone, but only the priests could enter the holy place—the tent of meeting. Before we leave the courtyard, let us consider what the two—the open courtyard and the holy place—represent.

All the activity and the utensils of the outer court were connected with the cleansing of humanity's sins, while the activity and utensils of the tabernacle were associated with the service of worship of God. For the Christian, the purposes of these two areas can be associated with the work of Christ toward man.

## Hebrews 9:1-10

### The Meaning of the Tabernacle for Christians

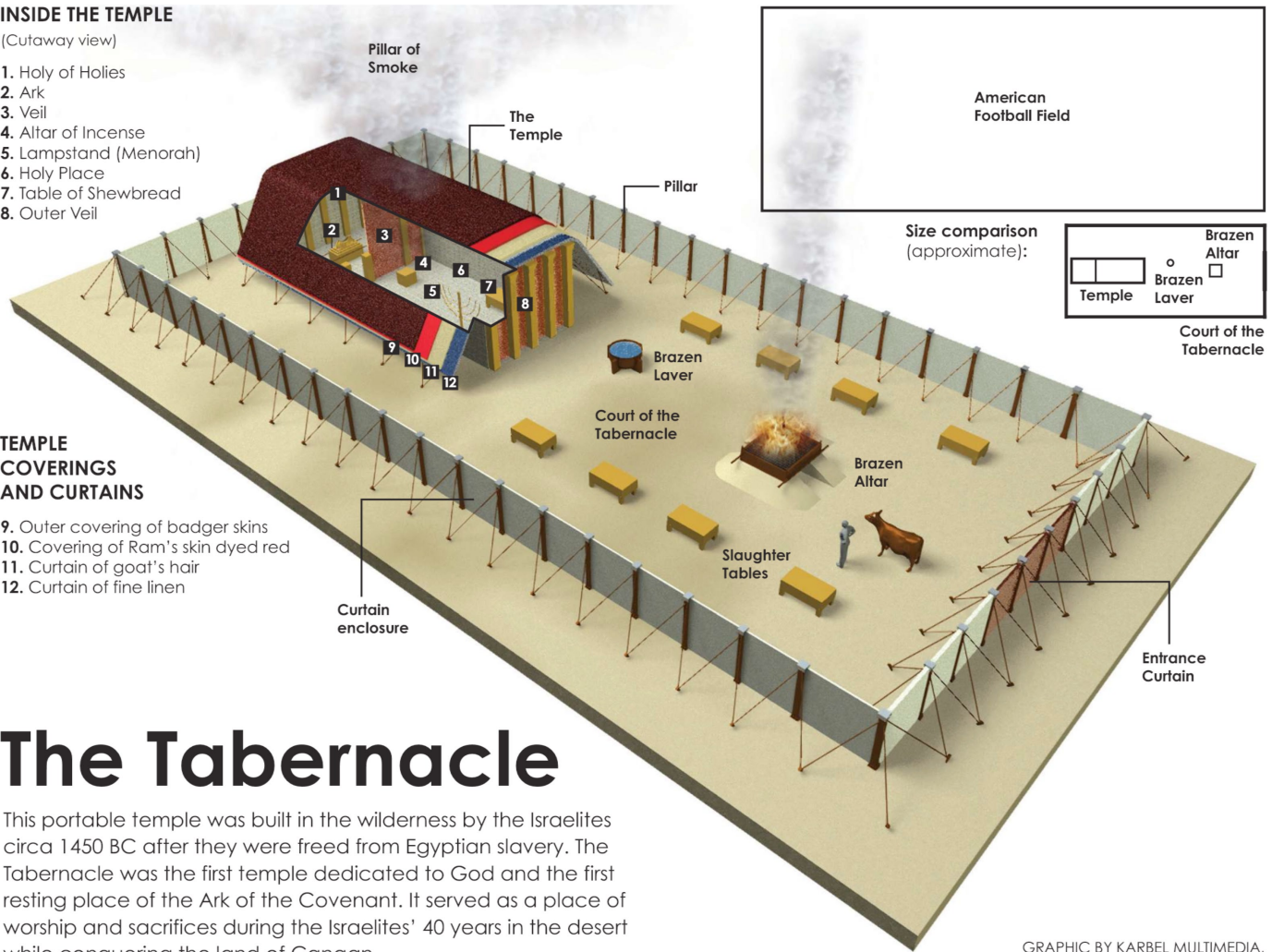
#### INSIDE THE TEMPLE

(Cutaway view)

1. Holy of Holies
2. Ark
3. Veil
4. Altar of Incense
5. Lampstand (Menorah)
6. Holy Place
7. Table of Shewbread
8. Outer Veil

#### TEMPLE COVERINGS AND CURTAINS

9. Outer covering of badger skins
10. Covering of Ram's skin dyed red
11. Curtain of goat's hair
12. Curtain of fine linen



## The Tabernacle

This portable temple was built in the wilderness by the Israelites circa 1450 BC after they were freed from Egyptian slavery. The Tabernacle was the first temple dedicated to God and the first resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. It served as a place of worship and sacrifices during the Israelites' 40 years in the desert while conquering the land of Canaan.

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#### THE TABERNACLE TENT

The entire tent was 45 feet (13.7 m) long, 15 feet (4.6 m) wide, and 15 feet (4.6 m) high. It was a wooden skeletal structure, overlaid with gold, with no solid roof or front wall (Ex. 26:15–29). Five wooden bars (overlaid with gold) passed through rings attached to each frame (Ex. 26:26–30).

The framed structure was covered by four layers of cloth and skin (Ex. 26:1–14).

The veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place was made from blue, purple, and scarlet dyed yarns woven with fine twined linen and embroidered with cherubim (Ex. 26:31–33). It hung on four golden pillars.

The altar of incense (Ex. 30:1–5; 37:25–29)

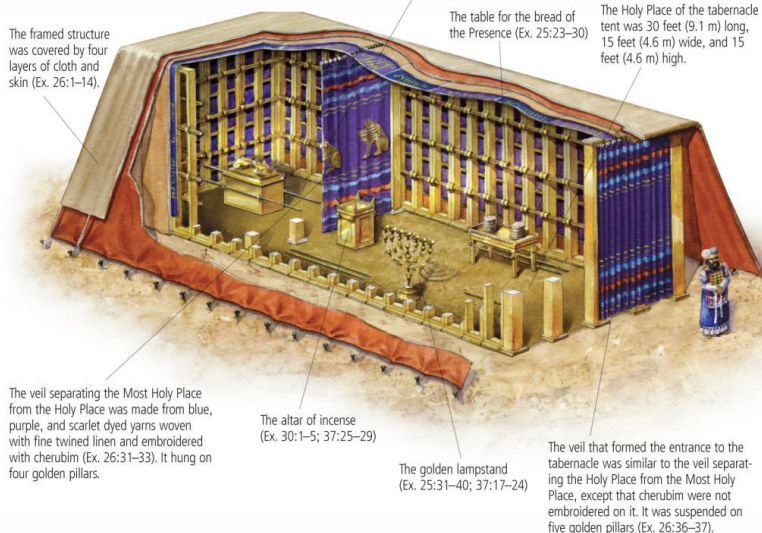
The golden lampstand (Ex. 25:31–40; 37:17–24)

The Most Holy Place was a 15-foot (4.6-m) cube, containing only the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:10–22; 37:1–9). It was here that Yahweh would descend to meet with his people in a cloud theophany (divine appearance). The high priest could enter only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (see note on Heb. 9:7).

The table for the bread of the Presence (Ex. 25:23–30)

The Holy Place of the tabernacle tent was 30 feet (9.1 m) long, 15 feet (4.6 m) wide, and 15 feet (4.6 m) high.

The veil that formed the entrance to the tabernacle was similar to the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, except that cherubim were not embroidered on it. It was suspended on five golden pillars (Ex. 26:36–37).



Jesus left the sanctuary of heaven to come down to earth to accomplish His sacrificial work of saving humanity from its sin. Christ is accessible to any and all who will come to Him—just as the courtyard was open to all. Jesus came to where the people were to save them. [\[There is not a perfect line of division between the two, since in the Holy of Holies the atonement for sins was also conducted. But the animals so sacrificed were slaughtered out in the courtyard.\]](#) But from inside the sanctuary, the Holy Place of heaven where He now resides, Christ serves His people in different ways—as illustrated and prefigured by the furniture and utensils of the Holy Place of the tabernacle.

### **Read v2.**

Now imagine yourself not just an average Israelite from the tribe of Dan, but a Levite and priest, for only the priests could enter the tabernacle proper, the tent of meeting. The writer of Hebrews mentions only two items in the Holy Place—the lampstand and the table for the shewbread—while situating the altar of incense in the *Most Holy Place*; some say this is in error, some say not. As you can see in your illustration, they have placed the altar of incense outside the inner veil, not inside. But one passage in Leviticus seems to indicate the writer of Hebrews knew what he was talking about.

#### **Read Leviticus 16:12-13.**

*“He shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. He shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, otherwise he will die.”*

It could very well be that this was a piece of furniture that was moved about, used daily in the Holy Place, and annually in the *Most Holy Place*. In any case the preacher *associates* the altar of incense with the *Most Holy Place*, without explicitly stating it was located there. [\[i.e., having also translated accompany, following, nearby\]](#) Since it is a toss-up we will follow our text and associate the altar of incense with those things *inside* the veil.

### **THE LAMPSTAND**

As you enter the tent, the solid gold lampstand (in the Hebrew, *menorah*) would have been on your left. There were no windows in the tent, so the candelabra supplied the illumination for the service of worship conducted in this first room. And the fuel for this *menorah* was the very finest olive oil they could make.

The application is pretty obvious: Jesus is the light. But the configuration of the tabernacle—the separation of the tent from the outer courtyard—illustrates an important aspect of His light. Let’s look at three passages that speak to this:

**Read John 1:4.**

**Read John 9:5.**

**Read John 8:12.**

Jesus came into the world to offer light to everyone. While He was on earth, all could see that light. But when He left the world and returned to His “sanctuary,” that light—that illumination—was only for His followers. He was the light of the world only “while I am in the world.” Now it is only those who belong to Him that benefit from that light.

The lamp stand was not in the courtyard, but in the tent.

### **THE TABLE FOR THE SACRED BREAD**

Every Sabbath twelve loaves of fresh bread would be placed on the table that was situated across the room from the lampstand. At the end of the week the priests—only the priests—would eat the old loaves before setting out the new. [\[talk about your day-old bread!\]](#)

And once again the application is obvious: Jesus is the bread of life.

**Read John 6:31-35.**

But, in a manner of speaking, He is also the table itself; He is the one who feeds us, sustains us. And the table—not

necessarily as a formal type, but just as a reminder—is also a picture of the banquet table set for us in heaven.

**Read Revelation 19:7-9.**

**Read vs3-4.**

Now for a final flight of fancy we must imagine ourselves the high priest himself, on the Day of Atonement.

### THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

The Altar (or censer) of Incense speaks of Christ's *intercession* on our behalf.

**Read Revelation 5:8.**

In the economy of God's kingdom the prayers of His people are associated with incense. David writes in Psalm 141,

May my prayer be counted as incense before You;

The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering. (Psalms 141:2)

And the writer of Hebrews connects these for us:

**Read Hebrews 7:24-25.**

### THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Because the preacher lists the items stored inside the ark, it is easy to think of it as essentially a box for storing important, historical items. But for the purposes of his argument—and Christian application in general—it is the box itself, and specifically its lid, that is most important. But before we examine that, let's give a moment to the items inside.

#### Manna

As we have seen, Jesus is the true bread come down out of heaven.

#### Aaron's Rod

This item speaks eloquently of the Resurrection: Life from lifelessness; the promise of new life after death for not just Christ Jesus, but for all who believe.

#### Tables (or Tablets) of the Covenant

Here was literally God's word handed down to man. But there was another Word of God:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

**tables, tablets** = *plax* = from <G4111> (plasso); a moulding-board, i.e. flat surface ("plate", or tablet, literal or figurative)  
:- table; anything flat and broad, hence a flat stone.

### THE MERCY SEAT

But the most important part of the ark was the mercy seat—the space between and beneath the wings of the cherubim that crowned the lid of the ark.

**Read v5a.**

**kher-oo-beem'** (cherub = singular; cherubim = plural)

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the priest would enter the Most Holy Place and there, between the two cherubim, would be **the earthly presence of very God**. Just what the priest saw, we cannot say, but we can safely assume it must have been terrifying. Here, before the mercy seat, was the closest temporal man could ever get to seeing God face to face, and if the high priest did not follow, precisely, the letter of God's instructions for this holy moment, he would die.

Jesus Christ *is* the mercy seat.

## Read 1 John 2:1-2.

**propitiation** = *hilasterion* (hil-as-tay'-ree-on) = neuter of a derivative of <G2433> (hilaskomai); **an expiatory (place or thing), i.e. (concretely) an atoning victim**, or (special) **the lid of the Ark** (in the Temple) :- mercy seat, propitiation.

This is the very word (*hilasterion*) used for “mercy seat” in the Septuagint translation of Exodus 25:17.

“You shall make a **mercy seat** of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.”

*Everything* in the tabernacle pointed to Christ. Everything there pointed to Christ in multiple ways, but, with the writer of Hebrews, we must sadly conclude.

...but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

**Question: Why was there no lamp stand for light in this tiny square room?**

Because it was illuminated by the glory of the Lord emanating from the mercy seat? This is why Moses' face was shining when he left the presence of the Lord. (Exodus 34:33-35)



## SESSION 28. HEBREWS 9:6-14

Last week, in our discussion of verses 1-5, the preacher emphasized how the old covenant **restricted access to God**. Average people could not get near Him, and of the priesthood only the high priest could, once a year, go into His presence.

In our passage this week—vs6-14—he emphasizes how **inadequate were the sacrifices to affect real, decisive cleansing from sin**.

### **vs6-7**

Verse 6 refers back to what we looked at last week—a detailed discussion about the furniture and implements of sacrifice and worship in the original tabernacle.

**Read v6-7.**

The <sup>KJV</sup> “ordained” is not the best translation; the word means “to prepare thoroughly by means of external equipment.”

The emphasis here is on the repetitive nature of the old covenant sacrifice and worship. Every day, “continually,” the priests would go about their prescribed duties in the first chamber of the tent of meeting—the holy place. And even though v7 tells us the high priest entered the most holy place only once per year—or, more accurately, two or even three times on one day per year—he had to do this *every* year, without fail.

And this is the flip-side to what he writes in vs11-12.

**Read vs11-12.**

*...for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.*

Here the <sup>KJV</sup> comes the closest to a literal translation (“errors of the people”). “Sins of the people committed in ignorance” could best be translated, “the people’s ignorances.” Calvin, however, points out that even that is a misnomer, for no one can rightly claim ignorance where it comes to sin.

No sin is free from error or ignorance, for however knowingly or willfully any one may sin, yet it must be that he is blinded by his lust so that he does not judge rightly, or rather, he forgets himself and God; for men never deliberately rush headlong into ruin, *but being entangled in the deceptions of Satan they lose the power of judging rightly*. (emphasis mine)

Here is the what the preacher is saying: Daily the people of Israel would bring their personal sacrifices to atone for the sins of which they were aware, or felt guilty of, or had become known by others. Daily those *known* sins were atoned for. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the most holy place to atone for the sins—of himself and all of Israel—that were *not* known, or that had been conveniently side-stepped out of “ignorance.”

### **vs8-9a**

I don’t know about you, but the first few times I read vs8-9a—at least in the <sup>NASB</sup>—I was left scratching my head.

**Read vs8-9a.**

The <sup>NIV</sup> past tense (“was”) is not the best. Throughout this sermon the preacher has been making the point that the Holy Spirit is still speaking—as he did in 3:7:

**Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,**

**“Today if you hear His voice...”**

That beginning of the quotation from Psalm 95 was written hundreds of years earlier, but the preacher wants us to know that the witness of the Spirit continues even now. He still speaks.

**disclosed**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **made manifest**<sup>KJV</sup> = from <G5318> (phaneros); **to render apparent** (literal or figurative) :- appear, manifestly declare, (make) manifest (forth), shew (self).

Look back at the last verse of chapter 8.

**Read Hebrews 8:13.**

The new covenant makes the old covenant obsolete, and what is obsolete is growing old and fading away. And the point he is making in v8 of chapter 9 is that it *must* be removed for the new covenant to take hold in your heart.

What the writer is saying in vs8-9a is this: *Listen to the Spirit! He is using this reminder of the mechanics of the old covenant to show you how inadequate they all were. So long as that tent remains standing—even if only in your mind!—you'll never get to God. You are still standing out in the courtyard, just wondering what is going on inside. Tear that tent down and move right into His presence for yourself!*

I think there is a lesson in this for us. Perhaps we do not struggle with clinging to the demands of the Mosaic covenant. But let that tent of meeting stand for *anything* standing between you and God's grace in Christ. What is there in your life, in your thinking, that has become a barrier, a stumbling block between you and God?

- old, stale traditionalism? [not "traditions," but "traditionalism"—the slavish devotion to "the way we've always done things"]
- an ignorance, a misunderstanding of God's grace?
- a lingering sense that you must work, must prove yourself, for His love?

**vs9B-10**

**Read vs9b-10.**

*Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience*

If you are still thinking you need to go through some ritual for Him, the preacher points out that that didn't work the first time around.

First we need to consider the word translated "conscience," because our modern conception of that term is not precisely what is in mind.

*...imposed until a time of reformation.*

**reformation** = from a compound of <G1223> (dia) and a derivative of <G3717> (orthos), meaning **to straighten thoroughly; rectification**, i.e. (special) the Messianic restoration :- reformation.

*Matthew Henry:* None of the gifts and sacrifices there offered could make the offerers perfect as pertaining to conscience; that is, they could not take away the desert, or defilement, or dominion, of sin; they could not deliver conscience from a dread of the wrath of God; they could neither discharge the debts, nor resolve the doubts, of him who did the service. A man might run through them all in their several orders and frequent returns, and continue to do so all his days, and yet not find his conscience either pacified or purified by them; he might thereby be saved from corporal and temporal punishments that were threatened against the non-observers, but he could not be saved by them from sin or hell, as all those are who believe in Christ.

Christ is our reformation. He "straightens thoroughly."

**vs11-12**

Now we get to the "but"—the flip-side to all this old-covenant futility.

**Read vs11-12.**

I want to point out first that the NIV and ESV are on solid ground when they claim that this has already occurred:

**NIV:** Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here.

**ESV:** But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,

Two early manuscripts read that way—and isn't it true? We do not wait for further revelation, further "reformation,"



further atonement by Christ; it is all done. However, the way I read “good things to come” is that the preacher is stepping back into the perspective of those still under the old covenant. At that point, those good things were still in the future.

*He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;* Last week we spoke of Christ Jesus stepping out of the sanctuary to minister to all the people of the world—those out in the courtyard. Here the preacher speaks of Christ re-entering that sanctuary as the high priest of the new covenant. And it harkens back to the beginning of Chapter 8.

**Read Hebrews 8:1-2.**

I can see vs11-12 play out in my mind. Under the old covenant the high priest, arrayed in his priestly finery, would kill the bull, catching some of its blood in a basin. This he would carry into the holy of holies to atone for his own sin. Then he would return to the open courtyard where a goat would be sacrificed. This blood would be also be carried inside in a basin, where the priest would use it to atone for the sins of the people.

Now I see Jesus, the high priest of the new covenant, arrayed not in linen finery but in filthy, blood-soaked homespun, carrying a basin of blood into the heavenly tabernacle. But this time the blood is not that of a goat, but His own blood.

**Read Matthew 26:26-28.**

*...having obtained eternal redemption.*

*...thus securing an eternal redemption. (ESV)*

Not, of course, His own, but *our* redemption.

*Albert Barnes:* It is not a temporary deliverance leaving the redeemed in danger of falling into sin and ruin, but it makes salvation secure, and in its effects extends through eternity. **Who can estimate the extent of that love which purchased for us “such” a redemption? Who can be sufficiently grateful that he is thus redeemed?** (emphasis mine)

And the end of our passage speaks to what Albert Barnes wrote. You see, no one is saying that the old covenant sacrifices were worthless. They were created and ordained by God, and they did what He said they would. So we might have a better perspective on the Hebrews passage, let’s first look at the passages that explains what the preacher is talking about.

**Read Leviticus 16:15.**

**Read Numbers 19:9 & 17-18.**

Now we’re ready for the next two verses in Hebrews.

**Read v13.**

**cleansing** = ceremonial purification

You see, they did. But this purification had two failings:

- as the NIV points out, it was just an *outward* cleansing;
- it was temporary.

**Read v14.**

*how much more will the blood of Christ,*

Blood not from animals, but from very God Himself

*who through **the** eternal Spirit (emphasis mine)*

At first this was another head-scratcher for me: just what is the preacher saying with this? Is he saying that Christ's sacrifice on the cross, resulting in the shedding of His blood to be a propitiation for sins was accomplished *through* the Holy Spirit, third member of the Trinity? But the margin notes in the NASB say, "or **His** eternal **spirit**." And taking this line, Thomas Hewitt was helpful:

Spirit here is used in opposition to "flesh" [v13] which is outward, material, and transitory. Christ offered Himself *through the virtue of His eternal spiritual nature*, which made the offering of infinite value, and accomplished eternal redemption. (emphasis mine)

*offered Himself without blemish to God,*  
the "spotless lamb"

*cleanse your conscience from dead works*

Remember what we said earlier about the use of this word "conscience" in Hebrews. William Lane said "it describes the whole interior self; it reflects upon the relationship of the whole person to God." By Christ's blood we are cleansed—ritually purified—inside and out. More than that, it "cleanses" our relationship with God.

*to serve the living God?*

Why? to "serve the living God."

Let me close with Titus 2:11-14.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from **every** lawless deed, and to purify **for Himself** a people **for His own possession, zealous for good deeds**.

## SESSION 29. HEBREWS 9:15-22

### REVIEW

Chapter 9 began (vs1-7) with a reminder of how worship and sacrifice were conducted under the old covenant. Beginning at v8 the preacher begins making the case for the *inadequacies* of the old—the Mosaic—covenant, and at v11 turns the corner into the *new* covenant by demonstrating how the priesthood and the blood sacrifice of Christ Jesus were *sufficient*, where those under the old covenant were insufficient.

### Read Hebrews 9:11-14.

### COVENANT

The preacher has been using covenant language throughout his sermon, but our passage today—following closely after the setup of vs11-14—launches an extended treatise on the subject. So it is incumbent on us to understand, as best we can, this deep and mystical concept of “covenant.” For that we need to begin in the OT. The essential Hebrew word translated “covenant” is *berit* (ber-eeth’):

**covenant** = *berit* = from <H1262> (barah) (in the sense of cutting [like <H1254> (bara’)]); **a compact (because made by passing between pieces of flesh)** :- confederacy, [con-]feder[-ate], covenant, league.

The first example of this is found in Genesis 15, where God introduces the practice to Abram. This takes place just after the momentous event where we are told “[Abram] believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Yahweh declares to Abram that He brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans so that he might possess the promised land.

### Read Genesis 15:8-10.

Abram then falls into a deep sleep, terrified by the sense of foreboding that permeates the strange experience. In this sleep Yahweh prophesies the bondage of Israel in Egypt, the exodus, as well as a long life for Abram. Our text is unclear about whether what follows occurs while Abram is asleep—a vision, or dream—or after he has awakened. In either case, Abram sees the Lord, represented as “a smoking oven and a flaming torch,” pass between the bifurcated animals.

### Read Genesis 15:17-18.

Wrapped up in this concept of covenant is the idea of death—or, more specific, the idea of *representative* death. William Lane tells us that

the ratifier would walk between the separated parts of the sacrifice, invoking upon himself a curse if he should fail to be faithful. The bloody dismemberment of representative animals signified the violent death of the ratifying party should he prove faithless to his oath.

And in this instance with Abram, it was Yahweh Himself who was the ratifier; it was the Lord’s way of declaring that He *would* fulfill His promise to Abram and his seed. Now for an example of man as the ratifier we need to turn to Jeremiah 34. This practice apparently was common, but in Scripture we do not have an explicit description of it other than the two we are looking at this morning. This was not like the tabernacle sacrifices, where the Lord handed down explicit, detailed instructions; we have just the one event described in Genesis and this one in Jeremiah 34—which the Lord references only after the fact—and then condemning the men for failing to live up to their part of the covenant.

### Read Jeremiah 34:17-20.

The leaders of Judah had made this covenant with the Lord. They had “cut the calf in two and passed between its parts,” placing themselves on the line if they failed to hold up their end of the agreement. And they didn’t, so the Lord handed them over to their enemy. Was actual blood and death involved? You bet. “And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.”

In the NT, the Greek word translated “covenant” is *diatheke* (dee-ath-ay’-kay):

**covenant** = *diatheke* = from <G1303> (*diatithemai*); properly **a disposition, i.e. (special) a contract (especially a devisory will)** :- covenant, **testament**.

It is sometimes hard to keep straight in our minds just what a covenant was. The instances of covenant in the OT seem to be more along the lines of an agreement between two parties: *if you do this, I will do this; if you don’t, I won’t*.

But in our passage the writer of Hebrews speaks of covenant more in terms of the original, secular Greek meaning of the word. J. Guhrt, writing in *Brown’s Dictionary of NT Theology* tells us that

the term *diatheke* occurs from Democritus and Aristophanes [philosopher and playwright, respectively, around the Fourth Century BC], onwards in the sense of a will or testament. It denotes an irrevocable decision, which cannot be cancelled by anyone. A prerequisite of its effectiveness before the law is the death of the disposer. Hence *diatheke* must be clearly distinguished from *syntheke*, an agreement.

Adding to our challenge, however, is that the preacher uses the word translated “covenant” *both* ways—will and agreement—in our passage. Nonetheless, that is the background for what the writer of Hebrews refers to in our passage. With that, we are now ready to dig in.

## v15

### Read v15.

*For this reason...*

vs11-14—especially v14:

...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

**mediator** = from <G3319> (*mesos*); **a go-between**, i.e. (simply) an internunciator, or (by implication) **a reconciler (intercessor)** :- mediator [speaks of Christ’s priestly role]

Here again, just as in the imagery of the tabernacle and sacrifices, Jesus plays multiple roles. Think of it in modern terms. We’re sitting in the lawyer’s office, waiting to hear the official reading of the will. v15 says that Christ Jesus is the “mediator,” the go-between; in that, **He is the lawyer sitting behind the desk**. v15 also says that “a death has taken place”—which is why we are having the reading of the will!; that death paved the way for the benefits of the will, the covenant: payment of a complete ransom for sin—not just for the future, but even for those committed under the old agreement—and the surety of an “eternal inheritance.” **That death was Christ’s**; it was His blood that was shed so that the will could be executed for “those who have been called.”

## v16-17

### Read vs16-17.

William Lane translates v16 this way:

For where there is a covenant, it is necessary for the death of the one who ratifies it to be **brought forward**... (emphasis added)

He gets this from the Greek behind the word “be” in v16: “must of necessity be...” The NASB margin notes say, “literally, “be brought.”

**be brought** = *phero* (or *pheresthai*) = a primary verb (for which other and apparently not cognate ones are used in certain tenses only; namely, *oio*, *oy’-o*; and *enegko*, *en-eng’-ko*); **to “bear” or carry** (in a very wide application, literal and figurative, as follows) :- be, bear, **bring (forth)**, carry, come, + let her drive, be driven, endure, go on, lay, lead, move, reach, rushing, uphold.

Here is how he explains this:

[The writer of Hebrews] declares that if a covenant is to be made legally secure, the death of the ratifier must be “brought forward” in a representative sense. Under the old covenant that death was “brought forward” in terms of sacrificial animals. In the case of the new covenant, it was “brought forward” through the death of Christ. Christ became the “cursed one,” who in a representative way offered Himself on behalf of those who had activated the curse sanction of the old covenant by the transgressions they had committed.

If I draw up a will, declaring that upon my death such and such will happen, that will is not executed until I die. There must be the death of the testator—the one who made it. In eternity past the Godhead drew up this new testament, this will, but it could not go into effect until the Godhead, through Christ Jesus, died.

## v18-22

**Read v18.**

**Read Exodus 24:3-8.**

Reading through the Pentateuch, our modern sensibilities are repelled by the ocean of blood spilled under the Mosaic covenant. And it's only natural to wonder why God instituted such a practice: Why all the blood? But it does make sense when you understand one important thing.

**Read Leviticus 17:11.**

If one of my arteries is opened, and the blood drains out of me, I will die. “The life of the flesh is in the blood.” Without blood, we cannot live. Without blood, we die. So it is perfectly logical that God would establish His economy of salvation on blood—the human life-force.

**Read Hebrews 9:19-22.**

There is no life!

From the very beginning God established the connection between blood and life. When He was issuing instructions to Noah and his sons after the deluge, telling them they could now eat meat, He stipulated that “Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.” (Genesis 9:4)

The life is in the blood.

sin = death (Romans 5:12)

blood = life

For sin/death to be converted to life, there must be atonement—the shedding of blood.

**Sidebar:** Compare:

**Hebrews 9:20**

saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.” [Exodus 24:8]

**Matthew 26:28**

“Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”

**Sidebar:**

*one may almost say, almost all things...*

The law included exceptions for those who were impoverished, permitting them to offer for their sins flour or grain, in place of a sacrificial animal.

Even so, John MacArthur reminds us,

It is possible to become morbid about Christ's sacrificial death and preoccupied with His suffering and shedding of blood. It is especially possible to become unbiblically preoccupied with the physical aspects of His death. It was not Jesus' physical blood that saves us, but His dying on our behalf, which is *symbolized* by the shedding of His physical blood. If we could be saved by blood without death, the animals would have been bled, not killed, and it would have been the same with Jesus.

## SESSION 30. HEBREWS 9:23-28

### PREFACE

To jump-start our discussion this morning I would like to plant a rhetorical question in your minds. *What if He never comes back? What if Christ never returns? What would this mean to the whole economy of God's salvation for man?*

Let that percolate a while, and we will return to it later. In our study this morning the preacher revisits a point he made earlier in this chapter, then draws from it a powerful insight on the return of Jesus Christ.

Let's read the earlier passage:

**Read Hebrews 9:11-12.**

### v23

When the writer revisits this in v23, he expands on it and, in the process, suggests something that does not quite sit right.

**Read v23.**

We're fine with the need for anything on this earth to be cleansed. We are too familiar with the corruption that not only dwells around us, but dwells within each of us. But what does he mean when he writes that,

*...but the heavenly things themselves [to be cleansed or purified] with better sacrifices than these.*  
**these** = everything listed in v19.

What in heaven could possibly require cleansing?!

**cleansed**<sup>NASB</sup>, **purified**<sup>KJV, NIV</sup> = *katharizo* = from <G2513> (katharos); **to cleanse (literal or figurative)** :- (make) clean (-se), **purge, purify.**

And if that is not sufficiently bothersome, what about the plural "sacrifices"? Isn't it our understanding that—isn't this the point the preacher has been making all along—that Christ did it once? Only one sacrifice was necessary. But when the preacher speaks of the "heavenly things" he continues the idea of multiple "sacrifices."

**heavenly things** = *epouranios* = from <G1909> (epi) and <G3772> (ouranos); above the sky :- celestial, (in) heaven (-ly), high.

So what is going on here? As is so often the case, scholars and commentators have struggled with this and come up with all sorts of work-arounds. So in this instance we must rely upon the Holy Spirit to weed out those positions that seem forced, or just wrong, and bring us to the position that makes the most sense. I read through several sources (oddly, the most contemporary) that seemed forced. Not until I read Albert Barnes (1798-1870) did I find something that made sense.

*Albert Barnes:* The use of the word "purified" here applied to heaven, does not imply that heaven was before "unholy," but it denotes that it is now made accessible to sinners; or that they may come and worship there in an acceptable manner. The ancient tabernacle was purified or consecrated by the blood of the victims slain, so that people might approach with acceptance and worship; the heavens by purer blood are rendered accessible to the guilty. The necessity for "better sacrifices" in regard to the latter was, that it was designed to make the conscience pure, and because the service in heaven is more holy than any rendered on earth.

Notice how v12 ends:

**Hebrews 9:12b.**

"obtained" or "secured" eternal redemption

Under the old covenant, man's sin would build up, soiling the relationship between God and man. Once a year the priest would cleanse, purify that soiled relationship with the blood of animals, restoring the man-God fellowship. Without that repeated purification, the fellowship would remain broken.

Under the *new* covenant, Christ's blood—that is, His sacrificial death—was metaphorically carried up to the heavenly tabernacle, **not to purify it, but to once and for all cleanse, purify the man-God fellowship**. For those whose relationship with God is established in the atoning death of Christ, that fellowship will never again become soiled to the point that another sacrifice must be offered. Yes, we can behave in ways that temporarily disturb that fellowship, but that takes place in the realm of confession/forgiveness, not sin/atonement.

**Read Romans 5:8-11.**

Finally, regarding the plural "sacrifices,"

*JFB*: The plural is used in expressing the general proposition, though strictly referring to the one sacrifice of Christ once for all. [The writer] implies that His one sacrifice, by its matchless excellency, is equivalent to the Levitical many sacrifices. It, though but one, is manifold in its effects and applicability to many.

## v24-26

**Read v24.**

*...now to appear in the presence of God for us;*

I love that little word "now," which is found in all the translations. Flexible word, this, and packed with meaning.

- **Historically**: The old covenant was in place for centuries, but *now* it has been replaced by a new covenant in Christ
- **Immediacy**: Right *now*, in a moment, everything is changed; right now our great high priest is before God on our behalf.
- **Establishing**: But this is not a one-off; this same Greek word is also used to express something that occurs *and then continues*.

**Read Luke 22:69.**

("from now on," "henceforth")

Whenever your "now" is, Christ Jesus is speaking to God the Father, face to face, on your behalf.

**Read v25.**

Christ's intercession continues, repeated over and over again, but His *sacrifice* does not.

11:15

**Read v26.**

Before we turn to what John MacArthur has to say about this verse, let's clarify a few of its points.

*...since the foundation of the world;*

Since the creation of man

*...at the consummation (end) of the ages...*

Christ inaugurated a new age.

**Read Ephesians 1:7-10.**

...making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

(Ephesians 1:9-10 <sup>ESV</sup>)

**manifested**<sup>NASB</sup>, **appeared**<sup>KJVS,NIV,ESV</sup> = *phaneroo* (fan-er-ah'-oh) = from <G5318> (phaneros); **to render apparent, to make visible** (literal or figurative) :- appear, manifestly declare, (make) manifest (forth), shew (self).

**put away** sin = cancellation

The bottom line is this: The preacher in this sermon has been persistently espousing the superiority of Christ in all things, and most recently the superiority of His priestly sacrifice. But if it were necessary for Christ to repeatedly offer the same sacrifice of Himself, that would render His sacrifice no better than that of the OT priests in the tabernacle.

## v27

In v27 we have the quintessential doctrine against reincarnation. This verse is just the beginning of a more

important statement of doctrine about Christ, but let's take it by itself for a moment.

**Read v27.**

**appointed** = *apokeimai* = from <G575> (apo) and <G2749> (keimai); **to be reserved**; figurative to await :- be appointed, (be) laid up.

**Read 2 Timothy 4:7-8.**

*Barnes*: Death is the result of "appointment;" It is not the effect of chance, or haphazard. [The] cause, or the reason of that appointment, is sin. This is the adequate cause; this explains the whole of it. Death occurs but "once" in this world. It cannot be repeated if we should desire to have it repeated. A man who dies, dies but once. He cannot come back again to make preparation if he has neglected it; to repair the evils which he has caused by a wicked life; or to implore pardon for sins for which he had failed to ask forgiveness. Whatever is "to be done" with reference to death, is to be done "once for all" before he dies.

But this passage, this final sentence of Chapter 9, is not at all about man and his death, but about the fact that Christ Jesus, like man, is appointed to die only once. He is not sacrificed repeatedly into perpetuity. He died once—and that was sufficient.

**Read vs27-28 from ESV:**

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

The Son of God died once for all sin. He will return again—not to die again for sin, but to show Himself victorious and bring home all those who look for His coming.

**CONCLUSION**

Now back to our rhetorical question: *What if He never comes back? What if Christ never returns? What would this mean to the whole economy of God's salvation for man?*



## SESSION 31. HEBREWS 10:1-7

### PREFACE

Before we move into Chapter 10, I'd like to address a couple of final points in Chapter 9—one of which pertains to our study today, the other is just housekeeping. First the quick clarification.

### v26: MANIFESTED/APPEARED

In v26, the NASB translates *phaneroo* [fan-er-o'-o] "manifested," but all the other common translations use "appeared." In the ESV and NIV this is handled well. For example, the ESV has it,

**But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.**

That makes it pretty clear. But note how it is translated—poorly, in my estimation—in the KJV:

**but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (NKJV)**

**but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (KJV)**

I realize it may be a small thing, but note how that could easily be read, "*but now, once at the end of the ages, He has seemed to put away sin...*"

Here, again, is a good reason to study God's word diligently, down to the bare metal. When something like that strikes you, check it, at least, against other translations or, better, see what the word means in the original language.

### v28: "TO BEAR THE SINS"

The second point I want to make is about a word found in v28. My purpose is two-fold: First, this ties in with our study in Chapter 10, but perhaps more important, here is another instance of the riches that lie beneath a single, seemingly obvious word.

#### Read v28.

I don't know about you, but the image I see in my mind at an initial reading of that verse is of Christ on the cross, "bearing"—struggling under the incredible weight—of "the sins of many." And that image is valid. But there is more to this word.

#### Read Hebrews 13:15.

**bear** = *anaphero* = from <G303> (ana ["up"]) and <G5342> (phero); **to take up** (literal or figurative) :- bear, bring (**carry**, lead) up, **offer** (up). [*Vine's*: "leading people up to a higher place" (e.g., the Transfiguration)]

So now we can add to the initial image of Christ suffering *under* the load of sin, the more glorious, cultic image of Christ our High Priest *carrying up to the heavenly sanctuary* our sins, there to be sacrificed once and for all time upon the altar.

### 10:1 & 4

Now we are ready for Chapter 10. And let me preempt any misgivings out there: At a glance it seems that our preacher keeps banging away at the same points over and over again and, reflexively, our eyes start to glaze over. *Do not fear!* He is still making new and wonderful points. Nonetheless we now begin the final leg of his dissertation on Christ's priestly office.

The first thing we note about the beginning of Chapter 10 is that the thought begun in v1 is completed in v4, with vs2-3 a parenthesis. So let's examine it that way by reading v1 & 4 together, then returning to the parenthesis.

#### Read vs1 & 4.

## Sidebar:

The first thing I notice in that only the NIV translates this as I would expect—

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. —so I am intrigued by the other translations that use having<sup>KJV</sup> or has<sup>NASB,ESV</sup>. The word is our familiar echo, which we have looked at before, and, sure enough, that is the idea.

**have, has** = *echo* = a primary verb; **to hold** (used in very various applications, literal or figurative, direct or remote; such as **possession, ability, contiguity, relation** or condition)...

So this “shadow” is not the law itself, but something that is a *part* of the law—something the law holds or possesses—such as a character trait.

Think of the Law as the *overarching framework* for the first covenant. Under that we have such things as the design and practices of the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the cultic rites carried out by the priests. The first covenant “has” or possesses these things which are but shadows of the “good” and more beneficial things to come. The preacher mentioned this in Chapter 8.

**Read Hebrews 8:4-6.**

And of course those “good things to come” are everything under the overarching framework of the *new* covenant in Christ.

*...can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near... For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

We have indeed examined this point before, so we needn’t spend a lot of time here.

**Read Hebrews 7:18-19** (without turning).

**Read Hebrews 9:8-10** (without turning).

“make perfect,” “perfect in conscience,” etc.

Man was never “perfect” (complete), the God/man relationship was never fulfilled under the old covenant. The fact that blood sacrifices had to be repeatedly offered made this clear; they were never sufficient to “**take away** sins”:

**aphaireo** (ah-fai-reh'-o) = from <G575> (apo) and <G138> (haireomai); **to remove** (literal or figurative) :- cut (smite) off, take away.

We’ve discussed that before, but in his parenthetical comment the preacher brings out an important aspect of this.

## 10:2-3

**Read vs2-3.**

There is a good and edifying remembrance—and there is a counterproductive remembrance that tears down.

Let’s make this personal: Think about times when you have sinned—perhaps it is a chronic sin, one that lies heavy on your mind, your conscience. You confess it to the Lord, but you have a hard time shaking the *guilt* of the sin. You feel the need to keep confessing it, imagining God will honor your earnest discomfort over the transgression. But what is the result? Because it is fresh in your mind, instead of withstanding the temptation of the sin you find yourself back in it. The remembrance has not kept you in the light, but returned you to the darkness.

Now think about another time when you confessed a sin to the Lord and truly left it with Him. You accepted and embraced His forgiveness, then moved forward in the fullness of His forgiveness and grace. You did not keep rehearsing the sin, nurturing the guilt, but *released* it and, as much as is humanly possible, forgot it.

This is what the writer of Hebrews is talking about. Under the old covenant, the tabernacle/temple system *emphasized the sin*. Year after year, month after month, day after day the system was built around the cycle of sin-guilt-atonement, sin-guilt-atonement, sin-guilt-atonement. This is how the writer uses the word “consciousness” of sins: the penitent was repeatedly, constantly *conscious* of his sin. He thought about it, ruminated over it, felt the guilt of it, never experiencing completion—in our current vernacular, the ubiquitous “closure”; in our text, “perfection.”

This is the remembrance that tears down. But Christ Jesus offers us a healthier remembrance; He commands us to remember not the sin, *but Him*.

**Read Luke 22:19-20.**

[same word: **reminder, remembrance** = *anamnesis*]

Instead of treating our transgressions like the bovine chews her cud, recalling them over and over again, we are to recall the ultimate and final sacrifice Jesus made for them. This is what we are to do during Communion, but it is also what we are to do every time we confess a sin to the Lord. We are to lay that sin at the foot of the cross; remind ourselves that He died to remove not just the sin, but the *guilt* of the sin; then we are to turn and walk away.

**v5-7**

The preacher seems to play fast and loose with the Psalm he now quotes in vs5-7 (some things never change), but there is an explanation for it. We will just begin a consideration of this passage this week, and return to it next week.

**Read vs5-7.**

**Read Psalm 40:6-8.**

As we noted at the beginning of this study of Hebrews, the “Bible” the writer/preacher used was the Septuagint—the ancient (300-200 BC) Greek translation of the Hebrew OT. This is the reason for the discrepancy we note especially in v5b.

**Original Hebrew:** “ears you have opened to me”—as translated, “My ears You have opened”

**Septuagint:** “but a body hast thou prepared me”

**Hebrews:** “But a body You have prepared for Me”

We read “My ears You have opened” as a reference to hearing—i.e., You have made it possible for me to hear. Perhaps. But it also may have reference to the practice of piercing the ear of a slave who wished to remain with his master—which, by extension, means *I commit myself to your service*. This is pretty close to v7: “I have come...to do Your will.”

Nevertheless, at a glance this business with the ears seems far afield of “a body You have prepared for Me”—but not necessarily.

*Robertson:* Using *sōma* (body) for *ōtia* (ears) does not change the sense, for the ears were the point of contact with God’s will.

The original Psalm being quoted is clearly a Messianic prophecy (which is how the preacher interpreted it). Here is fresh insight into our Christmas narrative—the Incarnation. I always like to put things in an historical context whenever possible, and this moment in (human) time is immediately before the conception of Jesus in Mary by the Holy Spirit. So just imagine it:

We are up in heaven. The Godhead has declared, “This is it; the fullness of the time has come.”

God the Father turns to God the Son and asks, “Are You ready?”

The Son replies, “All this time Your people on earth have been under the first covenant—but they haven’t

understood from it that the bulls and goats are only stand-ins for the sacrifice and offerings of the heart. That is what You want! Long ago You inserted references to Me in their written law, but it is now time for the real thing. You have prepared human flesh for Me, and I am ready to do Your will, Father, by going to earth to be the once and final sacrifice for their sin.”

Then too, the words of the Messiah recorded here could also fit perfectly into the context of the Garden of Gethsemane, just before Jesus pays that final price for sin.

This is all about *obedience*. The old covenant sacrifices did not produce obedience to God’s will, so Jesus had to come to model absolute obedience to prophetic Scripture, as spoken by God the Spirit, and to the will of God the Father.

As I said, there is more to glean from this passage, so we’ll return here next week.

Let’s close by reading what Jesus said about this after He came to earth.

**Read John 6:35-40.**

## **SESSION 32. HEBREWS 10:8-18**

If nowhere else in Hebrews do we hear the voice of a pastor and teacher, we certainly do here in chapter ten. In vs5-7 he quotes Scripture, from Psalm 40; then, like a good expositor, in vs8-18 he explains what the Scripture means.

### **vs5-7**

Let's read the quote again:

**Read vs5-7.**

*Sacrifice and offering You have not desired...*

On what does the preacher base this? There are quite a number of references to this, but perhaps he was thinking about a couple of the most powerful prophecies in his Scripture regarding the Lord's dissatisfaction with Israel over this: The first in Isaiah, the second in Amos.

Since we know his text was the Septuagint, while you follow along in your translation, let me read **Isaiah 1:10-17** from that:

Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; attend to the law of God, thou people of Gomorrah. Of what value to me is the abundance of your sacrifices? saith the Lord: I am full of whole-burnt-offerings of rams; and I delight not in the fat of lambs, and the blood of bulls and goats: neither shall ye come with these to appear before me; for who has required these things at your hands? Ye shall no more tread my court. Though ye bring fine flour, it is vain; incense is an abomination to me; I cannot bear your new moons, and your sabbaths, and the great day; your fasting, and rest from work, your new moons also, and your feasts my soul hates: ye have become loathsome to me; I will no more pardon your sins. When ye stretch forth your hands, I will turn away mine eyes from you: and though ye make many supplications, I will not hearken to you; for your hands are full of blood.

Wash you, be clean; remove your iniquities from your souls before mine eyes; cease from your iniquities; learn to do well; diligently seek judgment, deliver him that is suffering wrong, plead for the orphan, and obtain justice for the widow.

Isaiah is not saying that the Lord wants us to replace an action which He now despises with a different action He now desires. The whole point of this is that Israel's actions had become loathsome to God *because those actions did not produce obedience, righteousness*. They were just going through the motions without meaning any of it.

We find further evidence of this, showing just how bad it had become, in **Amos 5:21-27**. Again, while you follow along, I'll read from the Septuagint.

I hate, I reject your feasts, and I will not smell your meat-offerings in your general

assemblies. Wherefore if ye should bring me your whole-burnt-sacrifices and meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I have respect to your grand peace-offerings. Remove from me the sound of thy songs, and I will not hear the music of thine instruments. But let judgment roll down as water, and righteousness as an impassable torrent. Have ye offered to me victims and sacrifices, O house of Israel, forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch [**Mo-lokh'**], and the star of your god Raephan, the images of them which ye made for yourselves. And I will carry you away beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, the Almighty God is his name.

Permit me a Lampel paraphrase of vs25-27:

*For forty years did you do what I commanded and offer blood sacrifices to me? Yeah, you did—you also sacrificed your children to the detestable Moloch and you worshipped the star and the homemade idols belonging to Raephan. You carried these empty, fake gods around with you wherever you went, and you gave them more honor than you did Me. So tell you what I'm going to do: I'm going to carry you—right into exile, far away beyond Damascus. Perhaps then you will acknowledge that I am the only one, true God deserving of your devotion.*

Jehovah God is only interested in actions that flow *out of* a heart of devotion and obedience. Because this did not happen with Israel, He was willing to send them into exile as punishment.

As always, we must guard against being too smug about this. It does us no good to learn of the mistakes Israel made if we refuse to consider the same mistakes in ourselves.

- When you pray to God, do you really mean it?
- When you are singing to God in worship, do you mean in your heart the words you are singing? Can you sing them honestly? If not, do you have the courage to keep your mouth shut?
- When you hold the Communion cup in your hand, are you remembering Jesus and His sacrifice—or are you thinking about the football game that afternoon?
- Do you sing in the choir because you are determined to use the gifts from the Lord in His service and to bring Him glory—or do you sing in the choir because it's fun to sing and perform the songs with your friends?
- *That is, are you just going through the external motions of worship/service without meaning it in your heart?*

The Lord is not interested in our actions—only the love and devotion of our *heart*. Put another way, our service means nothing without the motive and driving force of our love for Him. *Our service is to flow **out of** our devotion.* And this takes us right back to Hebrews 10, where the Messiah says,

*...a body You have prepared for me...to do Your will, O God.*

William Lane writes,

Psalm 40 refers to a speaker who recognized his body as the gift God has prepared so that the divine will may be accomplished.

## v8-10

Now let's return to Hebrews 10, to the preacher's exegesis of the Psalm 40 prophecy.

### Read vs8-10.

*...I have come to do Your will.*

Regarding the reiteration of "I have come to do Your will," (v9), Thomas Hewitt writes,

Before the incarnation Christ had knowledge of the ineffectiveness of the sacrificial system of the law. He also knew that the fulfillment of the will of God meant suffering and death. He was willing and ready to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sins to carry out the redeeming will of God. It is the atonement, therefore which gives meaning to the incarnation and not the latter to the former. The incarnation was a necessary means to an end, and the end was the putting away of the sin of the world by the offering of the body of Christ.

This is why Easter is far more—incredibly more—important than Christmas.

*He takes away the first in order to establish the second.*

The preacher mentioned this in Chapter 8.

### Read Hebrews 8:7,13.

The new covenant in Christ is not a tweaking of the old, just a few modifications and improvements. The old is utterly removed—"abolished"—and *replaced* by the new, because it has become obsolete. The preacher really wants these Jewish Christians to understand: Nothing from their old law now applies; they are now "in Christ."

### Sidebar:

Isn't it interesting: Before, people were "*under the law*"; now we are "*in Christ*." Big difference. And we find a dramatic illustration of this mysterious concept on the road to Damascus.

### Read Acts 9:1-6.

Paul was actively, systematically persecuting the followers of Jesus. Yet when Jesus confronted him in that seminal moment, Christ did *not* say, *Saul, why are you persecuting my followers?* He said,

**Why are you persecuting Me?**

How could Jesus say this? Because His followers were *in* Him.

*[v10] By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

It is very important that we understand what is being said here.

**sanctified** = *hagiazō* = from <G40> (*hagios*); **to make holy**, i.e. (ceremony) **purify or consecrate**; (mentally) to venerate  
:- hallow, be holy, sanctify.

Imagine you are standing at the base of Mount Everest. You begin climbing, and each day you make progress, but every night you slip back to the same spot from which you began that morning. Every day is the same: you progress up, you regress back. No matter how hard you try, every day is the same. And it is obvious that at this rate you will never attain the summit.

One day an obliging helicopter pilot swoops down, picks you up, and a few moments later you are standing atop the world—and you didn't even break a sweat.

Under the law, even the most determined, reverent believers could never make it to holiness. No matter how much progress they made, they inevitably slipped right back to where they began. But one day, God swooped down in the person of Christ Jesus, picked them up, and set them upon the summit: sanctified, purified, consecrated... holy.

And we didn't even break a sweat.

"Through the offering of the body of Christ" believers have been brought into that true relationship which makes them eternally fit to have fellowship with God and be constituted a worshipping people of God.

*Westcott:* The thought of Christians as included in the Father's will, which Christ fulfilled, corresponds with [the apostle] Paul's thought of Christians being "in Christ."

And note the tense of the verb—not we *will be* sanctified, but we "*have been* sanctified." It was accomplished more than 2,000 years ago and further, as the verb tense of "sanctified" indicates, it *still is* in effect and it is an *ongoing* process.

## **v11-14**

In vs11-14 the preacher reminds us, again, of the difference between the priests of the old covenant and the High Priest of the new.

### **Read vs11-14.**

The old priest "stands"	Christ "sat down"
The old priest made sacrifices "daily"	Christ, once.
The old priest offered sacrifices "time after time"	Christ, once.
The sacrifices of the old priest never "took away sins"	Christ's sacrifice did "for all time"

And v14 reminds us that it was *His* offering—the offering of Himself—that purchased our "perfection"—our completeness—our *hagiazō*, our once and final, yet also ongoing, sanctification. Nothing we did accomplished this. It was all of Him.

This is how the preacher began this portion of his sermon.

### **Read v1.**

## **vs15-18**

In Chapter 8 of his sermon the preacher quoted in full the passage from Jeremiah 31. Here he lifts out two excerpts to make his point.

### **Read vs15-17.**

v15 once again reminds us of how *verbal* the preacher considers the Godhead. Throughout his sermon he has emphasized this by his choice of verbs. He opens the sermon with

God, after He **spoke** long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has **spoken** to us in His Son... (1:1-2)

Repeatedly he has quoted Psalm 95—

*“Today if you hear His voice...”*

and prefaced it with

*just as the Holy Spirit says...*

And here in v15 he again emphasizes this with

*And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying...*

Note not just how verbal the Spirit is, but how immediate and present: this occurs in the here and now, not past tense. He “testifies”—He bears witness—*right now*. And what does He testify to?

Two benefits, or blessings, of the new covenant are underscored:

*“I will put My laws upon their heart, And on their mind I will write them,”*

This new covenant in Christ is not external, but *internal*. No longer on slabs of stone, or rolls of papyrus, this new agreement between God and man is written on the heart and the mind.

**heart** = *kardia* (kar-dee'-ah) = prolonged from a primary kar (Latin cor, “heart”); the heart, i.e. (figurative) **the thoughts or feelings** (mind); also (by analogy) the middle :- (+ broken-) heart (-ed).

**mind** = from <G1223> (dia) and <G3563> (nous); **deep thought**, properly the faculty (mind or its disposition), by implication its exercise :- **imagination**, mind, **understanding**.

To understand the powerful difference—the contrast between the old and new covenants—let’s put this in practical terms with two common scenarios:

- You draw up a contract, an agreement, with a contractor to remodel your house. You both sign the printed contract that states he will do the work and you will pay him for that work.  
How do you think of the contractor? Well, maybe he’s a nice guy and you get along with him all right; maybe he’s a bit of a jerk, but does good work, so you put up with him. In either case, you probably don’t *love* the contractor.  
If either of you reneges on the agreement, the signed contract is presented at court for some legal satisfaction. You may be angry with the contractor (and/or he may be angry with you), but it is just business. You want the work done and he wants to get paid. Nothing personal.
- You fall in love. Your heart flutters, a peculiar warm glow courses through your body and you decide you cannot live without this person you have been dating. So you get married. It is still a binding agreement—a contract, as it were—but it is based on *love*, not work for pay.  
How do you think of your spouse? You are devoted to him or her; you sleep together, you make babies, you share life’s ups and downs; over the years, you become *one*, inseparable, bound together on a deep, visceral level. More than just “love,” more than just affection, it is an indescribable, mystical bond.  
If either of you reneges on the agreement, what happens? Oh, there may be legal ramifications, the courts may become involved. But along with that, *your heart is ripped out*. It is very personal, indeed.

That is the difference between the old Mosaic covenant and the new covenant in Christ.

#### Sidebar:

Appreciate the dilemma this posed for those Jews in the audience of this sermon who were vacillating between the old and the new. As John MacArthur points out,



Though the New Covenant was new, it was not a new revelation, but the fulfillment of an old one. Now that it had arrived, Jews, more than any others, should have welcomed it with unbounded joy and relief. The promise was not Jeremiah's, but was God's—the very witness of the Holy Spirit. The readers [and listeners of this sermon] were being put on the horns of a dilemma, which they could not escape. The Holy Spirit, through the writer of Hebrews, is saying, “You cannot accept the teaching of your own beloved prophet Jeremiah and yet reject the New Covenant he prophesied. You cannot accept one without the other.” To accept Jeremiah is to accept Jesus Christ. To reject Jesus Christ is to reject Jeremiah (not to mention the many other prophets who spoke of the Messiah) and to reject the Holy Spirit Himself.

*“And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”*

The second benefit or blessing is just as personal. The Spirit testifies that under this new agreement, God will forget your sins. Again, based on love—love of the Father for the Son, and love of the Father for His children *through* the Son—transgressions and violations of the agreement will not be remembered by the only court that matters.

As a result?

**Read v18.**

Wherever this agreement is in effect, that's it: the one sacrifice has been made, and there is no need for any further sacrifice.

Done.

## SESSION 33. HEBREWS 10:19-22

### PREFACE

In our next passage, the preacher begins his eloquent treatise on faith. Scattered throughout his sermon he has mentioned faith, but now, in v22, he reopens this topic in earnest. But our writer is no Pollyanna about this; he does not just toss out platitudes, assuming his audience will get it. When the topic is as important as faith, he looks them square in the eye and sets down the hard truth.

Since he began this written and delivered sermon, the preacher has systematically made the case for Christ and his once for all sacrifice.

- He has compared Christ to the angels
- He has compared Christ to the priesthood of Moses, of Aaron
- He has associated Christ with the priesthood of Melchizedek

Chapter after chapter he has painstakingly compared the old order—the law, the tabernacle/temple economy of worship and sacrifice—to the new order in Christ. And now, as we look downwind to the remainder of Chapter 10 (which is, to mix my metaphors, the foothills around the summit of Chapter 11) the preacher is saying, essentially, *Now, after all that, what are you going to do about it?*

Our anonymous pastor must be a Baptist, because the remainder of Chapter 10 represents his “altar call.”

### FAITH IS TO BE ACTIVE

To our preacher, “faith” is not just some philosophical position; it is far more than just believing. Faith is active, committed. It is, more than anything else...*paid for*. We will see that in a moment in vs19-22. But first, to see how active this faith is to be, let’s look at the verbs.

The structure [pseudocode] of vs19-25 is

```
therefore
  since this condition is true
and
  since this condition is true
  then
    do this
  and
    do this
  and
    do this
  and
    do this
  and
    do this
```

That is, *Since these two conditions have been proven true, your response is to be...*

All of this is based on the fact that our ability and privilege to do these things has been bought and paid for by Christ Jesus. And what is our response to be? Here are the verbs:

v19: **enter** (the *hagios*, most holy place)

v22: **draw near** (within the most holy place)

v23: **hold fast** (our confession)

v24: **consider** (how to stimulate one another)

all of these are in a verb tense that means to do it constantly or repeatedly, customarily; it is to be a

continuous process or habit.

v25: **not forsaking** (assembling together)

v25: **encouraging** (one another)

### Sidebar:

I wondered about the prefacing “let us” that is common to every translation. As far as I can tell, it is part of the whole verb—that is, “let us” is not a separate Greek word. So we can only use common sense in interpreting its importance. I take “let us” to be a sign of encouragement, of exhortation, rather than a dictatorial order. The preacher is saying, *This should be the mark of our faith; I really want us to do this.*

This is what “faith” is to look like on the outside. Now although we will not cover the entirety of it this morning, let’s read the passage for context.

**Read vs19-25.**

### vs19-20: PAID FOR

V19 marks a dramatic turning point in the sermon. What follows represents the “why” to all the detailed groundwork the preacher has laid in the previous chapters. But we must keep in mind that even now—even as we come to this passage where a life of faith in Christ is described and encouraged, the preacher is still connecting it back to the cultic ritual of old covenant worship. But now it is worship and fellowship in the *new* covenant in Christ.

The first condition that energizes our faith is that it has been bought and paid for by the blood of Christ.

*Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,*

Putting it in crass terms, the blood of Jesus is our ticket inside. Of course, as we have discussed, there is nothing magical about the literal blood; it just represents Christ’s sacrificial, atoning death on the cross. As William Lane translates it, this blood gives us “authorization for free access to the heavenly sanctuary”.

Why do I say this access is “paid for”?

**Read Acts 20:28.**

**Read Revelation 5:6-10.**

This “entrance fee” not only gains us entrance, but gives us assurance that we will survive the experience.

*...we have confidence...*

**confidence**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **boldness**<sup>KJV</sup> = from <G3956> (pas) and a derivative of <G4483> (rheo); all **out-spokenness**, i.e. **frankness**, bluntness, publicity; by implication **assurance** :- bold (x -ly, -ness, -ness of speech), confidence, x freely, x openly, x plainly (-ness).

*...to enter the holy place*

Not the outer courtyard, not the holy place where the priests went, but the *most* holy place, the holy of holies, where before only the *high* priest could go—where even *he* feared for his survival. Even the high priest did not enter this sanctuary with confidence; he went in with fear and trembling.

There is a lot going on in v20, where the preacher expands on this that gives us entrance. Our consecration for entrance to the most holy place was established

*by a new and living way*

Here we have interesting things going on beneath the surface.

**new** = *prospatos* (pros'-fat-os) = from <G4253> (pro) and a derivative of <G4969> (sphazo); previously (**recently**) **slain** (**fresh**), i.e. (figurative) lately made :- new.

This being the only place in the NT where it is used, *prospatos* originally meant “fresh killed” (“recently slain”), but over time the second part—the allusion to death—was dropped, and the word came to mean just “new.”

But one gets the impression that the preacher knew his audience would remember the old usage, because here he tacks on new and “living.” This new road into the presence of God is not by death, but by someone who is *alive*.

**Read 1 Peter 3:18.**

**way** = *hodos* = apparently a primary word; **a road; by implication a progress** (the **route**, act or distance); figurative a mode or means :- **journey**, (high-) way.

*...which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,*

**inaugurated** = from <G1456> (*egkainia*); to **renew**, i.e. inaugurate :- **consecrate, dedicate**.

The NASB word “inaugurate” seems to be the best translation of this word, for it combines the ceremonial aspects of **dedication, consecration**, with the idea of **initializing something new and grand**.

Webster’s: **2.** to make a formal beginning of; start **3.** to celebrate formally the first public use of; dedicate.

*...through the veil, that is, His flesh,*

**Read Matthew 27:50-53.**

Commentators are not in agreement on how to interpret how the writer of Hebrews puts this. Some associate “His flesh” not with “the veil,” but with “a new and living way.” But the text seems to make clear that it should be associated with “the veil.” Admittedly, however, that seems awkward to us. Christ’s sacrificial death was *responsible* for the rending of the temple veil that separated the Most Holy Place from everything else, but that doesn’t mean His flesh *was* the veil.

I agree with Albert Barnes that it is not necessary to explain how Christ’s flesh was in every aspect synonymous with the veil. That isn’t what the preacher is saying. His point (if not the event itself) is simple: Until Christ died, God was still hidden behind “the veil.” Once His flesh was crucified, and His blood spilled, that “veil” was torn away. So just as the actual temple veil went from being a closed door to an open portal, so Christ’s physical body—at the moment of His death—went from being a closed door to an open portal to God.

*Tasker:* His death, as it were, uncovered God so that man might have a vision of the glory that shone upon His face.

**v21**

The second condition that energizes our faith is that we have a brand new “great High Priest.”

**Read v21.**

Here again there is something of a mixing of metaphors. First His flesh is the veil; now Christ is the priest passing *through* the veil into the holy of holies! We have seen this for some time, because, in truth, Christ *is* all of the above.

- He is the portal to God (“I am the way...”)
- He is the priest interceding between man and God
- He is the sacrificial lamb slain upon the altar
- He is the blood poured out upon the mercy seat
- He is the mercy (or propitiation) seat itself

Here the preacher is just reiterating what he has said before, and set up in our Chapter 2:

**Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:17)**

## v22

Now we have the first of our preacher's five exhortations:

### **Read v22.**

Let us walk through that now-open portal—not just to salvation, but to the throne room of God to worship and praise Him. How are we to do this?

*...with a sincere heart...*

As the KJVS put it, with a *true*, or truthful heart.

*in full assurance of faith,*

Trusting in everything Christ has done to make this moment possible.

We could easily spend an entire session on just these two phrases, for they describe a life wholly dedicated to God. King David was not a perfect man by any definition, but he was dear to God and a model for us because he possessed a "sincere heart" for God. No matter what happened around him, no matter what he did, he stood before his Lord open and truthful. Likewise he had "full assurance of faith" in his God. There was no wavering in his complete trust in Jehovah. The "full" part of the Greek *plerophoria* (play-rof-or-ee'-ah), translated "full assurance," means utterly filled up, room for nothing more, used to describe a vessel filled to the brim—and means complete confidence in holy God.

*...having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

The first two conditions—a sincere heart and full assurance of faith—are ones for which we are personally responsible; they must be interrogated and verified each time we "draw near." The last two have already been accomplished; for them the work of Christ is responsible.

As Lane points out, in this passage we have moved from the Day of Atonement to the rite of the peace, or fellowship offering. The latter cannot be celebrated until after the first—that is, we cannot enjoy fellowship with God until our sins have been forgiven and forgotten.

In the first, the atonement, the beast was slain, its blood poured out upon the mercy seat, and the carcass removed from the camp and consumed by fire. In the second, the fellowship offering, the beast was roasted as a fragrant offering to God, then the meat shared by all. The peace offering represented a banquet at which Jehovah was the host. It symbolized the close and intimate fellowship worshippers enjoyed with their God because they were now cleansed of their sin.

Some commentators associate this with Christian baptism, but I come down on the side of those who keep this passage in the realm of cultic worship. "Draw near" does not speak of our coming to Christ for salvation, but coming before the throne of God *in* Christ for worship and praise. So to have our hearts "sprinkled clean from an evil conscience"—the NIV "guilty" is too soft—and "our bodies washed with pure water" refer back to the ritual of the tabernacle, where the priests had to wash in the laver before they could enter.

**V22 is really talking about our being clean inside and out!** A good way to understand what he is saying here is to look at the flipside.

### **Read Matthew 23:25-28.**

But as Ezekiel points out, only God can really cleanse and change us. Only He can affect the change that is necessary before we can "draw near" to Him.

### **Read Ezekiel 36:24-28.**

*Next week we will finish this important passage.*

## SESSION 34. HEBREWS 10:19-25

### REVIEW

Verse 19 of Chapter 10 represents a turning point in this sermon. What follows represents the “why”—and the “What are you going to do about it?”—to all the detailed groundwork the preacher has laid in the previous chapters.

Last week I pointed out the structure of vs19-25:

```
therefore
  since this condition is true
and
  since this condition is true
  then
    do this
  and
    do this
  and
    do this
  and
    do this
  and
    do this
```

That is, *Since these two conditions have been proven true, our response is to be...*

And what is our response to be? Here are the verbs:

v19: **enter** (the *hagios*, most holy place)

v22: **draw near** (within the most holy place)

v23: **hold fast** (our confession)

v24: **consider** (how to stimulate one another)

*all of these are in a verb tense that means to do it constantly or repeatedly, customarily; it is to be a continuous process or habit.*

v25: **not forsaking** (assembling together)

v25: **encouraging** (one another)

### v22

Before we push on into v23, let's expand on something in v22:

*...let us draw near with a sincere [or true] heart in full assurance of faith...*

Why? Why is this important?

- **not new**

**Read Joshua 24:14-15.**

This brings out not just the historical aspect of this, but the Joshua passage stresses that we are to have an undivided heart—an undivided, undiluted devotion to God.

- **courtesy**

**Read 1 Samuel 12:24.**

Why should our God and Savior be less worthy than friends neighbors, spouse? After all He has done for us, the least we can do is be honest and forthright with Him.

- **effectiveness**

**Read Psalm 66:18.**

If our allegiance is divided, if we are anything but truthful to our God when we draw near to Him, what's the point? Is there any point in lying to God? But when we approach Him honestly, with sincerity, our prayer is effective. **Read vs19-20:**

- **obedience**

Even if there were no other reason, there is always obedience.

**Read vs5-7.**

If even His own Son obeys Him, why should we—as His children as well—think we can do less?

**v23**

In v23 we have the preacher's second exhortation.

**Read v23.**

This flows right out of v22. We are to draw near to God with a true, undivided heart and full assurance of faith. v23 tells us to hang onto that. Why? Why should we have full assurance of faith? Because *God* is faithful to us!

**hold fast** = *katecho* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G2192> (echo); **to hold down** (fast), in various applications (literal or figurative) :- have, hold (fast), keep (in memory), let, × make toward, possess, retain, seize on, stay, take, withhold.

**confession** = *homologia* (hom-ol-og-ee'-ah) = from the same as <G3670> (homologeō); **acknowledgment** [of the truth] :- con- (pro-) fession, professed.

This is the noun form of the verb *homologeō*—*homos* = same, *legō* = to speak, i.e., to speak the same, to agree, to acknowledge.

To approach God in sincerity is to be consistent in what we believe. We have entrusted our hope, our confidence, in something. That something is eternal God.

**hope** = *elpis* (el-peace') = from a primary *elpō* (to anticipate, usually with pleasure); **expectation** (abstract or concrete) or **confidence** :- faith, hope.

(Not the κν "faith" (*pistis*), but *elpis*, "hope".)

**without wavering** = from <G1> (α) (as a negative particle) and <G2827> (κλινω); **not leaning, i.e. (figurative) firm** :- without wavering.

There are a number of ways this could be illustrated, but here is the picture I see:

You are on a solid, sturdy raft in the middle of a rolling, turbulent sea. Your hope for survival has been placed in that raft, and during the day you can hold onto it, and are safe. But you fear that when you fall asleep, you may roll off and be consumed by the inconstant sea. So at night you lash yourself securely to the timbers of the raft. So long as the raft survives, you will survive.

You are holding yourself down onto that hope.

This would have been especially pertinent for the Jewish Christians hearing this sermon. The preacher is saying that they are to hold fast to the hope they have in Christ. Don't let go! Don't fall off that raft and be swept under the waves of the old covenant.

For us today the danger is less from an old Judaism than a new and aberrant belief system—perhaps a distorted, fallacious doctrine that still labels itself "Christianity."

And what is our "hope" based on?

...He who promised is faithful.

**faithful** = *pistos* = trustworthy

## v24

The third exhortation is to...

*consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.*

**consider** = *katanoëo* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G3539> (noieo); **to observe fully** :- behold, consider, discover, perceive.  
[Brown: to direct one's mind and interest toward something to notice and perceive it; to observe, test, inspect; to comprehend, understand]

Consider what?

**stimulate**<sup>NASB</sup>, **stir up**<sup>NKJV,ESV</sup>, **provoke**<sup>KJV</sup>, **spur**<sup>NIV</sup> = from <G3947> (paroxuno) ("paroxysm"); **incitement** (to good), or **dispute** (in anger) :- **contention**, provoke unto; **"arouse, to excite, to call into action."**

to **love** = *agape*

**good** deeds = *kalos* (kal-os') = of uncertain affinity; properly **beautiful**, but chiefly (figurative) good (literal or moral), i.e. **valuable or virtuous** (for appearance or use, and thus distinguished from <G18> (agathos), which is properly intrinsic) :- x better, fair, good (-ly), honest, meet, well, **worthy**.

*Albert Barnes:* Let us so regard the welfare of others as to endeavor to excite them to persevere in the Christian life.

## v25

You cannot fulfill the third exhortation to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" without fulfilling the fourth: "not forsaking our own assembling together."

**Read v25.**

**forsaking** = from <G1722> (en) and <G2641> (kataleipo); **to leave behind in some place**, i.e. (in a good sense) let remain over, or (in a bad one) **to desert** :- forsake, leave.

Because the writer's context remains cultic worship of God, I would love to say that "assembling together" referred specifically to corporate worship. It certainly includes that, but I believe the *immediate* context broadens this to include the idea of corporate *koinonia* (fellowship). This is sandwiched between "stimulate one another to good deeds" (v24) and "encouraging one another" (v25), so it seems obvious that it refers to the whole economy of the church.

**encouraging** one another = *parakaleo* = from <G3844> (para) and <G2564> (kaleo); **to call near**, i.e. invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation or **consolation**) :- beseech, call for, (be of good) **comfort**, desire, (give) **exhort** (-ation), entreat, pray.

**Why are we to encourage one another?** The preacher has already given us the answer in Chapter 3:

**Read Hebrews 3:12-13.**

We all live in a fallen world—a world ruled by the "father of lies." We must exhort, comfort, encourage each other so as to be strong enough to, as he says in v23, "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering."

**How are we to encourage one another?** The list would be endless, but I was intrigued by the phrase "one another." So I performed a search based on that—which produced the following list—which is a subset, after removing OT and passages not pertinent. But what remains is a descriptive list of true *koinonia* behavior within the body of Christ.

I commend it to you for reading.

*...and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

**When are we to encourage one another?** Every generation has said the same thing: "The end of all things is near." No one knows the when, but we do know what we are to do about it.

**Read Romans 13:11-14.**

No matter when Christ is to return, perhaps it is not a bad thing to live as if it is imminent.



## CONCLUSION

**Note the order of the preacher's exhortations.** Too often, in our modern churches, this is played out in reverse: we assemble together, we encourage each other, we stimulate one another to good deeds and love. Then, as a part of that—sometimes the *least* part—we draw near to God.

But the most important exhortation—the one we are to fulfill *first*—is to draw near to God in worship. Out of that flows all the rest. In Matthew 22 Jesus told the lawyer who challenged Him that the first and greatest commandment was, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind.” The second, He pointed out, was, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Please understand this:

Both are commandments; both are important. But Christ Jesus, and the writer to the Hebrews, put them in the correct order. We draw near to God *first*, then everything else flows out of that. Why? Beyond obedience, there is a practical reason for it: **perspective**.

No matter where we are, no matter who we are around, our current circumstances inevitably become to us the standard for normal. Given time, we grow accustomed to everything and everybody around us. Concomitantly, given time, that which we are *not* regularly around becomes abnormal, foreign. So when, day after day, year after year, our immediate environs consist of the people and things of this temporal world, the things of God—and God Himself—will inevitably become foreign to us. Our standard of goodness becomes the good of this world. Our standard of generosity becomes the generous of this world. Our standard of beauty becomes the beautiful of this world. Because even believers remain flesh, and thus tied to the things of flesh, it is necessary for us to nurture with purposeful intent the things outside flesh: things of spirit.

So when we worship God by ascribing to Him His unique attributes we gain perspective on not just who He is, but on who *we* are, as well as those familiar things and people in our immediate sight. Our old car seems just fine, until we compare it to one that is brand new. The things of earth seem just fine, until we compare them to the incomparable beauty of holy God. Compared to Him, we are but dust.

Time spent in worship of God realigns our thinking. It gives us a superior perspective.  
His.

(from June 10, 2013 *Reflections by the Pond*)

The preacher in Hebrews tells us that we draw near to God *first*. Then, with the perspective that communion affords us, we minister to each other. Absent that first critical step, we are dealing with each other by the standards of this world. *With* it, we

- stimulate one other to God's brand of love and His idea of good deeds
- we encourage each other not by the flesh, but by the Spirit

## SESSION 35. HEBREWS 10:26-31

Just as we were in our study of Hebrews 6:4-8, we are again faced with the challenge to place the teaching of Hebrews 10:26-31 in the context of our accepted doctrine regarding persistent salvation.

Although most commentators point out that the two passages are parallel—and there are indeed similarities—I believe there is a significant difference. Let's first read the Hebrews 6 passage.

### **Read Hebrews 6:4-6.**

When we studied this I outlined the three possible interpretations—that it is addressed to

- **Christians**: real believers who have committed apostasy;
- **Non-Christians**: those well-versed in the gospel and doctrine, but not real believers, who then, ultimately reject Christ;
- **Hypothetical**: this is a hypothetical case study used by the preacher to make a point.

My conclusion was that the hypothetical position for this passage made the most sense. The preacher was using this extreme illustration to drive home a point.

### **Read Hebrews 10:26-31.**

These two passages are very similar—but not identical. The context is different, and I believe the reason for the preacher to raise this again is different. Let's look more closely at what he said in Chapter 6. Here's how he describes these hypothetical parishioners who have "fallen away":

- once been enlightened
- tasted of the heavenly gift
- made partakers of the Holy Spirit
- tasted the good word of God
- tasted the powers of the age to come

In our study at the time I pointed out that the nature of each of these critical words could be used to buttress either the true-believer or non-believer position. That is, this passage *could* be interpreted to mean he is speaking of true, converted Christians who then become apostates—i.e., lose their salvation.

It is also possible to interpret it to mean he is speaking of people who have heard the truth but have rejected it before actually making the commitment—i.e., never real Christians. But there are problems with both positions—and the hypothetical interpretation removes those problems. The preacher is saying ***if this could happen***, it would be "impossible to renew them again to repentance."

Before we leave Chapter 6, note again the long list of defining traits:

- once been enlightened
- tasted of the heavenly gift
- made partakers of the Holy Spirit
- tasted the good word of God
- tasted the powers of the age to come

## **vs26-27**

Now is our passage in Chapter 10 a simple reiteration of Chapter 6, or is it different?

### **Read Hebrews 10:26.**

Here we have just one defining trait:

- after receiving the knowledge of the truth,

There is no mention of a "heavenly gift," no mention of the Holy Spirit, no mention of "tasting the powers of the age to come." It is clean and simple: "after receiving the knowledge of the truth."

**knowledge** = *epignosis* = from <G1921> (epiginosko); **recognition**, i.e. (by implication) **full discernment**, acknowledgment :- (ac-) knowledge (-ing, -ment).

As we have been saying, in Chapter 10 the preacher is beginning his run-up to the eloquent chapter 11. He has begun his treatise on faith. This is a turning point in his sermon; he has begun his “altar call.” He has systematically, meticulously laid out the evidence for Christ, and now he expects those in His Jewish congregation who are still on the fence to get off it. He expects them to decide once and for all.

Thus v26 is not hypothetical at all; it is about as real as it can get! I would venture that just about every preacher out there would like to say much the same thing:

*Fence-sitters, I have systematically laid out for you, in plain English, everything you need to know to make up your mind. Now choose. With everything you now know, if you reject Christ—if you reject the truth that I have given you—and choose to willfully, purposely continue sinning, then that’s it. You’ve made up your mind, and there is nothing more I can say. More important, there is nothing more Jesus can do.*

V26 describes the same type of person that the apostle John does in his first epistle.

**Read 1 John 2:18-19.**

These people had been in the church. They probably blended right in: they looked like everyone else, they spoke like everyone else, so everyone else assumed that they believed the same. But in reality they did not; they “were not really of us.” And John refers to them as “antichrists”—no longer just undecided, but actually *opposed* to the Messiah.

They had heard all the same teaching; they knew the gospel, the doctrine, the truth about Jesus Christ. And they went the other way. The writer of Hebrews declares that for them

*...there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

If I have a terrible, life-threatening disease, and the very best doctor, a world-renowned expert and the one person capable of curing my disease, comes to my house and lays out all the details about how he can and will cure my disease, but I reject what he has to offer—I will die.

Jesus has made the one and only sacrifice for sin. There is no other—and, just as important, there never *will* be another—that will cure the disease of sin. If you reject that sacrifice, that cure, and willfully go on in a life of sin, then you’ve made your choice—and you will die.

Put another way, God has nothing more He can offer you. He has already made the supreme gesture in the death of His own Son. There is nothing better than that.

So what will you have instead?

**Read v27.**

You are looking forward to a frightful, horrific condemnation and damnation. The preacher expands this by quoting Isaiah 26:11. Here is how the <sup>ESV</sup> translates vs10-11 in Isaiah:

**If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly and does not see the majesty of the LORD.**

**O LORD, your hand is lifted up, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed. Let the fire for your adversaries consume them.**

The wicked refuse to see the Lord for who He is, so they will be consumed in the final judgment.

Need more, sinner? Are you not scared yet?

**Read vs30b-31.**

## **vs28-29**

To emphasize what a bad decision this is, the preacher now makes a comparison between rejecting the Law of Moses and rejecting Christ in vs28-29.

## DEGREES OF SIN; DEGREES OF PUNISHMENT

Some are of the opinion that “sin is sin”—that one sin is as bad as the next. But that is not true; in His word God has declared that there are indeed sins that are worse than others, sins that merit a more severe punishment than others. The subject of this passage is apostasy, and as sins go it doesn’t get much worse than that.

### Read John 19:5-11.

Pilate was guilty before God, certainly, but he knew little of Him. He was not a Jew, and was mostly ignorant of the teachings of this one who stood before him for judgment. But *Judas* could not plead ignorance. He was a Jew—and, more important, had just spent the last three years with Jesus, listening to His words, seeing His healings, His miracles. As well as anyone else in that day, He knew everything there was to know about Jesus.

And he rejected Christ. He was guilty of apostasy, and because of that his sin was greater even than Pilate’s.

### Read John 9:35-41.

“If you were blind”—i.e., uninformed, ignorant—“you would have no sin;”

“But since you say, ‘We see’—since you are not uninformed, you are not ignorant of who I claim to be”—“your sin remains.”

God declares that when one has all the necessary information, and then rejects it, that is a greater sin than that of the one who sins out of ignorance.

Now let’s return to Hebrews 10.

### Read vs28-29.

He gets what he says in v28 from Deuteronomy 17.

#### Read Deuteronomy 17:2-7.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the punishment for apostasy—the willful, unrepentant rejection of God and His law—was stoning. If at least two or three witnesses confirmed it, the offender was shown no mercy. But it will be much worse for the one who is an apostate to Christ. Note, in v29, not only how the offense is interpreted by heaven, but how the entire Godhead is involved:

#### *trampled underfoot the Son of God*

You cannot separate the Son from the Father. If one is rejected and dishonored, the other is as well.

#### Read John 17:20-23.

And such dishonor. We know precisely what is intended if someone takes the American flag, throws it to the ground, and stomps on it. We know exactly what they meant when the Iraqis placed a picture of George Bush on the sidewalk so all could walk upon his image.

Especially in the Middle East, this is a powerful gesture of insult, of disdain. The apostate has done this not just to Christ, but to everything of God.

#### *regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant*

**unclean**<sup>NASB</sup>, **common**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **unholy**<sup>KJV,NIV</sup>, **profaned**<sup>ESV</sup> = *koinos*

The Greek word for “common” is *koinos*. We see it in our term “fellowship”—*koinonia*—which means having our lives in common. We see it in the term *koinē* Greek—that is, the flavor of Greek used in the streets by the common man. The apostate says that there is nothing special about the blood Jesus shed for our atonement—no more special than the blood boiled out of the meat in a Jewish meal.

*the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified,*

A few commentators (MacArthur), uncomfortable with the prospect of a sanctified believer becoming apostate, have decided that the writer of Hebrews refers here to Christ. That's a little thin; there are references to Jesus sanctifying Himself—but never by the blood. And the NASB and NKJV—which capitalize the pronouns for Deity—have not in this case, so those translators do not agree.

But we are just as uncomfortable with the other possibility, that the preacher is saying that a true, sanctified believer can then reject Christ Jesus in this manner (by trampling Him underfoot, and regarding His blood of the atonement as something no more special than dog's blood). So what are we to do with this?

My suggestion—*only* a suggestion; no commentator I found posed this interpretation—is this: Perhaps the writer is using the term “sanctified” in more general, universal terms. He associates it with the “blood of the covenant”—that is, the blood Jesus shed is indeed *not* common, but actually has the power to sanctify (make holy) those who believe. So the idea would be that he is not using the verb in a “done deal” way, declaring that the apostate *has been* sanctified, but that in this economy of the new covenant sanctification is accomplished by the blood of Christ, so if the person was sanctified, he would have been so by the blood he now considers “common.”

*insulted the Spirit of grace*

The Holy Spirit is not left out. The apostate “insults” the gracious Spirit. How? It was the Spirit who drew him to Christ in the first place. He stayed around long enough to at least appear interested—certainly to come to an understanding about salvation in Christ. And then...he rejects the call—not politely, not graciously, but in a profane, disdainful way. He is not apathetic; he is in direct, working opposition to the things of Christ.

### **vs30-31**

Finally, the preacher—the pastor—pleads with his long-distance congregation: *Please, you fence-sitters, please don't do this! You may be thinking yourself so clever, so erudite, so sophisticated to reject the gospel of Christ, but look what you will end up with?*

### **Read vs30-31.**

The quotation translated “The Lord will judge His people” can be understood two ways:

- He will certainly judge—condemn, punish—those who treat Him this way, who spit on His gracious atonement in the blood of Christ;
- But the passage from which this is quoted—Deuteronomy 32:36—translates this “vindicate.” So you could read this that the Lord will winnow out the chaff from the true believers (“His people”).

And we need not add anything to v31. If you are treating salvation in Christ in this manner, you are in for a terrifying experience when you meet the living God in person.

## SESSION 36. HEBREWS 10:32-39

### REVIEW & OUTLINE

#### **vs19-25**

In vs19-25 the preacher encourages his congregation. This encouragement is based on this “new and living way” which was given them by Christ.

#### **Read vs19-25.**

Look at how he punches this—how he describes how they now can *and should* live:

**let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us **hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering**, for He who promised is faithful;

Additionally he says they are to study to love and encourage one another, drawing together for strength during trying times. In other words, the preacher tells them, *Based on everything I’ve been telling you, hang in there! Don’t waver! Don’t give up! Stick together!*

#### **vs26-31**

In the next section he contrasts this “new and living way” with a description of those who have rejected it.

#### **Read vs26-31.**

Look again at how he describes this egregious behavior in v29. These apostates have

- trampled under foot Jesus Christ, Son of God
- they regard his shed blood as nothing more than common refuse
- and they have ridiculed, insulted the Holy Spirit

The preacher says, *If you just go through the motions of faith, playing the role of a believer but all the while playing the living God for a fool, you will “fall into His hands”; He will have His way with you—and it won’t be pretty.*

#### **vs32-34**

*But you are not like that*, the preacher says in our passage for today, beginning with v32. *You have shown yourself faithful in the past. Remember who you are; remember how you began!*

#### **Read vs32-34.**

- you endured
- you demonstrated your faith to the benefit of others
- you sympathized with the plight of others, and shared all that you had

#### **vs35-38**

#### **Read vs35-38.**

So keep enduring!

#### **v39**

#### **Read v39.**

*You and I are not like those people I described earlier*, the preacher declares, *those who are on their way to perdition. We are people of faith. Now, speaking of which, let me tell you about a few people of faith.*

And he follows with the glorious and eloquent Chapter 11.

### vs32-34

The preacher wants it understood that he considers most of his congregation to *not* be in the group just described—the apostates, those just feigning a belief in Christ Jesus. By way of encouraging them, he reminds them of their past demonstrations of faith, and trust in Christ.

#### **Read v32.**

*...after being enlightened...*

"Enlightened" sounds too sterile, as if they had just been instructed in something to which they now give assent. But it is deeper, more mystical than that. I favor the NIV here:

after you had received the light

**photizo** = from <G5457> (phos); to shed rays, i.e. **to shine** or (transitive) to brighten up (literal or figurative) :- enlighten, illuminate, **(bring to, give) light**, make to see.

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (John 1:4-5,9)

When we come to Christ, we not only *acknowledge* the light, we *glow* with it. His light becomes part of us.

*...you endured a great conflict of sufferings,*

As to their background, let me refresh your memory with something from our first lesson in Hebrews:

- What little we know about the recipients of this letter and sermon fits the hardships borne by Jewish Christians who were expelled from Rome in AD 49 by emperor Claudius.
- It is now about fifteen years later. And now the congregation is facing a new and perhaps worse form of persecution.

**Read Hebrews 12:4.** This "not yet" implies that they *may be* "shedding blood" in the near future. And now these people are struggling with the cost of discipleship. These people were frightened—with good reason. Fifteen years after AD 49 would be AD 64—which is the date of the great fire that almost destroyed all of Rome. The populace was enraged at the perceived indifference to the tragedy by Emperor Nero. So months later he decided to do something to distract attention away from himself. The Roman historian Tacitus writes that "to suppress this rumor Nero fabricated scapegoats, and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called)." The threat of arrest and torture was very real for the house-church in Rome; these people had a very real fear of death.

And of what did those sufferings consist?

#### **Read v33.**

We can't be certain about what they suffered early on, but we can draw some inferences:

- Some have conjectured from the words used here—such as *theatrizo*, translated "public spectacle," or "gazingstock" in the KJV—that they were made to participate in the Coliseum torture and executions. But Hebrews 12:4 suggests that the worst was yet to come: they had not yet "shed blood."
- Further evidence that this was not the case is that v33 says "made a public spectacle through **reproaches** and **tribulations**." Christians did not suffer "reproach" in the Coliseum; they died. The word translated "tribulations" could refer to anything from physical persecution and death to feeling anguish, or experiencing general trouble.

So we are probably safe in assuming that v33 refers to the worst prejudice Christians today might experience in first world countries. They suffered verbal, and perhaps the occasional physical abuse; they were considered second-class citizens; they experienced prejudice and ridicule.

When you add in v34—especially "the seizure of your property"—I would compare it to the plight of the German Jews in the mid-1930s after Adolf Hitler became chancellor.

#### **Read v34.**



After he came to power, Hitler began a concerted, systematic effort to first isolate the Jews, then expunge them from Germany. They were considered low-lives; they lost their rights as citizens; their businesses were first harassed, then destroyed; they were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to ghettos; they were not allowed to attend synagogue. They had not yet lost their lives—“shed blood”—but it was coming to that.

But the reason the preacher brings this up is not so much to rehash the difficulty in their lives, but for them to remember the grace they showed to their brothers and sisters in Christ.

**showed sympathy, had compassion**<sup>KJV</sup> = *sympatheo* = from <G4835> (*sumpathes*); to feel “sympathy” with, i.e. (by implication) **to commiserate** :- have compassion, **be touched with a feeling of**; to **have a fellow feeling with**.

This word seems to go beyond just “feeling sorry” for someone’s plight. It implies a visceral connection. The preacher used this same word in Hebrews 4:15, referring to Jesus.

**Read Hebrews 4:14-15.**

In Chapter 10 he says that the people in his congregation had a “fellow feeling with” those who were incarcerated, in bonds.

Note, ancient prisons were very different from what we have now in the States. Even now, in some Third World countries, inmates are beholden to family and friends on the outside to supply them with food, clothing, etc. This is how it was in the first century. In addition, those who supplied these to the prisoners ran the very real risk of being associated with them in the eyes of the authorities. So “showing sympathy” to the incarcerated took real courage, because you could easily find yourself under suspicion, and behind bars as a result.

And after they had “accepted joyfully the seizure of [their] property,” I imagine they must have felt something like Peter and the apostles after they had been flogged for preaching Christ.

**Read Acts 5:40-42.**

*...knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.*

Note the preacher’s train of thought—how he discovers a theme that he will revisit in Chapter 11.

**Read v34.**

I can see the preacher sitting there, scratching these words with his wooden stylus. He puts down the words, then leans back and looks at them. *Where did that thought come from?* He wonders. And immediately he considers this new thought a gift from God, and he determines to make it a centerpiece of his planned, extended treatise on faith.

**Read Hebrews 11:9-10.**

See how he has woven it in. Abraham was satisfied with the life of a nomad, living in tents. He didn’t need any more because he was looking toward a city of deep and substantial foundation being built for him by God Himself.

**Read Hebrews 11:11-16.**

Believers—those who subscribe to this “new and living way”—can look beyond the trials of today, because they see beyond them to the fulfillment of the promise of a new city, a new and better country.

#### **Sidebar:**

Before we leave v34 I should address the variance between the <sup>KJV</sup>s and the other translations.

*for you/ye had compassion **on me** in my chains/bonds*

This clearly supports the Pauline authorship of this letter. I won’t get into the minutia of this, but the oldest and most reliable manuscripts omit the “me”; the thought is that this was slipped in by those in the Pauline authorship camp. It seems the modern consensus, along with a non-Pauline author of Hebrews, is that this should not be personalized, but be translated “the prisoners.”



### **vs35-38**

Once again the preacher makes a statement, then substantiates or explains it by quoting Scripture.

#### **Read vs35-36.**

The preacher has mentioned this before, and if we look at two of those verses, they will help explain these.

#### **Read Hebrews 3:6 and 3:14.**

These verses are *not* saying, *I will only make it to heaven (and my reward) if I endure to the end*, but, *The fact that I did endure and never lost my confidence demonstrates that I was a real believer who will receive his reward*.

To back up what he has just written, the writer of Hebrews mixes together a little Isaiah with two verses from Habakkuk—even reverses the text from Habakkuk. So really what he has done here is offer a paraphrase of these passages from the Septuagint.

#### **Read vs37-38.**

That is, if you are righteous—in our context, a true believer and not apostate—you will live by faith; if you live by faith (and endure to the end), that means you are/have been a true believer. By contrast, God is not pleased with—and will not reward—those who “shrink back”—i.e., lose their confidence and do not endure—because they were not people living by faith.

### **v39**

And v39 is clear evidence again that the writer of Hebrews is not at all suggesting that true believers can fall, lose their faith, and thus be condemned to perdition, but has offered the preceding—as in Chapter 6—in the hypothetical.

#### **Read v39.**

**preserving**<sup>NASB</sup>, **saving**<sup>KJV,NIV</sup> = from <G4046> (peripoieomai); **acquisition** (the act or the thing); by extension preservation :- **obtain** (-ing), peculiar, purchased, possession, saving.

At first I wrote this: *We are people of faith—faith that saves the soul...* But then I realized that was not correct; our faith does not save us. Here's the idea, from J.F.B.:

The kindred Greek verb is applied to Christ's acquiring the Church as the purchase of His blood (Act\_20:28). If we “acquire” or “obtain” our soul's salvation, **it is through Him who has obtained it for us by His bloodshedding**. “The unbelieving man loses his soul: for not being God's, neither is he his own [compare Mat\_16:26, with Luk\_9:25]: faith saves the soul by linking it to God” [Delitzsch in Alford].

*...[we are] of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

And with this last verse the writer segues smoothly into his treatise on faith that we have as Chapter 11. Notice how he words this: not “we are people of faith,” but “we are...**of those** who have faith.”

So with this brief concluding statement he sets up not just the topic of *faith*, but of *heritage*.

## **SESSION 37. HEBREWS 11:1-3**

I would like to begin our study of Chapter 11 by first examining “faith” itself—especially as the writer of Hebrews perceives and employs it. We have already seen that faith is important to Him, and he has been leading up to the grand retrospective of Chapter 11 for most of Chapter 10. But we cannot launch feet-first into a chapter constructed of historical examples of faith until we establish a definition for the term—and especially, how it is used by the writer in this sermon. For this I am indebted to the commentator William Lane.

### **FAITH VS. BELIEF**

**Discussion:** Just what *is* faith? Is there a difference between faith and belief?

**believe** = *pistos* = find God to be trustworthy, faithful, reliable

The first step toward faith is belief. If we step back and take the long view of the concept of faith in God’s word, it really boils down to “trust”. To have faith in someone we trust them to be who they say they are, and to do what they say they will do.

But especially in our relationship with God, before we can trust, we must *believe*—believe He is truly God, believe that His written word is true, and believe that Jesus really is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. It is “through Him” that we truly believe in God.

*Grudem:* The more we come to know a person, and the more we see in that person a pattern of life that warrants trust, the more we find ourselves able to place trust in that person to do what he or she promises, or to act in ways we can rely on.

As necessary as believing is, it is just the initial step of the relationship. If it does not move beyond this step, it is a thin relationship, dwelling more in the intellect than the heart. For that relationship to truly flower, we must move from belief to faith (trust). And God the Father initiated this by means of the resurrection, which we will see in a moment.

### **HOW THE WRITER PRESENTS FAITH**

When we read through Hebrews 11 we realize right off that the preacher’s intent is to associate “faith” with God’s promises for the future—that is, the faith of Hebrews looks *forward*. Just three examples will illustrate this:

**Read Hebrews 6:11-12.**

**Read Hebrews 10:38-39.**

And, of course this is the predominate theme of Chapter 11, beginning with v1:

**Read Hebrews 11:1.**

We may shrug this off: *Of course, we have faith in our future of God’s promises.* But this is not how the apostle Paul presents faith. For Paul, faith looks backward, as William Lane points out:

For Paul, faith is our subjective response to what God has done in the past. Faith looks back to Christ’s death on Calvary and affirms, “That death was for me.”

Let’s look at just a couple of examples of this.

**Read Colossians 2:11-12.**

**Read Galatians 2:20.**

Paul says that our faith, and our life and walk of faith, are based on the atoning work of God in His Son. But the writer of Hebrews speaks of faith differently—not in disagreement with Paul, just offering another aspect of faith. Again, William Lane:

In Hebrews faith is focused upon the future. It has an objective character because it is tied to the promise of God. Faith celebrates “the objective reality” or “demonstration” that what God has promised will be realized. It is the proof that God’s redeeming love surrounds us and sustains us.

And we will see this played out in the lives of those mentioned in Chapter 11.

This is how Lane translates v1:

Now faith celebrates the objective reality [substance, assurance] of the blessings [things] for which we hope, the demonstration [conviction, evidence] of events [things] as yet unseen.

Though these two expressions seem similar, perhaps even redundant, there is a subtle difference. First, *faith is the assurance, or substance, of things hoped for*,

*Lane:* Faith celebrates *now* the reality of the future blessings which make up the objective, or actual, content of Christian hope. **Faith gives to the objects of hope the force of present realities**, and it enables the person of faith to enjoy the full certainty that in the future these realities will be experienced.

For example, in earlier studies I have said that the believer is not waiting, treading water, for his eternal life to begin. The believer is already living in his eternal life; it has already begun! The believer enjoys *now* the blessings, the benefits, that have been promised him in the future. Those blessings are real right now! **Faith gives to the objects of hope the force of present realities.**

Second,

*...the conviction, or evidence, of things not seen.*

*Lane:* Faith demonstrates the existence of reality that cannot be grasped through our senses. Faith confers upon spiritual reality that we cannot see, the full certainty of a *proof* or a *demonstration*; it furnishes *evidence* concerning that which has not been seen.

If the first is difficult for the world to understand, this second is impossible. The writer of Hebrews is saying that faith does far more than give us peace, a confidence, about God's promises regarding our future, but faith actually *proves* those promises! This can be a challenging concept even for believers.

I suppose there may be a multitude of ways to illustrate this, but none occurred to me—except for one, and it is found, in of all places, in the film *Angels and Demons*, from the book of the same name by that learned theologian and author of *The DaVinci Code*, Dan Brown.

There is a scene in the movie where a Vatican priest, poses a question to the protagonist, Robert Langdon, before permitting the Harvard symbologist access to the Vatican archives.

"Do you believe in God, sir?"

"I'm an academic. My mind tells me I will never understand God."

"And your heart?"

"Tells me I'm not meant to. Faith is a gift that I have yet to receive."

If faith is a gift from God—and I believe it is—then having and experiencing that faith is proof of God and His promises. It is "evidence of things not seen."

*Leon Morris:* ...there are realities for which we have no material evidence though they are not the less real for that. Faith enables us to know that they exist and, while we have no certainty apart from faith, faith does give us genuine certainty. **Faith is the basis, the substructure of all that the Christian life means, all that the Christian hopes for.** (emphasis added)

In v13 we can see how the preacher has put this concept to use.

**Read Hebrews 11:13.**

*All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance...*

With faith, the saints of old "saw" (as if part of their immediate reality) the promises that were quite some distance into the future.

## v2

### Read v2.

For by *it*—faith—the men of old (itemized in the verses that follow) gained approval.

**gained approval**<sup>NASB</sup>, **obtained a good testimony (report)**<sup>KJVS</sup>, **received** their **commendation**<sup>ESV</sup> = *martyreo* (mat-too-reh'-o) = from <G3144> (martus); **to be a witness, i.e. testify** (literal or figurative) :- charge, give [evidence], bear record, have (obtain, of) good (honest) report, **be well reported of**, testify, give (have) testimony, (be, bear, give, obtain) witness.

This word is from the legal sphere (as is the word in v1 translated conviction, or evidence). In contrast to all other uses of the verb *martyreo* in the NT—which speak of someone bearing witness, for example, to the truth of Christ and His teachings—the writer to the Hebrews uses it in the *passive* (rather than active) form (i.e., had witness borne to them), which changes its direction.

Rather than the disciple submitting testimony about his Lord, here the Lord (implicitly) bears witness to the veracity of the disciple. God Himself (it is implied) acknowledges the superlative faith of these men, and because of that faith approves them—as in the *KJVS*, they “obtained a good testimony” (from God).

*Matthew Henry*: True faith is an old grace, and has the best plea to antiquity: it is not a new invention, a modern fancy; it is a grace that has been planted in the soul of man ever since the covenant of grace was published in the world; and it has been practiced from the beginning of the revelation; the eldest and best men that ever were in the world were believers. Their faith was their honour; it reflected honour upon them. They were an honour to their faith, and their faith was an honour to them. It put them upon doing the things that were of good report, and God has taken care that a record shall be kept and report made of the excellent things they did in the strength of this grace. The genuine actings of faith will bear to be reported, deserve to be reported, and will, when reported, redound to the honour of true believers.

## v3

In v3 the preacher expands further his concept of faith. He stated that faith makes what we hope for so real it is as if it were standing in front of us now. And he stated that faith is evidential proof for those things we cannot yet see. Now, in v3, he adds yet another aspect of faith: understanding.

### Read v3.

*By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God,*

**worlds**<sup>NASB,KJVS</sup>, **universe**<sup>NIV,ESV</sup>, **ages**<sup>YLT</sup> = *aion* (eye-ohn') = from the same as <G104> (aei); properly **an age; by extension perpetuity (also past); by implication the world**; specially (Jewish) a Messianic period (present or future) :- age, course, eternal, (for) ever (-more), [n-]ever, (beginning of the, while the) world (began, without end). Compare <G5550> (chronos).

**prepared**<sup>NASB,YLT</sup>, **framed**<sup>KJVS</sup>, **created**<sup>ESV</sup>, **formed**<sup>NIV</sup> = *katartizo* = from <G2596> (kata) and a derivative of <G739> (artios); **to complete thoroughly**, i.e. repair (literal or figurative) or adjust :- fit, frame, mend, (make) perfect (-ly join together), prepare, restore.

My first question was, why not just say the worlds were *created*? What's the difference? Here's the answer: More than just the idea of making something, this word includes the thought that what was made was made **appropriate, suitable, and useful**. It means that all creation was “put in order.” The word can also be used for “repair”—as it is in Mark 1:19 for the fishermen repairing their nets—but here it reflects the thorough attention of God in speaking the universe into being.

**Read Genesis 1:3a, 6a, 9a, etc.**

**word** of God = *rhema* (ray'-mah) = from <G4483> (rheo); **an utterance** (individual, collective or special); by implication a matter or topic (especially of narration, command or dispute); with a negative naught whatever :- + evil, + nothing, saying, word.

The Godhead chose to *speak* this universe into existence, and it is our *faith* that confirms this.

*...so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.*

More than that, our faith assures us that the raw materials from which the universe was made were *not* seen. That is, God's voice did not move the raw materials from the warehouse to space; God's voice *was* the warehouse! He *spoke* everything into existence! And it is our faith that helps us understand this mind-boggling truth.

In this brief passage the writer to the Hebrews has portrayed faith as something far more powerful and active than simply a person saying "I believe". Faith informs, illumines, convicts, gives confident hope and, not least, produces the public approval and affirmation of the one with faith and, ultimately, of God Himself.

# HEBREWS - CHAPTER 11

## BY FAITH...

Character	Heb. Ref	Background	Act(s) of Faith	Result of Faith
<b>Abel</b>	11:4	Gen. 4 Matthew 23:34-36 Heb. 12:24	obediently offered the correct sacrifice	gained God's approval; declared righteous
<b>Enoch</b>	11:5-6	Gen. 5 Jude 14	walked with God	did not experience death (no body buried on earth); pleased God (only by faith can anyone please God [v6])
<b>Noah</b>	11:7	Gen. 5 to Gen. 9 Mat. 24:37-38 (Luke 17:26-27) 2 Peter 2:5	fearing God, he obeyed His command and built an ark, and thus permitted God to condemn the world through his act of faith and obedience	his family saved ; an heir of righteousness; a preacher of righteousness;
<b>Abraham (&amp; Sarah)</b>	11:8-12 (11:11) 11:17-19	Gen. 12:1-4 Gen. 13:14-18 Gen. 12:8 Gen. 13:18 Gen. 17:19 Gen. 18:11-14 Gen. 21:2 1 Peter 3:5-6 Gen. 22:1-19	obeyed God's call to leave his home and migrate into an unknown land; did not settle down, but lived as a nomad; trusted in God that He would keep His promises about a son and many descendants; was willing to obey God's command to sacrifice his only son	received an inheritance; lived in the land of promise; promise of a son fulfilled; promise of innumerable descendants fulfilled
<b>Isaac</b>	11:20	Gen. 27:27-29 Gen. 28:1-4	blessed Jacob, the son of God's choosing	the covenant line was continued
<b>Jacob (Israel)</b>	11:21	Gen. 48:8-20	blessed Ephraim, the grandson of God's choosing	"I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." (Gen. 48:19)
<b>Joseph</b>	11:22	Gen. 50:22-26 Exo. 13:19 Joshua 24:32	knew that Canaan was his true home; anticipated the future exodus of Israel	saved and protected his family (Israel and his children); bones buried in the Promised Land

# HEBREWS - CHAPTER 11

Character	Heb. Ref	Background	Act(s) of Faith	Result of Faith
<b>Moses (and parents)</b>	11:23-28	Exo. 2:1-3 Exo. 2:10-11 1 Cor. 10:1-4 Exo 2:11-15 Exo 12:1-28 Exo 14:1-31	parents risked death to save Moses; Moses refused to deny his lineage, risking death to identify with Israel; he forsook ("left") Egypt when he accepted the role of Israel's defender (though he was rejected by Israel in that moment), then fled to Midian; obeyed God to keep the Passover; trusted in God to give them safe passage through the Reed Sea	faith of his parents meant that God's Law-giver would be saved; left Egypt safely; Egyptian army drowned in the Reed Sea; safely led Israel from Egypt and in the wilderness for forty years
<b>(Joshua)</b>	11:30	Joshua 6:1-27	obeyed God to take Jericho by unorthodox means	Israel gained entrance into the Promised Land beyond the Jordan River
<b>Rahab</b>	11:31	Joshua 2:21 Joshua 6:24-25 Matthew 1:1-6ff	risked her life because she believed in the Lord	she and her family saved; was included in the Messianic line, through David to Jesus
<b>Gideon</b>	11:32	Judges 6-8	believed he had "seen the angel of the Lord [Christ] face to face."; built an altar to the Lord; trusted God to deliver them with few men	received "peace" from God
<b>Barak</b>	11:32	Judges 4-5	he obeyed the Lord's command to lead troops against Sisera, insisting that the prophetess attend, then sang the Lord's praise with Deborah	Sisera (an oppressor of Israel for twenty years), while stronger in human terms, destroyed; Barak's faith and obedience remembered
<b>Samson</b>	11:32	Judges 13-16	though morally weak, he knew his strength and call were from the Lord	ultimately defeated the Philistines; commended for his faith
<b>Jephthah</b>	11:32	Judges 11-12:7	son of Gilead by a heathen prostitute, empowered by Holy Spirit to become a great leader	defeated the Ammonites
<b>David</b>	11:32	1 Samuel 16 to 1 Kings 2:12	from lowly shepherd to King of Israel; myriad acts of faith	declared by God to be a man after His own heart
<b>Samuel</b>	11:32	1 Samuel 1-25:1	Dedicated to the Lord by Hannah, rises to become the preeminent prophet/priest of Israel; myriad acts of faith	key figure in sculpting the initial kingship and fall of Saul, then the rise of David

## SESSION 38. HEBREWS 11:4-7

There are a number of ways to approach the “Roster of Faith.” I would like to survey Chapter 11—specifically vs4-32—by examining for each person mentioned

- his or her background story in the OT
- the result—that is, what their faith produced
- then finally the application for us today

### v4: ABEL

**Read v4.**

There are two ways we can approach this first illustration of faith in Abel: *obedience* and *faith*. But we will see that actually there is little difference between the two. We obey because we trust in the one who seeks our obedience. Without faith, without trust, there is no obedience.

So was Abel declared righteous because of his faith, or because of his obedience? The answer: Yes.

### **BACKGROUND**

The story of Abel takes us back to the time just after Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden.

**Read Genesis 4:1-5.**

Cain, the firstborn, was the farmer; Abel, his younger brother, was the shepherd. There is much we do not know about this moment, so we need to make some educated assumptions:

- After the fall, Yahweh must have instituted some form of cultic sacrifice for the first family to express its allegiance/devotion to Him. Of course, none of this was necessary *before* the fall.
- We are not privy to the Lord’s instructions regarding these sacrifices, but, from the result, it is clear that Abel was obedient with his, and Cain was disobedient.
- *Why* was Abel’s sacrifice more pleasing to God?
  - Much later, under the Mosaic law, the first offering was of blood, for the atonement of sin. *Sin must be dealt with first*. Only after that was there the fellowship offering, which consisted of food that would comprise a feast in which all would partake, with the Lord acting as the host. From this we can draw the conclusion that Cain was disobedient because he brought his fellowship offering out of order, before his sin offering—as Abel did.
  - There is one other point. It is subtle, and I wouldn’t want to put too much weight on it, but note v3:

Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground.

Compare that to v4:

Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock

It is probable that Cain’s offering was not off the top, but Abel’s was.

Cain was disobedient because he did not take God at His word—thus, he demonstrated that he had no faith in Him. Abel, by contrast, *was* obedient because he had faith that what the Lord said was true.

### **RESULT**

*And the Lord had regard for Abel and for His offering.*

**regard**<sup>NASB,ESV</sup>, **respect**<sup>\*KJVS</sup>, **looked with favor**<sup>NIV</sup> = *shaah* (shaw-aw) = a primitive root; **to gaze at** or about (properly for help); by implication to inspect, **consider**, compassionate, be nonplussed (as looking around in amazement) or bewildered :- depart, be dim, be dismayed, look (away), **regard, have respect**, spare, turn.

The precise meaning of this Hebrew word is always determined by context.

**Read Isaiah 31:1.**

The Lord smelled the aroma of Abel’s fire and was pleased. God said, *Abel’s heart is right; his faith is true*. The writer of Hebrews declares that this meant the Lord declared Abel “righteous.” Does he just surmise this, by extension? No, he probably got it from Jesus Himself.

**Read Matthew 23:34-36.**



...God testifying about his gifts...

Just as in v2, God Himself gives the testimony that Abel is righteous because of his obedient, proper sacrifice of meat. But we must not get sidetracked by the difference between meat and vegetables. Just as we have seen throughout this study, the true and timeless difference between the two was *the condition of each man's heart*. Abel's sacrifice was based on faith; Cain's sacrifice was based on arrogance, and an absence of faith. *The Message* paraphrase makes this point:

By an act of faith, Abel brought a better sacrifice to God than Cain. It was what he *believed*, not what he *brought*, that made the difference. That's what God noticed and approved as righteous.

## APPLICATION

...and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

So what is Abel telling us? The lesson is the fundamental lesson for perhaps every historical vignette mentioned in this chapter, and we find it in the previous chapter.

**Read Hebrews 10:22.**

It does no good—no good for us, no good for God—if we bring our sacrifice, our offering, our service without “a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” Actions without faith are as meaningless as Cain's sacrifice, which was rejected by the Lord.

We must, each one of us, develop in ourselves the habit of constantly ensuring that our actions—our worship, our service—are energized by true devotion and faith, and not by the bloodless motivations of habit, of traditionalism—or worse, grudging obeisance. [*“keep short accounts”*]

## VS5-6: ENOCH

**Read vs5-6.**

## BACKGROUND AND RESULT

Enoch [*khan-oke*] was the first person of record, after the fall, to “walk with God.” We find him in Genesis 5. And in this chapter the *rhythm* of the text is telling. Look at how each person's story is structured—how it begins and ends.

v3-5: Adam lived...and he died.

v6-8: Seth lived...and he died.

v9-11: Enosh [*en-ohsh*] lived...and he died.

etc.

But now v21.

Enoch lived...and he was not, for God took him!

What's different? What changed the repetitive narrative? “Enoch walked with God.” As John Sailhamer points out, Enoch “found life amidst the curse of death.” In Genesis 2:16-17 the Lord God told Adam,

**“From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”**

The curse of death was upon man, but Enoch “walked with God” and did not die.

*Matthew Henry*: he was really, eminently, actively, progressively, and perseveringly religious in his conformity to God, communion with God, and complacency in God.

We can summarize vs5-6 as a conversation:

**Enoch did not experience mortal death.**

*Why?*

**Because he pleased God.**

*How?*

**By faith.**

*What is faith?*

**To believe that God is, and that He is gracious and generous toward those who search out and worship Him.**

## APPLICATION

This is circular:

Do you want to please God? Then walk with Him, be devoted to Him, commune with Him, let *Him* set the pattern for your life. How does one do this? By faith.

But without faith, one would not even be inclined to want to please God. So faith comes *first*—and it is a gift from God.

So we can conclude that, like sanctification, there are two kinds, or types of faith:

- *establishing* faith, the initial faith that connects us with God in the first place;
- *established* faith, living faith that keeps us near God, learning His mind, loving His ways.

## v7: NOAH

Now in v7 the preacher revisits his thread of “things not seen”—which he will return to in earnest in v13.

## BACKGROUND

*By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen...*

What were these “things not seen”?

**Read Genesis 6:13 & 17.**

Put yourself in Noah’s sandals. You’re walking along one day, minding your own business, when out of the blue God taps you on the shoulder and shares with you His plans to destroy the earth and with it all flesh, everything that breathes. I imagine your response would be similar to Bill Cosby’s: “Right. Who is this *really*?” At the very least he might have asked, as did one of his descendants before a bush that was burning: “Why me?”

The answer is in v9 of Genesis 6.

**Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.**

But God wasn’t finished yet. He proceeded to explain, in excruciating detail, His plans for saving Noah, his family, and a remnant of all living things (God always leaves a remnant). After handing Noah the blueprints for a strange ship, He tells him,

**Read vs18.**

What was Noah’s response?

**Read 22.**

[Back to Hebrews 11](#). The preacher describes it this way in Hebrews:

*...in reverence [Noah] prepared an ark for the salvation of his household,*

in **reverence**<sup>NASB</sup>, moved with **godly fear**<sup>KJV</sup>, in **holy fear**<sup>NIV</sup>, in **reverent fear**<sup>ESV</sup> = *eulabeomai* = middle from <G2126> (eulabes); **to be circumspect**, i.e. (by implication) **to be apprehensive**; religiously, to reverence :- (moved with) fear.

Why is Noah included in this catalogue of faith? Because the Lord God told him this fantastical story about what was about to happen—and he believed. He had reverent, fearful *faith*. He trusted that God was telling him the truth. How could he do this? He “walked with God.” And there it is again.

## RESULT

### Read all of v7.

*...by which he condemned the world...*

We do not know if the “by which” refers to Noah’s faith or his building of the ark (the NIV inserts “faith”). But it makes little difference; the first is the motivation, the second the action *based* on that motivation. The point remains the same: it “condemned the world.”

What is this talking about? Let’s do a little quick arithmetic.

- Genesis 5:32 tells us that after Noah was 500 years old he became the father of the three sons who would remain with him and repopulate the earth.
- Genesis 7:6 tells us that Noah was 600 years old when the flood came.
- Genesis 6:18 tells us that when God told Noah to build the ark, his sons already had wives.
- The conclusion would be that the building of the ark took a number of decades, perhaps as many as 70 or (unlikely) 80 years.

### Read 1 Peter 3:18-20.

*...who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark*

There is a lot going on in this opaque, problematic passage—most of which, while fascinating, we don’t have time to examine, and is outside the context of our study in Hebrews. But I refer to this because of its reference to God’s patient longsuffering during the construction of the ark.

Along with building the ark, what was Noah doing during those many decades? He was explaining to the people why he was doing it, and what was about to happen to those who did not change their evil ways. 2 Peter 2:5 supports this:

and [God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher [or herald] of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

During the ark’s construction, God was giving everyone a chance to repent through the evangelizing of Noah. When they didn’t—there were only the original eight people in the ark—they were “condemned.” The faith of Noah, and the resulting ark, was a stark testimony against the sins of the world.

### Back to Hebrews 11.

*... and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*

As with his descendant Abraham, God declared Noah righteous because of his faith—not his service, not his carpentry or shipbuilding, but his *faith*.

## APPLICATION

There could be many applications from this for our lives, but let’s leave it at this: When literally the entire world outside your immediate family is against what you believe, let your fear be not of them, but of God. And He will reward your persistent faith.

## SESSION 39. HEBREWS 11:8-12

### OLD BUSINESS

Regarding last week's (off-topic) discussion on when God sent rain—after the Fall, or not until the Deluge—there is no definitive consensus on this.

Rain after the Fall	Rain not until the Deluge
K&D MacArthur Gill? Barnes?	Sailhamer? Whitcomb/Morris

After some research I come down on the side of those who believe there was rain at least just after the Fall—i.e., when Adam and Eve were banished from the garden. To wit,

- The Bible does not explicitly state when the first rains occurred, because different words are used that *could* refer to rain, i.e., “mist,” “flow,” etc.
- The mention of mist, rain, etc. in Genesis 2:5-6 speaks of conditions during the creation process (not conditions for centuries later)—and some claim that the “mist” of Genesis 2:7 *does* refer to a form of rain.
- The plants mentioned are of two types: the initial plantings by God that were watered without rain and lived without cultivation, and those planted and tended by man that required regular rain.
- Since Cain was a farmer (“a tiller of the ground”), those who claim it didn’t rain until the Deluge would have to believe that there was no rain for all the cultivated vegetation from Cain until Noah’s 600<sup>th</sup> year—a span of hundreds, perhaps thousands of years (and let’s not get into *that!*). This is highly unlikely.
- **Conclusion:** Once sin entered the world; once Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, and thus had to fend for themselves; once there were men to plant, cultivate, and harvest food from the ground, there was rain. But there is insufficient “proof” either way for anyone to be dogmatic about this.

### VS8-10: ABRAHAM

One has the impression that Abraham is a favorite character for the writer of this sermon. He is mentioned in Chapter 2, 6, at length in Chapter 7. And now that he is deep in this treatise on faith, he can’t wait to get back to him again. The writer does not just add Abraham to the list, but he uses him as a representative, or template of sorts, for *everyone* in the list.

#### Read Hebrews 11:8-10.

Remember that when we examined the first three verses of this chapter I pointed out that, different from the apostle Paul, who points faith *backwards* to the work of Jesus Christ, the writer of Hebrews points faith *forward* into the future. Let’s listen again to how William Lane puts it:

In Hebrews faith is focused upon the future. It has an objective character because it is tied to the promise of God. Faith celebrates “the objective reality” or “demonstration” that what God has promised will be realized. It is the proof that God’s redeeming love surrounds us and sustains us.

Faith celebrates *now* the reality of the future blessings which make up the objective, or actual, content of Christian hope. **Faith gives to the objects of hope the force of present realities**, and it enables the person of faith to enjoy the full certainty that in the future these realities will be experienced.

And Abraham is the perfect poster child for that concept of faith. He repeatedly trusted God for what God promised for Abraham’s future. And perhaps the most dramatic high point for this trust occurred in the very beginning.

### BACKGROUND: VS8-10

#### Read v8.

This refers to **Genesis 12**, and my favorite approach to this passage—to illustrate Abram’s incredible faith in Yahweh—is to first read the bookends.

v1a: Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth...”

v4a: So Abram went forth...

That is faith in a nutshell. If you ever need a reminder of what true faith and trust in God looks like, there it is. But just what did God say about the future that Abram believed?

**Read vs1-3.**

**Sidebar:**

We consider it a laudable act of faith for a believer to obey the Lord's call to go to a specific place for a specific purpose: "Leave Iowa and go to the island of Borneo to be a missionary to the natives." But Abram was not given those specifics. He did not know where the Lord was taking him, and he wasn't told *how* he would "be a blessing." He just "went forth."

*...he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

However, as the writer of Hebrews will point out in a moment, that ignorance of destination applies only to *temporal* locations. Spiritually, in faith, Abram knew *exactly* where he was going.

**Read v9.**

Let's make sure we understand correctly this period in Abraham's life, for it is not always easy to shake those flannel graph images we learned in Sunday School.

- Abram was Chaldean—born, raised and lived the first seventy-five years of his life in Ur, in southern Mesopotamia. He was born into a culture that did not know Yahweh. The principal god of the Chaldees, worshipped at the ziggurat that still stands today, was Nannar, or interestingly in the Semitic tongue, "Sin"—the moon god.
- Everything about him would have been foreign to the people of Canaan: his speech, his dress, his appearance, his traditions. He did not look anything like those pictures we grew up with in *Egermeier's Bible Story Book*.

[\[describe dress and appearance\]](#)

- When you will live to be 175 years of age, at seventy-five you surely do not have a long white beard and a wrinkled visage; you are younger than middle-aged.

*...he lived as an alien...dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise*

Abraham was wealthy and well-respected. When he came into Canaan he not only could have settled in a city, he could have established his own. But he didn't; he remained a nomad. Why? He could have sung that old Jim Reeves song,

*This world is not my home I'm just a passing through  
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue  
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore*

The point is this: Abraham purposely, intentionally remained a nomad, living in tents his whole life, never putting down roots, because even though the land had been promised to him and his descendants, he realized that this was not his true home.

**Read v10.**

For me this is food for meditation—something to spend time with in the prayer closet. Too often people—even people within the church—think of living by faith as aimless, directionless, just "letting go"—which could be a synonym for being lazy. But that does not at all describe Abraham's life of faith.

*You want me to settle down here? He might have said at the time. This? This is nothing. Why should I settle for the fleeting impermanence of human cities; their rubble litters the landscape. My city is one with real foundations—they'll go all the way down—because it will be a city designed and built by God Himself.*

You can sense the preacher getting excited about this. It starts here, continues through Chapter 11, then in Chapter 12 he really cuts loose, where he compares Mt. Sinai to the future New Jerusalem.

### **Read Hebrews 12:18-24.**

Talk about being filled with the Spirit!

### **BACKGROUND: v11**

I was going along, blithely preparing to do a normal breakdown of v11, when I happened to notice how the NIV translates it. All other translations are Sarah-centric, but the NIV is *Abraham*-centric! What's going on here?

### **Read v11 in NASB.**

Now here is the same verse in the NIV:

**By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.**

Leon Morris writes,

This verse presents us with a problem so difficult that Hering speaks of it as a "cross which is frankly too heavy for expositors to bear."

So once again we have text with which we dare not be dogmatic, for scholars are divided on what to do with this verse.

Without going too far into the weeds, the root of the problem focuses on the Greek words translated in the NASB, "received ability to conceive," or in the KJV, "received strength to conceive seed." In most instances, the phrase *dynamis eis katabolēn spermatis* would apply to the masculine: "power for the laying down of seed," or "power for the depositing of semen." So just a few quick notes to back up my thinking on this:

- *sperma* is used repeatedly in Scripture for children or descendants, and need not be limited to literal semen.
- It is possible that by this time Abraham was incapable of "bearing fruit," but he did become the father of Ishmael at age 86. I do not recall any mention of him, at any age, being sterile or impotent; v12 suggests it, but could also just mean that at his age, one would assume... But Sarah is mentioned here because she *had been* heretofore barren, thus she "received ability" when under natural circumstances she did not have the ability or power.
- Thomas Hewitt points out that *katabolē* can have other meanings that refer to establishing a foundation or posterity. He also mentions the existence of an ancient papyrus in which *katabolaios* has the meaning "store-place".

So it makes sense to me to interpret this (as the KJV, ESV, YLT, and the NASB) that Sarah, though barren, was through her faith given the ability or strength to receive *and, for once, put to use* the seed that would become the foundation of a great nation—i.e., the ability to establish a posterity.

It may be that you, like me, wondered how Sarah got into a catalogue of faith. After all, didn't she laugh at the idea of giving birth at her age? Well, yes. We find the story in Genesis 18.

### **Read Genesis 18:9-15.**

But maybe you, like me, forgot that Abraham, too, laughed at the idea—as a matter of fact, Abraham was rolling in the aisles over the absurd idea.

### **Read Genesis 17:15-17.**

For me this just means that Abraham and Sarah were human. Having faith does not mean we are cast from a mold, a bunch of little automatons, bobble-heads just nodding in perfect acceptance of everything. Thomas Hewitt reminds us that not only is Rahab the harlot of Jericho included in this list of the faithful, but that she, along with Tamar, who played the harlot, and Bathsheba, an adulteress, are included in the genealogy of our Lord.

### **RESULT: v12**

In v12 we have the result of the faith demonstrated by both Abraham and Sarah.

### **Read v12.**

## APPLICATION

What a beautiful picture this is for us today—not just of faith in the abstract, but of a daily faith-walk. Abraham’s life illustrates perfectly how we are not to “settle down”—we are not to let ourselves become too comfortable—in this temporal world. We are to remain aliens and strangers here. It should raise a red flag, alarm bells should sound whenever we as believers start regretting the day we will leave this for our true home.

Then too, we are never to accept as absolute and final the laws of the natural world. If God says it is going to happen, then it will. God’s will always trumps natural law, so, for example, a man and woman well beyond childbearing years can become the patriarch and matriarch of God’s chosen race of people.

## SESSION 40. HEBREWS 11:13-16

### PREAMBLE

Flesh is persistent, pervasive. It skews our reason even as we strive to apprehend the reasoning of God. I wonder if any of you, as I, have fallen into the trap of associating faith with righteous actions. Didn't we just last week discuss how, "by faith Abraham...obeyed by going out..." (v8)? Didn't we last week *question* the faith of Sarah because she initially laughed at the promise of God?

But faith is not action. Righteous actions *emerge* by faith, are *motivated* by faith. Our text repeatedly states, "**by** faith"; faith comes first, and then, ideally, it becomes the motivating factor in the actions that result.

I take some comfort in this, because this means that unrighteous actions do not necessarily nullify faith. Faith *desires* to be obedient to God because faith dwells already in the future promises of God. Faith holds to those promises; it considers them as already accomplished, fulfilled. And any one, or even repeated, wrong action does not necessarily indicate a lack of faith in the promises of God.

We cannot look at one action or behavior in someone and then say, "Have you lost your faith?" Our behavior can and should be *influenced* by faith, but that behavior is not faith itself. This is how we can read the biography of Abraham in Genesis, reading of all the stupid things he did—actions that *appeared* to demonstrate a lack of faith—yet he can still be held up as the supreme example of faith by the writer of Hebrews.

Here, in the story of Abraham as well as the other men and women highlighted, is the root of our own salvation in Christ Jesus. Less important than their day-to-day behavior was the fact that they were grounded in their trust of God. Periodic disobedience did not derail that trust; occasional doubts did not reflect a deeper instability in their faith.

Looking back (as the apostle Paul), faith in the saving work of Christ Jesus, and looking forward (as the writer of Hebrews), faith in the eternal promises of God—neither of these, even though well-established in a life, ensures perfect obedience. Neither does imperfect obedience indicate an absence of faith. It is precisely that faith that assures us that the work of Christ and the promises of God still hold true, that they are *not* derailed by our occasional sin.

This is the foundation Paul spoke of when he compared it to the trials he was suffering.

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

Now our text for today.

### Read Hebrews 11:13-16.

### v13

*All these died in faith...*

I love the way that is stated: "they died in faith." These people lived *by* faith, and they died *in* faith. It is a visceral, invasive, supernatural word, "in." They didn't toy with faith; they didn't sample faith; they didn't think about faith on alternate Sundays—they were *in* faith. Think back to when you were baptized by immersion. For that moment when you were totally submerged you were *in* the water—totally surrounded, you were encased in, you were enveloped in the water. Just so, these people, in life and death, were *in* faith.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creature*; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

*All these died...without receiving the promises,*

**received** = *komizo* = from a primary *komeo* (to tend, i.e. take care of); properly to provide for, i.e. (by implication) to carry off (as if from harm; genitive obtain) :- bring, receive; to bear, to carry.



These people of faith died without holding the promises of God in their arms, but,

*having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance...*

Faith was so real to these remarkable people that even though God's promises did not exist in tangible form that they could hold in their hands, they nevertheless "saw" them—

**seen** = *horao* = properly **to stare at** [compare <G3700> (*optanomai*)], i.e. (by implication) to **discern clearly** (physical or mental); by extension to attend to; by Hebrew **to experience**; passive to appear :- **behold, perceive**, see, take heed.

—and "welcomed" them.

**welcomed** = from <G1> (*a*) (as a particle of union) and a presumed form of <G4685> (*spao*); **to enfold in the arms**, i.e. (by implication) to salute, (figurative) to welcome :- **embrace**, greet, **salute**, take leave.

By NT times this word signified a less-personal greeting—an acknowledgement, a salute, today the shaking of hands—but originally it meant the embracing of two good friends when meeting. It included the idea of love and respect for persons and things. So even though it could be used in more of a detached, formal way—a salute—and is so interpreted by most commentators, I imagine that that was not what took place when this word was used to describe Mary greeting Elizabeth.

Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah,  
and entered the house of Zacharias and **greeted** Elizabeth. (Luke 1:39-40)

Do you think she shook her hand, or stood there and waved at her, or did she run into her arms? I like to think that based on what we know of these people of faith, they *embraced* the promises.

*...having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*

Having acknowledged and agreed that they were aliens, guests and resident foreigners, they embraced as something familiar and substantial something invisible on earth. Their true home was less a place than a Person; they dwelt in the promises of the God in whom they had placed their faith and hope.

By the way, the KJVS include "were assured" or "persuaded of them," but this is not found in the oldest, most authoritative manuscripts, and should be removed. (K&D, Hewitt)

**vs14**

**Read v14.**

*those who say such things...*

What things? "That they were strangers and exiles on the earth."

*...make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.*

I'm always fascinated by the fact that very often the Bible is stating things more forcibly, describing very vital, active thoughts or actions than we think when just reading the text. And this is a case in point.

**make clear**<sup>NASB,ESV</sup>, **declare plainly**<sup>KJVS</sup>, **show**<sup>NIV</sup> = *emphanizo* = from <G1717> (*emphanes*); **to exhibit** (in person) or **disclose** (by words) :- appear, declare (plainly), inform, (will) **manifest**, shew, signify.

These people were daily *witnessing* to their desire for a different country than the one in which they were physically. Their friends and neighbors knew this well; they had no doubts about it. Their very lives were a testament to their alien status and their desire to be elsewhere.

**seeking** = *epizeteo* = from <G1909> (epi) and <G2212> (zeteo); **to search (inquire) for**; intensive **to demand, to crave**  
:- **desire**, enquire, seek (after, for).

This too is an active word. In Matthew 12:39 Jesus says,

“An evil and adulterous generation **craves** for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet.”

**country of their own**<sup>NASB</sup>, **homeland**<sup>NIV,ESV</sup> = *patris* = from <G3962> (pater); **a father-land**, i.e. **native town**; (figurative)  
heavenly home :- (own) country.

So the choice of this word (*patris*) by the writer of Hebrews indicates that he was not just speaking of a *different* country (“I’d rather be somewhere else.”) but specifically the land of their father—that is, their Father.

Let’s be clear: The *earthly* land of their father was Mesopotamia, but in earthly terms they considered Canaan their true home. However, Canaan was still just a temporary way-station for them. Their *true* fatherland was the country of their *true* Father: Yahweh—that is, heaven.

*Matthew Henry*: Hereby they declared plainly that they sought another country, heaven, their own country. For their spiritual birth is thence, there are their best relations, and there is their inheritance. This country they seek: their designs are for it; their desires are after it; their discourse is about it; they diligently endeavour to clear up their title to it, to have their temper suited to it, to have their conversation in it, and to come to the enjoyment of it.

## v15

*And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

The word translated “thinking of” in the <sup>NASB</sup> and <sup>NIV</sup>, and “called to mind” and “mindful” in the <sup>KJVS</sup>, is more often than not translated “remember.”

**thinking, mindful** = from a derivative of <G3420> (mneme); **to exercise memory, i.e. recollect**; by implication to punish; also to rehearse :- make mention, be mindful, remember.

Any of these work in the context; to be mindful of something can certainly mean to remember it. But the translators, I believe, wanted to emphasize that the patriarchs whose lineage went back to Mesopotamia, would have been doing more than just remembering something previously forgotten. Perhaps the idea here is that more than just remembering, *if they had dwelt at length* on the memory of the place of their roots, if they had grown homesick for it as the result of their ruminations, they certainly could have gone back there at any time.

<sup>NEB</sup>: “If their hearts had been in the country they had left”

But Leon Morris points out that they did quite the opposite: purposely stayed well away from it.

- When Abraham wanted a wife for Isaac, he wanted her to be from the homeland, but neither he or Isaac went back, sending a servant instead. In fact, Abraham insisted to the servant: “Beware that you do not take my son back there.” (Genesis 24:6)
- After Jacob had spent twenty years in Mesopotamia (in “the land of the sons of the east,” Paddan-aram) he still considered Canaan his true home: “my own place...my own country”. (Genesis 30:25)
- And Jacob heard the Lord’s command to “return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you”—that is, Canaan.
- Abraham buried Sarah, and he alongside her in Canaan, not Mesopotamia, as were Isaac and Jacob.

So though they could have returned and settled down there at any time, it seems clear that the patriarchs did *not* wax nostalgic for the “country from which they went out”—the land of their earthly roots.

## v16A

And the beginning of v16 states this explicitly.

### Read v16a.

Let's pause here and make application. Permit me to challenge us all with a few uncomfortable questions:

- Where is home?
- How much time do we spend thinking and imagining *beyond* this earth? Are we so rooted into the soil of this earth that we cannot even imagine a "better country"?
- Think about how much more we, in Christ, know about heaven than the ancient patriarchs. They knew nothing of what we know from the prophecies of Daniel, Christ Jesus, the apostles, The Revelation—yet they desired, they *craved* heaven over any other dwelling place. Does that describe the way *we* live?
- If we *do* live that way, is it obvious to those around us? Is this desire so manifest in our lives that our neighbors, our friends, our family, even our foes know this about us?

What this describes is a life so imbued with the fullness of God, so filled with the Spirit, that without even making an effort our feet tread lightly upon the soil of this earth, for we live every day on that glide-slope upward to heaven.

### Read Ephesians 3:14-19.

## v16B

Then this passage concludes with one of the most remarkable statements in Scripture.

### Read v16b.

I don't know about you, but when I read that my mind immediately goes back to scenes and events in the lives of the patriarchs—embarrassing, shameful, disobedient behavior. And I marvel that God would say such a thing. Then my mind goes back to scenes and events in my own life—embarrassing, shameful, disobedient behavior—not the least, those occasions when I have been loathe to speak up in His defense. In other words, there have been times when I have been "ashamed" of Him! And when I remember these, I marvel all the more that I have a God who is not ashamed to be associated with *me*. This is breathtaking. Talk about grace!

*Matthew Henry:* There is nothing in this world commensurate to the love of God in being the God of his people.

This is what God meant when He Himself stated what He did in Exodus 3, before Moses.

### Read Exodus 3:6 & 14-15.

Of all the ways He could have described Himself, the first was that He was the God of those who had placed their faith in Him.

*...for He has prepared a city for them.*

Note the tense: not God *will* prepare a city, but God *already has* prepared a city. It's a done deal.

### Read John 14:1-2.

God has already built the city—His "house." Jesus says, *You believe in me, and I'll make sure there's a spot waiting for you in that city.*

I began this study with a discussion about how while there can indeed be a cause-and-effect relationship between actions and faith, those actions are *not* the faith. Our Father God is able to differentiate between the two. He always makes His determination based on the faith dwelling in the heart, rather than the actions of fallen flesh.

## SESSION 41. HEBREWS 11:17-22

In our passage today, the pastor returns to his favorite subject: He leaves the previous paragraph which was a parenthetical side trip about all those who “died in faith,” to return to an examination of Abraham—this time focusing on God’s call to sacrifice his son Isaac. Then the writer continues down the family line to Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

### **Read Hebrews 11:17-22.**

#### **vs17-18**

*By faith Abraham, when he was tested...*

**tested, tried** = *peirazo* = from <G3984> (*peira*); to test (object), i.e. endeavor, **scrutinize**, entice, discipline :- assay, **examine**, go about, **prove**, tempt (-er), try; **to make proof of**.

This is one of those words that must be interpreted by context.

- The apostle Paul uses it when he writes to the Corinthians: “**Test** yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!” (2 Corinthians 13:5) It is used as well when the various religious leaders would test Jesus with their political questions.
- Luke uses it in the sense of attempting to accomplish something: “...and after they came to Mysia, they were **trying** to go into Bithynia.” (Acts 16:7)
- The gospel writers use it to describe the tempting of Jesus by Satan: “And He was in the wilderness forty days being **tempted** by Satan.” (Mark 1:13)

Keep your finger in Hebrews as we go to Genesis 22; we’ll be going back and forth. Just how was Abraham tested?

### **Read Genesis 22:1.**

*...after these things*

And of course we must ask, after *what* things?

For almost twenty-five years the Lord had promised Abraham a future, a posterity—a “nation.”

“Go forth from your country,  
And from your relatives  
And from your father’s house,  
To the land which I will show you;  
And I will make you a great nation,  
And I will bless you,  
And make your name great;” (from Genesis 12:1-2)

At the end of the next chapter, after Abram had separated from Lot, the Lord was more specific:

“For all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.” (Genesis 13:15-16)

So his “nation” would be of his own seed—and the episode with Hagar made it clear that it would be his seed only through his wife Sarah (and our text today reinforces that).

**Sidebar:** As to this business of “nation,” did you know that when the Lord changed his name from Abram to Abraham, he did it for us?

Abram = “high father”; “Nation” = Jews;

Abraham = “father of a multitude”; “multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:5) = what Paul spoke of in Galatians 3.

### **Read Galatians 3:6-9.**

Then at the oaks of Mamre, in Genesis 18, the pre-incarnate Son of God visited Abraham in person and told the

aging couple that come next year, they would have a son. And in Chapter 21, when Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac is born.

So just one chapter later, “after these things,” God taps Abraham on the shoulder one night and said “Now...

**Read Genesis 22:2.**

**Sidebar:** We don’t know how old Isaac was, but he was more than just a little boy. He was strong enough to carry a load of split firewood up a mountain.

*... God tested Abraham*

Although the word translated “tested” in the NASB, NIV and NKJV is Hebrew rather than Greek, it means precisely the same and is equally flexible: It can mean to test, to try or attempt, or to tempt.

[Back to Hebrews 11.](#)

*... offered up Isaac*

First, note the identical rhythm of

v8: By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed...

v17: By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...

Abraham is held up as a pillar of faith because there was a pattern to his life—and there it is: When God told him to do something, he obeyed.

**offered up** = *prosphero* = from <G4314> (pros) and <G5342> (phero) (including its alternate); **to bear towards**, i.e. lead to, **tender (especially to God)**, treat :- bring (to, unto) deal with, do, offer (unto, up), **present unto**, put to; **to bring to**.

Among other, less specific applications, this is cultic language of the temple that the preacher has employed before.

**Read Hebrews 8:3.**

Abraham “offered up” Isaac as a priest would offer up the sacrificial lamb on the altar. And,

*... he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;*

The way this is stated is no accident. At a glance we might say, “But wait a minute; Abraham had at least one other son—Ishmael. So how can this say Isaac was his ‘only begotten’ or ‘only born’?” The answer to that is in “he who had received the promises.”

Isaac was the son of the promise, not Ishmael. He was the one and only son of the promise. God had promised Abraham he would be the father of a great nation—more than that, the father of a multitude of nations. That would happen only through Isaac by Sarah. And this is reinforced by the quotation from Genesis 21:12 in v18:

**Read v18.**

**v19**

And now we come to the challenging v19. Once again we have a verse that divides scholars and commentators.

**Read v19.**

Let’s first break down the words.

**considered**<sup>NASB,ESV</sup>, **concluding**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **reasoned**<sup>NIV</sup>, **accounting**<sup>KJV</sup> = *logizomai* = middle from <G3056> (logos); **to take an inventory, i.e. estimate** (literal or figurative) :- **conclude**, (ac-) count (of), + despise, esteem, impute, lay, number, reason, **reckon**, suppose, think (on).

**able**<sup>NASB,KJV,ESV</sup>, **could**<sup>NIV</sup> = *dynatos* = from <G1410> (dunamai); **powerful or capable** (literal or figurative); neuter **possible** :- able, could, (that is) mighty (man), possible, power, **strong**.

**raise** = *egeiro* (ee-gay'-ro) = probably akin to the base of <G58> (agora) (**through the idea of collecting one's faculties**); **to waken** (transitive or intransitive), i.e. **rouse** (literal **from sleep, from sitting or lying, from disease, from death**; or figurative from obscurity, inactivity, ruins, nonexistence) :- awake, lift (up), raise (again, up), rear up, (a-) rise (again, up), stand, take up.

And now we get to the difficult part.

NASB: from which he also received him back as a type.

NKJV: from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

KJV: from whence also he received him in a figure.

NIV: and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

ESV: from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

*THE MESSAGE*: In a sense, that's what happened when he received Isaac back, alive from off the altar.

The central word, translated "type" or "figure" is

**parabole** = from <G3846> (paraballo); a **similitude** ("parable"), i.e. (symbolic) fictitious narrative (of common life conveying a moral), apothegm or adage :- comparison, **figure**, parable, proverb; **a placing beside, a comparison**.

Here are some thoughts:

- In John 8:56, Jesus declares that

**"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."**

- The extent of Abraham's understanding about the future Messiah is difficult to nail down. Some have interpreted this verse (in Hebrews) in conjunction with the verse in John 8, to mean that Abraham saw this incident as a "type" of Christ's death and resurrection. I personally think that is stretching it, and it needn't go that far. Jesus' statement in John 8 does not explicitly tie into the sacrifice of Isaac. It could just mean that Abraham recognized—he "saw" along with God's other promises—that there would be a deliverer for the people of these future nations. So I disagree with those who would *personalize* this to the extent that Abraham saw the incident *at the time* as a type or a "figure" of Christ Himself, and what He would suffer more than 2000 years in the future.
- Some take Abraham's statement to his servants in Genesis 22—"Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."—alone as proof that Abraham was convinced Isaac would be coming back from the mountain with him. That is, he would not die—at least not die permanently. Perhaps, but I'm not sure we can put such weight on that statement alone. It may have just been his way of reassuring his son, or his servants, when in his own heart he was not so sure. In conjunction with other passages, however, it admittedly gains strength.
- We need not read into the text anything more than what is there. The emphasis is on *resurrection*—not the specific crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. For this reason I favor the translations other than the NASB, that put it in terms of, "in a way, Abraham did receive Isaac back from the dead"—because Abraham had made the decision. He believed God for His promises; He trusted Him explicitly. The Lord had repeatedly told Him that he would be the father of a great nation *through Isaac*—the only son of the promise. If the Lord was now telling him to sacrifice that same son, he, Abraham, *must* believe in the concept of resurrection to believe all God's other promises!

*Albert Barnes*: He was to Abraham dead. He had given him up. He had prepared to offer him as a sacrifice. He lay there before him as one who was dead. From that altar he was raised up by direct divine interposition, as if he was raised from the grave, and this was to Abraham a "figure" or a representation of the resurrection. [I take issue only with the definite article "the" in that last sentence.]

*Matthew Henry*: The reward of his faith in this great trial: he received his son from the dead in a figure, in a parable. (1.) He received his son. **He had parted with him to God, and God gave him back again.** The best way to enjoy our comforts with comfort is to resign them up to God; he will then return them, if not in kind, yet in kindness. (2.) **He received him from the dead, for he gave him up for dead; he was as a dead child to him, and the return was to him no less than a resurrection.** (3.) This was a figure or parable of something further. **It was a figure of the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, of whom Isaac was a type. It was a figure and earnest of the glorious resurrection of all true believers, whose life is not lost, but hid with Christ in God.** [Yes, but only to future generations. My position is that *Abraham* did not reason through this as a type of Christ. We, and obviously the writer of Hebrews, have this as a lesson—a "placing alongside" for a comparison—about Christ, but not Abraham.]

## v20: ISAAC

And now we part company with Abraham and start working down the family tree. And the common link in the next three characters of faith is their faith that, like that of their father Abraham, looked beyond death, beyond their own demise. They trusted in the promise for the future given them by God.

### Read v20.

We find the story in Genesis 27, and for anyone familiar with it, this faith the writer of Hebrews speaks of in Isaac is a bit of a head-scratcher; we need to go looking for it.

- We don't find faith in Rebekah, who, like her mother-in-law Sarah, determined to force the Lord's prophecy in her own way. The Lord had told her (Genesis 25:23) that two different nations were in her womb, and that the older would serve the younger. It was her idea to use trickery and deceit to make sure that Jacob, and not Esau received the blessing from the blind Isaac. Now, perhaps it was God's plan all along for Rebekah to do this, to fulfill the prophecy through her deceit, but for her part it certainly was not a demonstration of faith.
- We don't find faith in Isaac, who determined to bless the older twin, Esau, in spite of what the Lord told Rebekah. Then, upon learning of the trickery, was furious that Esau had not received the blessing.

### Read Genesis 27:33a.

But we *do* find Isaac's faith in what comes next. He accepts what has happened as God's will and refuses to change his blessing.

### Read Genesis 27:33b.

When Esau pleads for a blessing of his own, what he receives instead is essentially a curse, which is the mirror image of the blessing that went to Jacob.

### Read Genesis 27:39-40.

With faith in God's promise to Abraham and himself for the future of their nation, old and blind Isaac accepted the Lord's will and left the blessing on Jacob.

## v21: JACOB

And again, in v21, we find the patriarch at end of life.

### Read v21.

Although in the story of Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph we do not have the trickery of the previous patriarch, we do have the blessing, as before, inverted to the younger of the two sons. We find the story in Genesis 48. Jacob's sight, like his father Isaac's, was failing, and Joseph had to tell him who was standing before him. But from this narrative we can glean several instances of Jacob's faith.

- It is seen in blessing Joseph's *sons*, rather than Joseph himself—one of the original twelve. By the traditions of the time, Joseph would have represented the eleventh tribe of Israel, but that is not how it was to be. The eleventh tribe would be split into the two half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.
- His faith is seen in insisting that the blessing be upon Ephraim, the younger, rather than Manasseh, the elder. Even though Joseph presented them the "correct" way, Jacob crossed over to bless the other with his right hand—the hand of strength.

### Read Genesis 48:13-19.

In other words, *I know, my son. But I am listening to God, not you. I am placing my trust in the promise of the Lord for these two boys, rather than the custom of men.*

- And sure enough, the line went through Ephraim, and that name became a synonym for the northern kingdom of Israel.

**Sidebar:** The writer refers to Genesis 47:31 when he adds, following the text in his personal Bible, the Septuagint, "...and [Jacob] worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff." But when you look at Genesis 47:31 it doesn't say that.

**He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.**

This is because there are no vowels in written Hebrew; the vowels are supplied when spoken. When certain vowels are added to the word it translates "staff"; when other vowels are added it translates "bed." The meaning



and lesson are the same, however: When it came time to pass on the blessing, Jacob was worshipping and listening to Yahweh, not the traditions of men. (Only the NIV translates Genesis 47:31 “staff”.)

[Back to Hebrews.](#)

## **v22: JOSEPH**

And once more, in v22, we find Joseph at the end of life.

### **Read v22.**

It’s a beautiful story at the end of Genesis 50. And it takes no effort at all to witness the faith of Joseph.

### **Read Genesis 50:24-26.**

On his deathbed Joseph foresaw the exodus of Israel from Egypt to the promised land (Genesis 13). He trusted in God to the extent that he had his descendants swear that they would carry his bones from Egypt to Canaan. And they did.

All these, like Abraham, could see over the horizon. They could see—as if they had already occurred—the promises of God that lay far into the future.



## SESSION 42. HEBREWS 11:23-31

In our passage today, the writer of the Hebrews sermon continues his chronological journey from Adam through “David and Samuel and the prophets.” This week we examine the faith of Moses, his parents, Israel as a group, Joshua and the Jericho prostitute, Rahab.

### **Read Hebrews 11:23-28.**

#### **v23: AMRAM AND JOCHEBED**

The beginning of v23 is a bit misleading, because it leads one to believe it is about the faith of Moses. But the NIV says it best:

By faith Moses’ parents...

How could Moses have faith when he is just born! V23 is about the faith of Amram [am-rawm'] and Jochebed [yo-keb'-ed] (who was actually Amram’s aunt), both Levites, and parents of Aaron and Moses. We find the story in **Exodus 2**.

When he was born, Jochebed declared Moses was special—he was *tob*.

**beautiful, goodly, fine** = *tob* = from <H2895> (towb); **good** (as an adjective) **in the widest sense**; used likewise as a noun, both in the masculine and the feminine, the singular and the plural (good, a good or good thing, a good man or woman; the good, goods or good things, good men or women), also as an adverb (well) :- **beautiful**, best, better, bountiful, cheerful, at ease, × **fair** (word), (be in) favour, fine, glad, good (deed, -lier, -liet, -ly, -ness, -s), graciously, joyful, kindly, kindness, liketh (best), loving, merry, × most, pleasant, + pleaseth, pleasure, precious, prosperity, ready, sweet, wealth, welfare, (be) well ([f-favoured]).

I imagine every mom and dad thinks their newborn child is beautiful, but Moses was “beautiful” to someone else, as well.

**Read Acts 7:20. (NKJV or NASB)**  
(literally, “beautiful to God”)

We may want to spiritualize this, remembering that God examines the heart, rather than the outward appearance. But we probably can also take this at face value, for the ancient historian Josephus said that

...those who met [Moses], as he was carried along the streets, forgot their business and stood still to gaze at him.  
(VWS)

*...they were not afraid of the king’s edict.*

Because of this—because his mom and dad understood Moses to be special—they hid him away. By faith “they were not afraid of the king’s edict.” We find the punch line to that back story just two verses back in Exodus 1:22.

**Read Exodus 1:22.**

The king of Egypt was afraid the too-numerous Hebrews would rise up and become an army against him, so he wanted to rid himself of anyone who might grow up to be a soldier. Of course, the pharaoh was not known for his intelligence, for his short-sighted command also meant that he would soon run out of strong backs for his public works projects!

But this is not about the pharaoh, nor even about Moses. It is about *the faith of his parents*. Remember, this is before the Law, well before the Levites would be singled out as special, sanctified for the priesthood. Just two regular people from one of the twelve tribes, getting up every morning and trying to stay alive in the oppressive Egyptian system. Though it is not stated, it is safe to assume that by taking these steps to save their son they were jeopardizing their own lives—perhaps of their entire family. But **their faith was stronger than their fear**.

## APPLICATION

And there is the lesson for us; that is what we must ask ourselves at every turn: Is my faith stronger than my fear—of circumstances, of ridicule, of physical persecution? Is what I fear worse than that faced by Amram and Jochebed by opposing the edict of the king of Egypt?

## vs24-25: MOSES

### Read v24.

The back story for this begins in v11 of Exodus 2:

Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.

The story is fleshed out in Acts 7.

### Read Acts 7:21-24.

**Note especially Acts 7:23:** By faith, Moses, when he was about forty years old, heard the call of God and made the conscious decision to break his association with the royal family and associate, instead, with his Israelite brothers.

Isn't there, in faith, a sense of home? Isn't it our faith that causes us to feel at home with our brothers and sisters in Christ—wherever we may encounter them? And isn't it our faith that makes unseen heaven more a home to us than any place on earth?

### Read v25.

Moses choosing his Hebrew brethren and their life of oppression over the luxury of palace life reminds me of the responses we got [when leaving Southern California for Iowa 22 years ago...](#)

But, for us, we were going *home*, and it was the same for Moses. For forty years he had known nothing but the pleasures and ease of the royal family, yet when he witnessed the cruelty borne by Israel, something in him snapped, and he realized that his home lay with them.

I also see the Holy Spirit active here. Don't think for a minute that after forty years, Moses woke one morning and just happened to pass by where the children of Israel were slaving away making mud bricks. ("Well, would you look at that!") No, he was very much aware of the situation; he had been raised in it. But one day Yahweh said, "Now," and sent the Spirit to convict Moses and draw him to Him by faith.

*...the passing pleasures of sin.*

Leon Morris makes an excellent point:

"The pleasures of sin" does not mean Moses saw himself as a dissolute rake while at court. It implies rather that once he saw where God's call lay, **it would have been sin to turn away from it and align himself with the Egyptians.** There would have been pleasures, but they would have been enjoyed only at the expense of disobeying God.

## v26: MOSES

In v26—as we saw in our discussion of v19 last week—I believe the writer of Hebrews mixes into the historical mindset of Moses a bit of his own post-Christ mindset.

### Read v26.

Did Moses, standing there at his point of decision, say to himself, "I think I'd rather go with the suffering Jesus of Nazareth than the treasures of Egypt." It would be 1,500 years later that Jesus the Christ would be crucified. I doubt that Moses—even by faith—would have been thinking about those specifics. A few thoughts:

- The writer of the Hebrews sermon has a habit of weaving his own contemporary perspective into the historical perspective of the patriarchs. There is nothing wrong with this—so long as the reader is aware when it is being done. A couple of examples:

- I believe we saw this in v19: It is the *preacher* who sees the sacrifice and “resurrection” of Isaac as a type of what Jesus would go through—not Abraham.
- Historically “righteousness by faith” was introduced in the Genesis narrative with Abraham, yet in v7, the writer of Hebrews writes as if Noah became an heir of this righteousness by faith. Only post-Abraham writers declare Noah righteous; he “became an heir” to that brand of righteousness only after he was long gone.
- We should remember that the ancients—and especially the Jews—did not see history as the linear, sequential thread as do we. Events presented out of order would not have bothered them at all.
- More important, v26 speaks of the eternal second member of the Godhead being present and active during these events—whether or not the principals were aware of it. The Son of God was not just aware of what was transpiring, He was not just present—He was suffering along with those who were suffering. We hear of this in a Messianic prophecy of Isaiah.

**Read Isaiah 63:8-9.**

## **v27: MOSES**

V27 is a little challenging because on the surface at least it doesn’t make sense, based on what we *think* we know. Regarding this story, because of childhood Sunday School, errant commentators and, not least, Hollywood, we have an enormous amount of obstacles in our mind to climb over before we can get to the truth.

### **Read v27.**

Let me see if I can distill down to the essentials the point of controversy. Moses left Egypt twice: he fled shortly after killing the Egyptian, settling in Midian. Then forty years later he left Egypt again, leading the exodus of Israel.

*...not fearing the wrath of the king*

Perhaps a red flag went up for you at the words, “not fearing the wrath of the king.” Based on the passage in Exodus 2, some (esp. older commentators) have concluded that this verse in Hebrews 11 refers to the exodus. Exodus 2:14 states:

**But he said, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and said, “Surely the matter has become known.”**

This is then followed by v15:

**When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.**

It is very easy to link the two verses, concluding that “Moses was afraid”...[Pharaoh] “tried to kill Moses”...“Moses fled.” Conclusion: Moses fled Egypt because he was afraid of the pharaoh—which is in contradiction with our verse in Hebrews. But I lean toward the explanation offered by Leon Morris:

We should notice that the flight is not connected with fear in Exodus or anywhere else. Other options were open to Moses, such as leading a slaves’ revolt. While his fear was real, his flight appears to have been because he did not think it was God’s time for action, or, as the writer of Hebrews puts it, he went out “by faith.”

In other words, like his parents, Moses feared God more than the king, and God said *It’s time to go; I need another forty years to get you ready*. This Moses obeyed “by faith.” That is one way to look at this, but here is a better one—and I appreciate Pastor Jeremy pointing this out to me.

**Return, please, to Acts 7.**

The whole point of Stephen’s defense before the Sanhedrin was to point out to them that throughout Israel’s history God had sent prophets (like Jesus) that they had rejected (as they were now rejecting Jesus). Included in his sermon is the passage we looked at earlier about Moses. Look again at v24. **Read v24.** Moses felt the call by God to help his people. He acted on that call by faith. But then look what happened. **Read v25-29a.** The writer of Hebrews is absolutely correct: Moses didn’t fear the wrath of the king—he *feared his own people!* God called him to help them, but they were rejecting his help! So he fled. [two reasons: 40 more years to prepare Moses; 40 more years of bondage for Israel for rejecting him]

And one last point about v27. The preacher has not forgotten his thread about these patriarch's seeing over the horizon.

- v26: for he was looking to the [unseen] reward.
- v27: for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

**Sidebar:** The *KJV*s do a little better job with the word translated "left" in the other translations. "Forsook" gives us a more accurate picture of the Greek word, which can mean more than simple departing. Moses *abandoned*, he *turned his back on* the things of Egypt in favor of things seen only by faith.

## **v28: MOSES**

V28 is fairly straightforward—

### **Read v28.**

—but I do want to read what Leon Morris writes about the word translated "kept."

The verb *pepoieken* may be translated "kept," but some feel that a meaning like "instituted" is required (*Today's English Version*: "It was faith that made him establish the Passover.")

This is not difficult to understand. If one reads the account in Exodus with a detached perspective, ignorant of what the procedure foreshadows, it is reasonably bizarre. Only by faith, in obedience to Yahweh, would someone follow through on something as strange as painting blood over the doorways, eating bitter herbs standing up and dressed for travel (Exodus 12).

## **v29: ISRAEL**

And now, in v29, the writer switches from a telephoto to a wide-angle lens—from the one man, Moses, to all Israel.

### **Read v29.**

Once again, we can find in the Exodus account many examples of small or nonexistent faith—or, to be charitable, imperfect faith. It's easy to read these accounts and question the accuracy of what the preacher is saying about Moses, and the grumbling, complaining Israelites. But I would ask you: Are *you* a person of faith? You would probably answer in the affirmative. If that is so,

- do you ever grumble and complain to God?
- do you ever question what He says or what you read of Him in His word? do you ever doubt?
- do you ever disobey Him? take the wrong fork in the road?
- do you ever choose the wisdom of flesh over His wisdom?

We see the effectiveness of faith—imperfect as it is—in the different outcomes for Israel and the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. Thomas Hewitt writes

The Exodus account of this incident shows much unbelief among the people, but there must have been faith of some kind for them to go forward into the sea at Moses' command. The Egyptians perished because their movement forward was an act of presumption rather than an act of faith.

Then Hewitt quotes Bengel (which I assume refers to Johann Albrecht Bengel [early 1700s]):

"By a daring not unlike this many rush into eternity. When two do the same thing, it is not the same thing."

And then Hewitt concludes,

The Israelites were acting according to God's will; the Egyptians were not.

And, again, the Greek is more colorful than the simple word "drowned."

**drowned** = *katapino* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G4095> (pino); **to drink down, i.e. gulp entire** (literal or figurative) :- devour, drown, **swallow (up)**.

## **vs30-31: ISRAEL & RAHAB**

And now we zoom forward another forty years, when God finally permitted Israel to enter the promised land under the leadership of Joshua.

### **Read vs30.**

If you don't think it took faith in God to do what they did to break down those walls, you're not paying attention. Once again the Lord devised a plan that not even the most inept commander would have dreamed up.

#### **Read Joshua 6:3-5.**

Do you think it possible that there was at least one man out there thinking, "This will never work"? No doubt. But Joshua and the people did what the Lord told them, and that took *faith*.

And we end today with Rahab—a most remarkable person, and a fascinating story—a story awash with God's grace.

### **Read vs31.**

Over the centuries scholars have tried to soften the words in Scripture used to describe Rahab, but the plain truth of it is that she was a prostitute—in fact, Morris points out that the word translated "harlot" in Joshua 2 (zana [zaw-naw']) designates not even a temple prostitute, but a secular prostitute—a woman of the streets.

To those who would try to make her into something she was not, because Rahab is listed with the Hebrews faithful and was included in the family line of the Messiah, I would ask, "Have you ever heard of this concept called 'grace'?" How reassuring her story is for those of us with less than pristine backgrounds.

#### **Read lineage from back of issue #151. (Matthew 1:5-6a,16)**

I'll not take the time here to go into the details of her story, because I can offer something better.

[See Rahab articles \(\*The Journey\*, Issues 150 & 151\).](#)

## SESSION 43. HEBREWS 11:32-40

For the all of Chapter 11 till now the writer of Hebrews has been most eloquently itemizing important historical illustrations of faith. But now he switches gears and, because of time or space, begins organizing general categories of faith, based on (in human terms) *victories*—victorious answers to faith—and *martyrdom*—darker consequences of faith.

These are “good” and “bad” only from an earthly perspective; the life of faith is one of God-glorifying purpose in *all* that follow. It is not a tragedy for the kingdom when a faithful servant is martyred, only for the loved ones left behind.

### Read Hebrews 11:32-38.

#### v32

*And what more shall I say?*

The preachers quickly realizes he cannot continue with the same detailed history of Israel’s faithful. Perhaps, he was running out of parchment length; perhaps, since the purpose of the letter was that it be delivered as a sermon, he feared putting his audience to sleep.

*Matthew Henry:* as if he had said, “It is in vain to attempt to exhaust this subject; should I not restrain my pen, it would soon run beyond the bounds of an epistle; and therefore I shall but just mention a few more, and leave you to enlarge upon them.”

*For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets...*

This might be appended with “for example,” offered as a generalized list. But the names *are* specific to the first result listed.

#### vs33-35A

*who by faith...* [after Lane, Hewitt and Morris]

<i>conquered kingdoms</i>	Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Joshua
<i>performed acts of righteousness [or administered justice (NIV)]</i>	the judges
<i>obtained promises</i>	Samuel and the prophets
<i>shut the mouths of lions</i>	Daniel (Daniel 6); also David, Benaiah, Samson
<i>quenched the power of fire</i>	Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego (Daniel 3)
<i>escaped the edge of the sword [i.e., successfully escaped when forced to flee, or emerge unscathed from battle]</i>	David and prophets, et al; Elijah not killed by Jezebel
<i>from weakness were made strong</i>	Gideon, Samson, Esther, et al
<i>became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight</i>	Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David, Samuel
<i>Women received back their dead by resurrection</i>	widow of Zarephath of Sidon (Elijah: 1 Kings 17:8f); the Shunammite woman (Elisha: 2 Kings 4:8f); widow of Nain (Jesus: Luke 7); Lazarus (Jesus: John 11)

When one reads the stories of these men and women of faith, it is almost impossible to avoid another God-word: grace. For these individuals were not plaster saints. They had doubts, they did not always blindly obey God’s call, but questioned, even challenged Him to prove Himself before they would obey. In their stories we are reminded at every turn that man’s faith is not sufficient—it must always be answered by God’s grace. Whatever man offers upward to God will always be imperfect, soiled by the clay of his beginning and stained by the weakness of his flesh. Man’s faith is made perfect by God’s grace.

## vs35B-38

Remember the context, the setting of this sermon to the Hebrews: these people needed encouragement to endure, to hang in there during a time of very real physical persecution.

**Read Hebrews 6:9-12.**

**Read Hebrews 10:32-36.**

The preacher does not encourage his parishioners with rosy but false promises of ease in a life of faith, but rather a balanced, unflinching picture of what has and what can happen to people of faith. He itemizes some of those times when faith resulted in what we would think of as victory—weakness made strong, conquering kingdoms, escaping the sword, victorious in battles and wars. But now he itemizes some of those times when faith resulted in what we would think of as defeat. But God does not call it defeat. Look at what he writes in v39 after revealing the darker consequences of faith.

**And all these**—[those in “victory” and those in “defeat”]—**gained approval through their faith...**

We cannot know the ultimate effectiveness of faith from what occurs here on earth. Flesh is not capable of seeing such things. But flesh energized by the Spirit *can* see over the horizon to the promises of God. And this is what sustains us through trials.

Ironically, it is faith itself that empowers us not to bother interpreting the earthly results of faith.

*...and others were tortured...*

**tortured** = *tympanizo* = from a derivative of <G5180> (*tupto*) (meaning a drum, “tympanum”); **to stretch on an instrument of torture resembling a drum, and thus beat to death** :- torture.

*...not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;*

**release** = *apolytrosis* = from a compound of <G575> (*apo*) and <G3083> (*lutron*); (the act) **ransom in full**, i.e. (figurative) riddance, or (specifically) Christian **salvation** :- **deliverance, redemption**.

Here once again we have reference to a faith that sees over the horizon. The person of faith endures the trials of the present age for the rewards—including God’s resurrection of those dead in Christ—of the *next* age.

The writer earlier spoke of “resurrection” in his reference to Isaac upon the altar. He was, as it were, “raised from the dead” because of his father’s faith and trust in Jahweh. But turn it around to the negative. Someone is imprisoned, perhaps being tortured for Christ. They are on their way to death and, out of weakness, settle for the “resurrection” of release by denouncing Christ. This was a very real prospect for those hearing this sermon. The preacher is telling them that people of faith would not settle for the “resurrection” of the immediate, but even die, choosing instead a “better resurrection.”

*...others experienced mockings and scourgings...*

**mockings, jeers**<sup>NIV</sup> = *empaigmos* = from <G1702> (*empaizo*); **derision** :- mocking

In the midst of reference to torture and scourgings, “mocking” or “jeers” seems out of place. This is the only place this word is used in the NT, and this is a reasonable translation. But it can mean more—and does outside the canon of Scripture.

It is used in the Apocrypha, which is included in the Catholic bible, in 2 Maccabees 7. It is a gruesome scene—the torture and death of seven brothers—of which I will spare you the worst. But reading it, it is easy to imagine this is precisely what the writer of Hebrews was thinking of when he wrote this passage.

**So when the first was dead after this manner, they brought the next to make him a mocking stock: and when they had pulled off the skin of his head with the hair, they asked him if he would eat, before he were punished throughout the whole body in every limb. But he answered in his own language, and said: I will not do it. Wherefore he also, in the next place, received the torments**



of the first: And when he was at the last gasp, he said thus: Thou indeed, O most wicked man, destroyest us out of this present life: but the King of the world will raise us up, who die for his laws, in the resurrection of eternal life. (2 Maccabees 7:7-9)

The word translated here “mocking stock,” or also translated “brutality,” is the same as “mockings” in our text.

**scourgings, flogging**<sup>NIV</sup> = *mastix* = probably from the base of <G3145> (massaomai) (through the idea of contact); **a whip** (literal the Roman flagellum for criminals; figurative a disease) :- plague, scourging.

*...yes, also chains and imprisonment.*

We think of Joseph, Jeremiah—both imprisoned for obeying the Lord. How discouraging it must have been to obey Him in every respect, yet still suffer for it. And when this happens today, in the flesh it is easy to get discouraged, to wonder, “what’s the point,” when after doing what we should, we still pay a penalty. But at such times we must remember what Jesus went through—after obeying the Father in every respect.

**Read Matthew 27:27-31.**

*They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were **tempted**, they were put to death with the sword...*

The inclusion of the mild “tempted” in the midst of stoning, being sawn in two, and death by the sword has left scholars scratching their heads over the years. The various manuscripts are not conclusive: some include it, some do not, others move it about.

There are two schools of thought on this:

1. Most modern commentators take the position that the word translated “were tempted” is a dittography [accidental repetition during copying], since the word is very similar to that translated “were sawn in two.” Presumably for this reason the NIV and ESV leave it out.
2. But older commentators make a pretty good case for its inclusion. They suggest that this refers to the torturer, just before dealing the fatal stroke, tempting the one being tortured to save his life by renouncing Christ. With this explanation, it does not seem out of place at all. Tempting, indeed!

*they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated... wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.*

Then the preacher switches from persecution by torture to persecution by alienation. The passage brings to mind

- John the Baptist wandering the wilderness dressed in “a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist,” with his food consisting of “locusts and wild honey” (Matthew 3:4).
- David holed up in caves when being pursued by Saul
- Jeremiah being imprisoned in the mud at the bottom of a cistern (38:6).

*(men of whom the world was not worthy)*

JFB: So far from their being unworthy of living in the world, as their exile in deserts, etc., might seem to imply, “the world was not worthy of them.” The world, in shutting them out, shut out from itself a source of blessing... In condemning them, the world condemned itself.

**vs39-40**

**Read vs39-40.**

I must confess that I read and re-read this passage several times and still could not decipher it. Based on previous passages, I could sort of make out v39, but v40 remained a mystery since, at least in the NASB and ESV, it sounded as if the writer was saying that their promise, their ultimate fulfillment was somehow contingent on *us* (“so that apart from us they would not be made perfect”). Since I knew this could not be the case, it would require some digging. [value of knowing the fullness of God’s word]

We find the answer to v39 earlier in this chapter.

**Read Hebrews 11:13-16.**

Indeed all of Chapter 11 has been about people of faith who were looking toward something that was over the



horizon. Their lives were the antithesis of so many today—and, sadly, even within the church—lives that insist on immediate gratification.

The cast and crew of one of our favorite television shows were in production of a feature-length film which would be the dramatic coda to the popular series. But the script had them shooting in the Arctic—the real thing. One of the principal actors, in an interview, leans back in his chair, and with brightly polished self-importance declares, “...I said the Arctic is far away, uh, and uh, it’s cold, and I—that doesn’t work for me. You’re going to have to bring the Arctic to me.” So the studio, at great expense, had to recreate in studio many of the icy, sub-zero conditions for the scenes that included this arrogant prima dona.

Meanwhile, the rest of the cast—including the series lead, who, incidentally, was also one of its executive producers—made the uncomfortable trek to a research station in the Arctic. The dangerous conditions at the site required them to undergo a thorough pre-trip briefing, and while there they had to live in the same primitive conditions as the resident staff. They helped cook the meals, wash dishes, and haul out the trash like everyone else—along with their regular work in front of the cameras. To the challenge of filming in the Arctic, the lead actress of the picture had a response different from her pompous, absent co-star.

“For me, I thought, just open up, take it all in. I’m just a big sponge. This is going to be the adventure of a lifetime.” So for the duration she lived in a drafty plywood box set atop the frozen expanse; hacked out chunks of ice for her drinking water; took her turn at k. p. duty; and, along with everyone else, used the tiny wooden outhouse when nature called. It was, indeed, far away, uncomfortable, inconvenient—and cold. But everyone who went, came away from the experience the better for it. [2 min.]

Faith means that we are able to live with the trials and inconveniences of this temporal world for

- the maturity it profits us within this earthly life, and
- the promises of God in the life hereafter.

Finally, to understand v40 we need to keep in mind that it speaks not of people (“us”) but of *time*. The preacher speaks of the later covenant in Christ, that would be “better,” a covenant God had provided—but *had not yet implemented in full during the time of the patriarchs*. It had been foreshadowed repeatedly, but not yet consummated until the Son of God would come down in flesh to die for sin.

The J. B. Phillips paraphrase of vs39-40 was most helpful:

**All these won a glowing testimony to their faith, but they did not then and there receive the fulfillment of the promise. God had something better planned for our day, and it was not his plan that they should reach perfection without us.**

There is not a Jewish plan of perfection, and a Gentile plan of perfection, but *one* plan of perfection in Christ Jesus.

**Jesus said . . . , “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6)**

## SESSION 44. HEBREWS 12:1-3

### PREFACE

All of Chapter 11 prepares us for the “Therefore” that opens Chapter 12, but I believe we find the summit of that in vs13-16.

**Read Hebrews 11:13-16.**

### v1

As we have seen, the faith of these remarkable people was not seamless. Like us, they had their weaknesses, their moments of doubts; like everyone else, there was sin in their lives. But they shared in common a supernatural—that is, spiritual—identification with and belief in God: with His covenants and promises, with His better country—“a heavenly one.” Apprehending these truths they dissociated themselves from the places and faiths of their birth to live lives of extraordinary faith in the unseen. Though imperfect, their faith persistently saw what was over the horizon.

And now the pastor turns from the illustrative historical to make his application to the people to whom he wrote this sermon—and, of course, us.

**Read Hebrews 12:1-2.**

*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us...*

There are two reasons why it is easy to misinterpret the intent of the pastor in v1:

1. his athletic metaphor of the runner; it is easy to imagine a stadium filled with spectators, “witnessing” the race;
2. our inclination to make everything about us.

So we read v1 and we envision a large cheering section, the old patriarchs and saints there to cheer us on, there to witness the race we are running. Pleasant thought, but not what the text is saying.

**witnesses** = *martys* (mar'-toos) = of uncertain affinity; a witness (literal [judicially] or figurative [genitive]); by analogy a “martyr” :- martyr, record, witness.

As William Lane points out,

A witness is never merely a spectator. He is a participant who pledged his life to validate what he has seen and experienced. [clarify use of word “witness”: as when we witness to others for and of Christ] The emphasis in 12:1 thus falls on *what Christians see in them*, rather than on what they see in Christians. These witnesses are the men and women of Chapter 11 who have received acknowledgment from God because of their faith. They stand in Scripture as a witness to the character of committed faith and to the possibilities of faith for later generations. As such they speak with a vibrant voice to believers in all ages.

The people in the stands at our race are there not so much to eyeball *our* efforts, but there to represent the generations of individuals who can and do attest to the faithfulness of God in a life—to good reasons to remain faithful to Him until the end of the race. They bear witness of God to us—not us to God. They are indeed an encouragement to us—but it is their *lives* that encourage us, not their cheers from the stands.

But actually they are not high in the stands, are they? They *surround* us.

**surrounding, compassed**<sup>kw</sup> = *perikeimai* = from <G4012> (peri) and <G2749> (keimai); **to lie all around, i.e. enclose, encircle**, hamper (literal or figurative) :- be bound (compassed) with, hang about.

This suggests a very great number—which indeed it is. The word translated cloud is *nephos*, which means a *mass* of clouds (a single cloud would be *nephele*).

Although it is feasible that the writer continues his athletic metaphor here, referring to the athletes on the field being compassed about by the ring of spectators in the stadium, the use of the word *nephos* (a mass of clouds) seems to suggest something more intimate.

So I would suggest a better way to look at this scene. Remember our context: the writer has just spent the last chapter describing all these people of faith. Then in Chapter 12 he turns to exhort us to learn from their example—to live a life of faith. So instead of the runner being cheered by these saints as he runs, I see him standing at the starting line, looking up to all those around him, and he puts the question to them: “*How did you do it? How did you run so well? How did you endure?*”

And then the writer proceeds to answer that question, including himself in the exhortations. He says, the first thing we are to do is,

*let us also lay aside every encumbrance...*

Here, on the surface, is more athletic imagery. In the ancient games the runners would remove their clothing and run naked (but this was not as scandalous as you might think, since only men were allowed at the games).

Since “sin” is addressed as a separate point, “encumbrance” must mean something else—something that is *not* obvious sin.

**lay aside, throw off**<sup>NIV</sup> = *apotithēmi* = from <G575> (apo) and <G5087> (tithemi); **to put away** (literal or figurative) :- **cast off**, lay apart (aside, down), put away (off).

**encumbrance, weight**<sup>KJV</sup>, **everything that hinders**<sup>NIV</sup> = *onkos* = probably from the same as <G43> (agkale); **a mass** (as bending or bulging by its load), i.e. **burden** (hindrance) :- weight.

*Thomas Hewitt:* They must be ever watchful of obstructions which, unless removed, will certainly impede their progress. The Greek word *onkos*, weight, in the athletic world of that day was connected with bulk of body or superfluous flesh which had to be removed by right training. It was also used metaphorically for pride, whether good or bad. But the use of *apotithēmi*, the word translated “lay aside,” suggests something which can be thrown off like a garment, which in any race would be a great hindrance.

This is very personal; perhaps for each person here the item—or list of items—would be different. But every one of us has something that becomes a weight that hinders our walk of faith.

- It may bog us down, making us lethargic [Thanksgiving feast].
- It may slow us down, impeding our progress [backpack, heavy woolen coat].
- It may distract us, so that we lose our focus on what is truly important [too many other interests or activities in our life].

By themselves none of these are necessarily sinful, but if they get in the way of our sanctification, I suggest they become sin if we refuse to shed them.

*and the sin which so easily entangles us...*

And then there are things that are, from the outset, sin. We are to throw them off as well.

**entangles**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **beset**<sup>KJV</sup>, **ensnares**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **clings so closely**<sup>ESV</sup> = *euperistatos* = from <G2095> (eu) and a derivative of a presumed compound of <G4012> (peri) and <G2476> (histemi); **well standing around, i.e. (a competitor) thwarting (a racer) in every direction** (figurative of sin in general) :- which doth so easily beset. [i.e., a competing runner that hounds our every step, first from this side, then that side, always there knocking us off-stride]

I don't think it necessary to delve into this in depth. I would hazard a guess that every person in this room understands precisely the application to our lives, for every one of us has experienced this. The preacher says, *Is there sin in your life that does this, that keeps getting tangled up in your feet, hindering your race? Cast it off. Throw it off. Get that encompassing sin far away from you.*

The apostle Paul, in several of his letters, puts it another way. He counsels us to “flee”, to run away from sin.

Flee immorality... (1 Corinthians 6:18)

...flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14)

Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness... (2 Timothy 2:22)

*...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

We began with the runner looking up to these surrounding witnesses, asking, “How did you do it?” And they have just told us: Shake off every unnecessary weight, and every entangling sin. Once you’ve done that, now “run with endurance the race set before [you].”

**endurance, patience**<sup>KJV</sup>, **perseverance**<sup>NIV</sup> = *hypomone* = from <G5278> (hupomeno); **cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy** :- enduring, patience, **patient continuance** (waiting).

We know this is important for two reasons:

- The writer uses this word three times in these first three verses.
- This has been a recurring theme throughout his sermon.

As we reminded ourselves last week, throughout this epistle/sermon the pastor has been pleading with his congregation to hang in there, tough it out no matter what. And now he continues this in v2, using the very best incentive he can.

### vs2-3

Note that even though we are surrounded by witnesses to the power of faith—including Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua—and we are certainly to learn from their righteous examples (why else would they be witnessing to us?), on whom are we to focus our attention? Not on them, but on Jesus Christ!

**Read vs2-3.**

The writer now paints a very descriptive, even emotional picture of the Savior. Hovering around this narrative is the message, *Look at all that the Lord Jesus endured for you, to make it possible for you to endure for Him*. It is not so much *If He can do it, you can do it*, but more *Since He did this for me, I can certainly give it my best shot for Him*.

**fixing...eyes**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **looking (un)to**<sup>KJV,ESV</sup> = *apharao* = from <G575> (apo [“from”]) and <G3708> (horao [“to stare at”]); **to consider attentively** :- look; **to look away from one thing so as to see another**.

*Quit studying the things of this world! Why try to emulate failure? Look to Jesus. Why? He is...*

*the author and perfecter of faith,*

**author, founder**<sup>ESV</sup> = *archegos* = from <G746> (arche) and <G71> (ago); **a chief leader** :- author, **captain**, prince.

**perfecter, finisher**<sup>KJV</sup> = *teleiotes* = from <G5048> (teleiōo); **a completer**, i.e. **consummator** :- finisher.

Our subject is still faith and, specifically, Christ’s hand in that. This verse tells us that Jesus was the creator and completer of faith. Just what does this mean? Let’s follow the thread of thought.

Hebrews 11:4 tells us that faith was in the world as early as the time of Abel, Adam and Eve’s second son. But faith really comes into full flower when it is associated in the OT narrative with Abraham and righteousness.

**Read Galatians 3:6-9.**

This was more than 2,000 years before Jesus of Nazareth would be born. Yet Jesus Himself tells us in John 8...

**Read John 8:56-58.**

How can this be? Well, the clue is in that small but powerful two-word phrase: “I am.” That is Jesus cracking open the side door to eternity. Select any point in time and Jesus is there. Jesus, as the human form of the second member of the Godhead, never “was”; He always “is.” Not just before Abraham, or even Abel; He pre-dates that.

### Read Colossians 1:16.

Jesus created everything there is—including invisible faith—and He stands astride all time, from eternity past to eternity future.

### Read Revelation 1:17-18.

Which brings us back to Hebrews 12: Jesus is “the author and perfecter of faith.”

*who for the joy set before Him...*

Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus both began and completed the concept of faith. Not only that, He *used* that faith Himself! How else could he endure what He did? Just like every person mentioned in Chapter 11, Jesus put that faith to work to see over the horizon. Through every hard thing He had to live through, He was looking forward to the “joy set before Him.

*...endured the cross, despising the shame...*

Jesus endured—same word as in v1—the physical torture of the cross, despising—thinking little of—the shame, or disgrace.

That may sound odd to modern ears, but crucifixion was a shameful method of capital punishment, reserved for “the worst and the lowest” criminals.

*New Bible Dictionary:* The cross in the NT is a symbol of shame and humiliation... Rome used it not only as an instrument of torture and execution but also as a shameful pillory reserved for the worst and lowest. To the Jews it was a sign of being accursed.

To this was added the shame of being stripped naked in public—before His disciples, the women who traveled with Him, His mother.

*[v3]...endured such hostility by sinners against Himself*

And we are to consider Him who endured, as well, such hostility, or opposition, by sinners. During His time on earth Jesus was accused of being *too* friendly with sinners, but now those sinners had turned against Him, crying out for His death.

Just a word about the word “consider.”

**consider** = *analogizomai* = middle from <G356> (analogia); to **estimate**, i.e. (figurative) **contemplate** :- consider; **reckon up, to consider in the way of comparison.**

*Matthew Henry:* We must consider him, meditate much upon him, and reason with ourselves from his case to our own. We must *analogize*, as the word is; compare Christ’s sufferings and ours; and we shall find that as his sufferings far exceeded ours, in the nature and measure of them, so his patience far excels ours, and is a perfect pattern for us to imitate.

*Adam Clarke:* Attentively observe and analyze every part of his conduct, enter into his spirit, examine his motives and object, and remember that, as he acted, ye are called to act; he will furnish you with the same Spirit, and will support you with the same strength.

All of this physical torture and shame Jesus “dismissed” because of “the joy set before Him.” He could see that joy as clearly as if it were right before His eyes. And of what did that “joy” consist? What did Jesus see over the horizon as He hung on that cross?

*...[He] has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Oh, for the time to really do justice to this moment. Matthew and Mark tell us that on the cross Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” God the Father turned His back on His own Son because of the putrid mass of sin He bore. The Father could not look upon that sin, and when He turned away, the Son felt that abandonment as acutely as the sin itself.

So just imagine that moment when the ascended Son returns through the gates of heaven to be embraced by the Father, and to be offered the seat to the right of the Father's throne. Our great high priest *sat down!* after His sacrifice, returned to His former glory—and more.

But another part of the joy was that He knew He would be for His followers a strong, compelling example of endurance for those times when *they* are called upon to endure. They need not grow weary or

**lose heart**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **faint in your minds**<sup>KJV</sup>, **discouraged in your souls**<sup>NKJV</sup> =

**eklyo** = from <G1537> (ek) and <G3089> (luo); to relax (literal or figurative) :- **faint**.

**psyche** = from <G5594> (psucho); **breath, i.e. (by implication) spirit**, abstract or concrete (the animal sentient principle only; thus distinguished on the one hand from <G4151> (pneuma), which is the rational and immortal soul; and on the other from <G2222> (zoe), which is mere vitality, even of plants: these terms thus exactly correspond respectively to the Hebrew <H5315> (nephesh), <H7307> (ruwach) and <H2416> (chay)) :- heart (+ -ily), **life, mind, soul**, + us, + you.

This is a picture of despair right down to the depths of the soul, of giving up, of being “enfeebled” (RWP). But we don't have to experience that.

*Albert Barnes:* The best means of leading a faithful Christian life amidst the opposition which we may encounter, is to keep the eye steadily fixed on the Saviour.

## SESSION 45. HEBREWS 12:4-8

### PREFACE: THE BRIDGE

It is important that we build a bridge from Chapter 11 of Hebrews to the rest of the sermon—and, more importantly, to our walk of faith. We began laying the pilings of that bridge last week as we looked at vs2-3 of Chapter 12. But before we press on, I want to complete it.

The roster in Chapter 11 is a wonderful history of the patriarchs and matriarchs of faith, and their histories remain always inspiring and informative. But the *best* thing we can learn from them is how they were always looking *forward*, not back. V13 of Chapter 11 states that

**All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance,** and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

What set these remarkable people apart was that they were always looking forward to something no one else could see—because it could only be seen by faith. William Lane writes something important for us to remember; he reiterates something we have discussed at length before:

Faith celebrates now the reality of future blessings which are certain because they are grounded in the promise of God. Then he adds,

For the Christian it is the future, not the past, that molds the present.

While the history of our forefathers of faith can be useful from time to time, that history is not to be the basis on which our own walk of faith is conducted. Like them, we are to always look *ahead* to the promises of God and our true home in and with Him. And Jesus Himself is the bridge to that. As we look for endurance when hostility strikes, we must live our own life of faith based on the “author and perfecter of faith,” for He is the only one that bridges the struggles and hopes of the past and present to the *realization* of that hope in the promises of God.

Our passage for today is Hebrews 12:4-8, but we really need to begin at v3 to get the correct run into it.

**Read Hebrews 12:3-8.**

### v4

There are a couple of ways to interpret v4:

#### **Read v4.**

- the sin it refers to, against which the people had been striving, was **internal**—*their* sin; this from v1, “let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us”
- the sin against which they were striving was **external**—the sin committed by those who would lead them astray, away from Christ and into apostasy; this from v3, “consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself”

*JFB*: Sin is personified as an adversary; sin, whether within you, leading you to spare your blood, or in our adversaries, leading them to shed it.

I believe there is a stronger case for the latter. The first interpretation breaks down somewhat with the “resisting to the point of shedding blood.” That doesn’t seem to track: shedding blood by resisting sin in our own lives? The “sin” in v1 is something that gets in the way of our sanctification-race—not something that does us physical injury.

But the second interpretation makes more sense—especially coming right after v3:

**For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood [like Jesus did] in your striving against sin;**

That seems to track better, and suggests that it is the sin of others that is in mind.

**resisted** = *antikathistemi* = from <G473> (anti) and <G2525> (kathistemi); **to set down (troops) against, i.e. withstand**  
:- resist.

**the point of**<sup>NASB,NIV,ESV</sup>, **to/unto**<sup>KJV</sup> = *mechri* = or *mechris*, *mekh-ris'*; from <G3372> (*mekos*); **as far as, i.e. up to a certain point** (as preposition of extent [denoting the terminus, whereas <G891> (*achri*) refers especially to the space of time or place intervening] or conjecture) :- till, (un-) to, until.

**striving against**<sup>NASB,KJV</sup>, **struggle against**<sup>NIV,ESV</sup> = *antagonizomai* = from <G473> (*anti*) and <G75> (*agonizomai*); to struggle against (figurative) ["antagonize"] :- strive against.

## vs5-6

The grade school I attended, Franklin School, was located on Main Street, just through the block on which I lived. The normal way for me to get to school each day was to go out the back door, cross our back yard, "cut through" the Wigand's back yard, down their drive, and cross Main Street to the school yard. The return trip was the same, and never took more than two minutes for the entire journey. Mom could always expect me home just a few minutes after the school bell rang.

One day after school a classmate, one of the Nelson boys, invited me to join him catching crawdads down at Linn Creek, instead of going right home. The creek ran just behind Franklin School and was little more than a tiny tributary, shallow, muddy, and smelled not unlike the sewer that crossed its path—but the Mississippi never held more fascination for Tom Sawyer than did Linn Creek for us.

I knew it was wrong. I knew I'd get into trouble for it. And I did it anyway. Instead of going right home after school that day, I went down to the creek with the Nelson boy. We caught crawdads, looked for garter snakes and frogs, and generally got wet and muddy and had a wonderful time.

The Nelson boys had parents who didn't really care where they were or when they got home from school. So, when we eventually decided to leave the creek, they headed off to some other adventure.

I, however, went home to my sure execution.

On that day so long ago, I was all of thirty minutes late getting home from school, and my mom was beside herself. *Where have you been? What happened to you? Are you hurt?* Boy, did I get a lickin' that day. And I learned the rather painful lesson that no matter how much the creek beckoned, I was always to come right home after school.

Our passage today and next week is all about "discipline," and we must understand how that word is used in God's word. Perhaps you, as I, read this and automatically think "punishment"—as if it said,

...and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,  
"My son, do not regard lightly the [punishment] of the Lord,  
Nor faint when you are reproved by Him"

But that is not exactly what the word means.

**discipline** = *paideia* = from <G3811> (*paideuo*); **tutorage, i.e. education or training**; by implication **disciplinary correction** :- chastening, chastisement, **instruction, nurture**.

Context, as usual, is important. The verb form of this word, especially, (*paideuo*) can refer to beating, whipping, scourging. It is used in Luke 23 to describe what the soldiers did to Jesus.

**Read Luke 23:22.** ("punish" or "chastise")

This was not education or training; this was brutality for the sheer, perverse joy of it, inflicted upon a helpless victim. But here in Hebrews 12 it is used as it is in Ephesians and 2 Timothy.

**Read Ephesians 6:4 KJV.** ("nurture"; all else, "training" or "discipline")



## Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. (“training” or “instruction”)

When I got a spanking because I went down to the creek with the Nelson boys instead of coming right home after school, my parents were “educating” me about right and wrong, about obedience. Yes, there was a measure of “punishment” involved, but that punishment was for my good, for my training in becoming a responsible person.

As young as I was I learned another, even more valuable lesson that day. Even though I experienced a burning sensation in my posterior for the next few hours, I learned that of the two sets of parents—the Nelsons and the Lampels—mine loved me more. Even then I understood that though it was sometimes expressed with worry, fear, anger, even chastisement, my parents loved me enough to care. Beneath my mom’s anger that day was a more powerful relief that I was finally home safe and sound.

When God disciplines us He is “educating” us in His ways, His righteousness, which always redounds to our good. And the only reason He bothers is because He loves us enough to care.

Now let’s look at how the writer addresses discipline in this sermon.

*...and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,*

The writer then adds that God, in His word, had already addressed this in the book of Proverbs. Some say this could/should be translated as a question—i.e., Have you forgotten...? Then he quotes it.

### Read vs5-6

Here is the original text in Proverbs 3:11-12.

My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord  
Or loathe His reproof,  
For whom the Lord loves He reproves,  
Even as a father *corrects* the son in whom he delights.

These two verses are packed with synonyms for discipline/correction/chastisement:

discipline  
reproved  
disciplines  
scourges

And none of these are we to “regard lightly”—a different word from that used to describe Jesus enduring the cross, “despising the shame,” but one that means the same.

**regard lightly**<sup>NASB,ESV</sup>, **despise**<sup>KJV</sup>, **make light**<sup>NIV</sup> = oligoreo = from a compound of <G3641> (oligos = “little,” “puny”) and ora (“care”); **to have little regard for, i.e. to disesteem** :- despise.

We are *not* to do that; we are to take seriously the Lord’s discipline as part of our necessary instruction.

*...And He scourges every son whom He receives.*

The end of v6 seems troublesome—and not just on the surface. The word used by the writer is

**scourges** = *mastigoo* (mas-tee-gah’-oh) = **from <G3148> (mastix); to flog** (literal or figurative) :- scourge.

This one is not as easy to explain as the word translated “discipline.” It means just what it seems to say. Now, the original OT Hebrew does not use the Hebrew equivalent of this word—in fact, the word is not even there at all in the original manuscripts. It is inserted by the NASB, but the other common translations leave it out—e.g., in the NKJV,

For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

But as we have discussed throughout our study, the Bible used by the writer of Hebrews was the Septuagint—the early Greek translation of the OT—and in *that* version is where we find the word translated “scourges.”

The sense is this: It is not saying that God flays us with a scourge like and for the same reason as the soldiers who scourged the Lord. But that there are times when God’s discipline, chastisement can be very painful, leaving permanent scars. Read the life of King David; here was a man the Lord loved dearly, to the extent that He chastised David severely when egregious sin was committed. And no doubt in the midst of that “discipline”—when Bathsheba’s child was taken; when David’s family life disintegrated and his favorite son turned violently against him, running his father out of town and from the throne—I’m sure David felt as if he had been “scourged.”

## vs7-8

### Read vs7-8.

v7 begins with a statement that—even when correctly translated—seems odd.

**It is for discipline that you endure.**

The KJVS for this verse are not based on the best manuscripts, which do not begin with the word translated “if.” The statement is sufficiently odd without making conditional:

NKJV: **If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons.**

The correct translation seems odd enough: *I thought we were enduring for the promises of God—not for His discipline! What’s that all about?*

When we paraphrase vs7-8 we can work in that KJVS “If.”

*If you experience God’s discipline, then that means He is treating you as a true son, for that is what good fathers do—they train up their children by means of corrective discipline. If you are not experiencing God’s discipline, which all His children do, then this means you are not His child; you are a bastard.*

It is all because of His love.

**partakers** = *met’ochos* = from <G3348> (metecho); **participant**, i.e. (as noun) **a sharer**; by implication an associate :- fellow, partaker, partner.

The writer used the same word translated “partakers” in Hebrews 3:14.

### Read Hebrews 3:13-14.

The “deceitfulness of sin” would try to convince us that hard times, discipline, chastisement are all signs of God’s displeasure with us, that He is a God of wrath who doesn’t really care that much about us. But what God is displeased with is *sin*; He knows it is corrosive to a life. So, out of love, He disciplines us to train us *away* from sin. We are “partakers of Christ”; in Him we have become true sons and daughters of Father God.

And in Hebrews 5:8 the preacher writes

**Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.**

Jesus was obedient to the call to suffer death in accordance with the revealed will of God. Jesus learned experientially through His passion what obedience entails in order to achieve salvation and to become fully qualified for His office as eternal high priest.

He died in our place; His suffering removed from us the specific suffering of death. But as partakers in Him, we too must “suffer” the discipline of the Father to progress through our sanctification—our upward journey toward perfection, completion. Like our Savior and Brother, we learn obedience from the things we suffer.

It is all part of a loving Father’s training program for those who are His children.

## SESSION 46. HEBREWS 12:9-13

### PREFACE

Last week our discussion of discipline was generally formed along the lines of human family discipline—i.e., a child **does something wrong**, so a parent employs one form or another of corrective chastisement to steer the child in a better direction.

That does describe how our heavenly Father deals with us at times; discipline *can* involve punishment. But we would be doing a disservice to the text if we limited it to that. Heavenly discipline is sometimes deployed even when we **haven't done anything wrong**. It is not always corrective.

We have a common phrase that describes this: “the school of hard knocks” (Elbert Hubbard, 1902). It is easier these days to illustrate this by its absence, rather than by an active example. For we live in a time when “hard knocks” are being systematically removed from life experience.

- competition is being removed from our schools, eliminating the concept of winners and losers; now *everyone* must receive a medal at the end of the race;
- unemployment insurance keeps being extended, removing the impetus to find work;

We need only look around us to see what this does to a society:

- We are surrounded by generations of spoiled brats who think the world owes them a living, a comfortable life, and easy wealth.
- Now when some are fired from a job they do not accept it as a learning, formative experience, but return with a gun—implicit: *That job was owed me; no matter how lousy an employee I am, how dare you take it away from me!*  
“...a gunman killed a dozen workers at the Washington Navy Yard, less than a mile from the Capitol. The shooter, a former sailor who went to work for a Navy computer contractor after he was bounced out of the service, was reportedly angered over a benefits dispute.” (FoxNews)
- We live now in an age of “victimhood”: nothing is ever our own fault, but it has been inflicted upon us by someone else.

Our heavenly Father does not want his children to grow up to be spoiled brats. He not only corrects us when we have erred; He teaches us through the hard knocks of life—even those that come from the Enemy.

### vs9

Our passage for this week begins with v9, but let's take a run at it by reading from v7.

### Read Hebrews 12:7-11.

In vs7-8 the preacher lays out the basic premise of his argument: If you have a father who disciplines you, you are a true son; if you do not receive discipline, you may as well not be a son, since you have no true father. Fathers who do not discipline their children are not fathers at all.

In vs9-11 the preacher dissects his premise further.

#### Read v9.

The KJV translates v9 literally, for the word translated “earthly” or “human” is *hemon sarx*—, literally, “our flesh.” Hence the KJV, “...fathers of our flesh.”

The word “fathers” (*pater*) is modified further by “to discipline us” or “who corrected us,” and in the Greek it is almost one descriptive term: *pater paideutes*.

**to discipline** = *paideutes* = from <G3811> (*paideuo*); **a trainer, i.e. teacher** or (by implication) **discipliner** :- which corrected, **instructor**.

...and we respected them;

**respected, reverence**<sup>KJV</sup> = *entrepo* = from <G1722> (*en*) and the base of <G5157> (*trope*); **to invert**, i.e. (figurative and reflexive) **in a good sense, to respect**; or **in a bad one, to confound** :- regard, (give) reverence, shame.

“lit. means to turn in, that is to turn one upon himself and so produce a feeling of shame, a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct”

When we respect someone, we listen to what they have to say, we honor it by following their counsel.

### Read 1 Corinthians 4:14.

Paul's writing (to the Corinthians) would not "shame" them if they didn't respect him. So to respect our earthly fathers is to ascribe to them the ability to shame us. In a sense, this is the opposite of the word we looked at last week in v5:

**regard lightly**<sup>NASB,ESV</sup>, **despise**<sup>KJV</sup>, **make light**<sup>NIV</sup> = oligoreo = from a compound of <G3641> (oligos = "little," "puny") and ora ("care"); **to have little regard for, i.e. to disesteem** :- despise.

Those we do not respect have small impact on us; it is easy for us to regard them lightly, even despise them, disesteem them. But those we *do* esteem, such as our fathers, have a larger impact on us, including our feeling shame before them—a healthy shame that changes our conduct.

*...shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?*

Part of respecting those who discipline us is to place ourselves in subjection to them—

**subject to** = *hypotasso* = from <G5259> (hupo) and <G5021> (tasso); **to subordinate**; reflexive **to obey** :- **be under obedience** (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto.

—and the writer makes the obvious point: If we do this with our earthly fathers, we certainly should with our eternal *heavenly* Father. And then in v10 he goes on to explain why. But first he uses an expression for Father God that is found nowhere else in Scripture: "Father of spirits" (the NIV inserts "our," but that is not in the Greek). What makes this odd is not the two Greek words—which are perfectly normal: *pater* and *pneuma*—but the juxtaposition of the two.

There have been many interpretations of this over the centuries, but I don't think the writer is trying to make some deep theological, Creationist point with this. He is simply contrasting the "fathers of flesh"—earthly fathers—with the "Father of spirits"—our heavenly Father. He is contrasting the two *realms*, and making the point that the latter is more important and more substantive.

*Vincent's Word Studies*: Contrasted with fathers of the flesh. Their relation to us is limited; his is universal. They are related to us on the fleshly side; he is the creator of our essential life. Our relation to him is on the side of our eternal being.

### vs10

I have some very vivid memories of my dad's corrective methods. Some were wise; some were not. Some were harsh; some were not. He did not seem to reason through his methods, but more often than not shot from the hip. At times he was right on-target; at other times he was not.

In later years, as an adult, whenever I would mention to Mom the disparity of physical discipline between my older brother and me (he received many more spankings), Mom would point out that he *needed* more—i.e., I was better behaved.

But of course this was not true at all. I was just better at not getting caught. I was much better at talking my way out of a tight situation, whereas my brother was a thick-headed dope. I was better at hiding my transgressions, whereas he did his out in the open for all to see.

My parents—good people though they were—were doing the best they could under less than ideal circumstances. Their elder son was an idiot, and their younger son was a cunning Artful Dodger. (*Oliver Twist*) They were hopelessly out of their depth with me.

*For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them;*

Our earthly parents have us for only a limited number of years, and for only a few of them is there any hope of real, formative influence. Worse, they are operating from flesh. My mom and dad were earnest, Bible-believing Christians who wanted only what was best for their two boys, but at times no amount of faith can overcome the impulse of flesh.

*...but He disciplines us for our good,*

Earthly parents may *intend* to train us up for our good, but, again, the motives of flesh will often win out.

Psalm 103 speaks of both aspects of this: the weakness of flesh and the superior qualities of our heavenly Father.

**Read Psalm 103:8-18.**

*so that we may share His holiness.*

The goal of our heavenly Father, in all His chastisement and teaching of us, is to instill in us a character like His own.

## v11

**Read v11.**

This verse voices a concept that our world today rejects:

**Discipline trains us to recognize the profit in discipline!**

The world says, *Why would I want to pass through the school of hard knocks? Why should I want to go through that? It's inconvenient, painful, and no fun at all. I'd rather choose a life without discomfort.*

But we know what that kind of life produces: spoiled brats. The Lord wants His children to grow up; isn't that what the writer pointed out back at the end of Chapter 5?

**Read Hebrews 5:13-14.**

[Let's return to Chapter 12.](#)

The writer does a bit of a switch in mid-sentence; the first half voices a universal truth, that applies to both discipline from fathers of our flesh and our heavenly father.

*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful;*

Well, yeah.

**for the moment**<sup>NASB</sup>, **for the present**<sup>KJV</sup>, **at the time**<sup>NIV</sup> = *pareimi* = from <G3844> (para) and <G1510> (eimi) (including its various forms); **to be near, i.e. at hand**; neuter presumed participle (singular) **time being**, or (plural) property :- come, x have, be here, + lack, (be here) present.

(not) **joyful** = *chara* = from <G5463> (chairō); **cheerfulness, i.e. calm delight :- gladness**, x greatly, (x be exceeding) joy (-ful, -fully, -fulness, -ous).

*...yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

But what he says in the second half of the sentence applies only to the discipline that comes down from the Father of Lights—for only from Him do we receive the “peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

**Read Philippians 1:9-11.**

*...yet to those who have been trained by it...*

[Now back to Chapter 5.](#)

In v14 the preacher says that solid food is for those who have gone through the necessary *training* to discern good and evil. Here is our link to Chapter 12.

**trained**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **exercised**<sup>KJV</sup> = *gymnazo* = from <G1131> (gymnos); **to practice naked (in the games)**, i.e. train (figurative) :- exercise.

Same word used in v11 of Chapter 12.

Without training through the school of hard knocks

- we cannot discern between good and evil (5:14)
- we cannot obtain the peaceful fruit of righteousness (12:11)

## vs12-13

The Lord's discipline is not meant to be simply an intellectual exercise. It is intended by Him to affect change in lives.

At first I thought that vs12-13 were a continuation of the athletic metaphor, but that is not correct. These two verses are not exhortation for the individual runner or athlete to tone up his own body, but are in fact exhortation to family life in the church.

### Read vs12-13.

**strengthen, lift (up)**<sup>KJV,ESV</sup> = *anorthoo* (an-orth-ah'-oh) = from <G303> (ana) and a derivative of the base of <G3717> (orthos); **to straighten up :- lift (set) up, make straight**; to set upright.

Straighten up what?

*...hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble.*

Two similar words:

**weak, hang down**<sup>KJV</sup> = *pariemi* = from <G3844> (para) and *hiemi* (to send); **to let by, i.e. relax** :- hang down; **limp**.

**feeble** = *paralyo* (para-loo'-oh) = from <G3844> (para) and <G3089> (luo); **to loosen beside, i.e. relax** (perfected passive participle paralyzed or enfeebled) :- feeble, sick of the (taken with) palsy. [translated elsewhere "paralytic," "paralyzed"]

Both together paint a picture of weakness, of useless limbs—i.e., ineffectiveness.

Note that it does not say to strengthen our own limbs, but "the" hands (<sup>NIV</sup> "arms" incorrect) and "the" knees—i.e., strengthen those who are weak in the body of Christ. Straighten out whatever and whomever is weak and paralyzed in the church.

*...and make straight paths for your feet,*

I take "your" to mean you who *have been doing* the strengthening joined with those who *have been* strengthened. The preacher almost certainly got his imagery for these two verses from Isaiah 35.

### Read Isaiah 35:3-6a,8-10.

*...so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*

Look again at how this chapter opens:

...let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith... (from Hebrews 12:1-2)

Vs12-13 are following along the same line. First let's look at the key words:

**lame** = *cholos* (kho-los') = apparently a primary word; **"halt", i.e. limping** :- **cripple**, halt, lame.

**put out of joint**<sup>NASB,ESV</sup>, **dislocated**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **disabled**<sup>NIV</sup>, **turned out of the way**<sup>KJV</sup> = *ektrepo* = from <G1537> (ek) and the base of <G5157> (trope); **to deflect, i.e. turn away** (literal or figurative) :- **avoid**, turn (aside, out of the way).

**healed** = *iaomai* = middle of apparently a primary verb; **to cure** (literal or figurative) :- heal, **make whole**.

So the preacher is still employing the metaphor of physical infirmity or feebleness. But this isn't really about arms and legs, but about our life of faith. Let's cut right to the point.

*Albert Barnes:* Divested of the figure, the passage means, that everything should be removed which would hinder anyone from walking in the path to life.

Whatever is defective we should endeavor to restore to soundness, rather than to suffer the defect to be increased.

Whatever is feeble in our faith or hope; whatever evil tendency there is in our hearts, we should endeavor to strengthen and amend, lest it should become worse, and we should entirely fall.

This passage is filled with Christian love. I see it especially in the way the KJV translates v13:

**And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.**

Here we see more clearly the call for us to minister to each other, heal each other—*love* each other, so that the weak among us are not “turned out of the way.” What is the way? Jesus said, “I am the way.”

Let us pay attention to the health of the body, so that no one is lost.

## **SESSION 47. HEBREWS 12:14-17**

### **PREFACE: OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER 12**

Our passage this morning is a moment of transition—from the subject of discipline to the subject of pilgrimage. It is not an abrupt change, but just the continuation of a logical flow in Chapter 12:

- vs1-3: encouragement to run the race well, with endurance, to not “grow weary and lose heart”
- vs4-11: the importance of discipline to the long journey before us
- vs12-13: strengthening and encouraging each other; making each other outwardly strong for the “race that is set before us” (v1)
- vs14-17: purifying ourselves inwardly as we get closer to our destination
- vs18-24: What is our destination? Not the fearsome Sinai, but Zion!
- vs25-29: the Unshaken Kingdom—the purity of God’s presence.

Our writer/preacher has not lost his place; his theme of late has been consistent:

- believers do not belong to this world, but to another
- believers are not to be looking back, but forward
- believers are to strengthen themselves with endurance and discipline for this forward-moving journey

Follow the thread of this forward-looking journey:

**Read Hebrews 11:1, 9-10, 13-14, 39-40, 12:2, 14, 22-24 (what a glorious picture he paints!).**

### **v14**

V14 is one of those verses that, at a glance, seems not quite right. But then, once you work out the essentials of it, you soon realize there is a storehouse of wealth here. This verse opens up like a budding flower to the morning sunshine. We could spend all of today here—we won’t, but we could—and a three-point sermon could easily be preached with this verse as its sole text.

#### **Read v14.**

What is this about “pursue...sanctification without which no one will see the Lord”? You mean if I don’t pursue sanctification, I won’t get through?

First we have to understand that peace with all men [\[or people\]](#) and sanctification are a team that must be considered together. In this way:

**Peace with all men is never to be at the price of one’s holiness.**

And I can offer no better negative example of this than the letter Pope Francis recently wrote to the publisher of a newspaper. **Read marked paragraph.**

The impression one gets from reading the entire letter is that Pope Francis is a very nice man consumed—literally, consumed—by “love,” and that he is willing to sacrifice doctrine and truth and, yes, even holiness for expressing love to—“pursuing peace with”—all men.

But love and peace must be pursued within the context of holiness. This is similar to what Pastor spoke of last week regarding Titus 3:10.

**Reject a factious man after a first and second warning...**

Two strikes and you’re outta here, because even though we love, we will not jeopardize the sanctity of the body.

V14 really blossoms when you look inside the word translated “see,” as in “see the Lord.”

**see** = *horao* = properly **to stare at** [compare <G3700> (*optanomai*)], i.e. (by implication) **to discern clearly** (physical or mental); by extension **to attend to**; by Hebrew **to experience**; passive to appear :- behold, **perceive**, see, take heed.



Linda and I recently watched the movie *Avatar* again, and in that movie the expression the natives use as a form of greeting is “I see you.” But they use that in a deep, spiritual way, similar to the Greek *horao*: “I see *within* you. I *experience* you. I *understand* you. I embrace the *totality* of you.”

Applying that to our verse, it is saying without sanctification, without holiness, no one can experience, understand, see within the totality of the Lord. Even the unregenerate will stand before the Lord and see His face, so this has to be speaking of something deeper than that.

Well, let’s go back and see what the preacher has said about this before.

### Read Hebrews 10:10.

So our one-time sanctification is accomplished through “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.” Then, in v14, he reinforces this.

### Read Hebrews 10:14.

So clearly, in Hebrews 12:14, the preacher is not speaking of earning our way into heaven. Christ “earned” our salvation once for all on the cross. MacArthur and Lane are in agreement on their interpretation of this. Here is how Lane puts it:

Christians are made holy and are consecrated to the service of God through the effective power of Christ’s death on the cross. They are to participate in the process of being made holy by cultivating a life-style that is pleasing to God. When the preacher instructs his friends to “pursue the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” he is urging them to reflect the essential quality of the Father so that a pagan society will recognize in them the family likeness!

A different interpretation is possible as well, favored by Leon Morris. Sanctification, or holiness, is not remotely possible without the work of Christ on the cross. Here the idea is that our *pursuit* of holiness is made possible by the sacrifice of Christ, which results in the sanctification of every believer. Only because we have been once-for-all sanctified by His death can we pursue a deeper life of holiness—only by His death would we even *want* to. And without the propitiatory death of Christ, “no one will see the Lord.”

## v15

Then in vs15-17 the preacher enlarges on the subject of pursuing holiness or sanctification.

### Read v15.

Remember our context: the body of Christ, the church of God, on its pilgrimage of sanctification, the journey of holiness bringing it ever closer to its new country, new city, and the presence and promises of God. In addition, he includes the fact that those within the church (apparent believers) are surrounded by those without the church—unbelievers. Based on that, how are we to interpret these commands?

*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God;*

This verse seems to address, as a continuation of the previous verse, the sanctity of the congregation.

**see to it, looking carefully/diligently**<sup>KJV</sup> = *episkopeo* = from <G1909> (epi) and <G4648> (skopeo); to **oversee**; by implication to **beware** :- **look diligently, take the oversight**. In the same word group as...  
**episkopos** = from <G1909> (epi) and <G4649> (skopos) (in the sense of <G1983> (episkopeo)); **a superintendent, i.e. Christian officer in general charge of a (or the) church** (literal or figurative) :- **bishop, overseer**.

**comes short of**<sup>NASB</sup>, **fall short of**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **fail of**<sup>KJV</sup>, **misses**<sup>NIV</sup>, **fails to obtain**<sup>ESV</sup> = *hystereo* = from <G5306> (husteros); **to be later**, i.e. (by implication) to (be inferior; genitive to fall short (be deficient) :- **come behind** (short), **be destitute**, fail, lack, suffer need, (be in) want, **be the worse**.

*Be diligent in your oversight of the church family to ensure that those who claim to be believers really are.* Not in a cruel, judgmental way, but in context with vs12-13, from last week—as the KJV puts it:

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Keep watch over the flock as a diligent shepherd: keep it safe, keep it pure. Why?

*...that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;*

**causes trouble** = *enochleo* = from <G1722> (en) and <G3791> (ochleo); **to crowd in, i.e. (figurative) to annoy** :- trouble.  
**defiled** = *miaino* = perhaps a primary verb; **to sully or taint, i.e. contaminate** (ceremonial or morally) :- defile.

### Turn to 1 Corinthians 5.

Whether the preacher had it in mind or no, it is as if he is saying, *I don't want you to be like that church in Corinth!* Remember the story: The members of the church in Corinth were exhibiting just a tad too much grace. They were priding themselves on their understanding, their love, their tolerance. But, in fact, all they were doing was permitting gross sin in the church. One of their members was openly living in sin with his step-mother.

The apostle Paul was concerned not just for the soul of that one member—he was concerned for the integrity and purity of the congregation. So in v2 he writes (in the NIV):

**And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?** And he goes on to say that even though he was not present in Corinth, he nonetheless commanded them—in the “power of our Lord Jesus”—to put the man out of the church, to destroy his flesh but in the hope that his soul would be saved. And in v6 Paul explains why:

**Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:6-7 NIV)**

This is what the writer of Hebrews is saying. *Protect the integrity of the body! If you permit an apostate in your midst—someone pressing a different gospel, or just being factious—this is introducing a root of bitterness that will grow and spread and cause even more trouble in the church.*

Here is another approach, compliments of Pastor Jeremy:

I would add that the reference to a ‘root of bitterness’ is almost certainly a direct reference or quote of Deuteronomy 29:18-21 (so much so that the ESV text of Hebrews puts it in italics to signify it is a quote)

**Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, ‘I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.’ This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. And the LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law. (Deuteronomy 29:18-21 ESV)**

Here the danger is that there will be one who hears the words of the covenant and thinks to himself “I can have the blessing and my sin/idol.” I think the modern equivalent is “I know its wrong, but I am going to do it anyway because Jesus will forgive me.” A pretty strong warning indeed!

### v16

And in v16 he presses the point further.

*[See to it] that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.*

## BACKGROUND: ESAU'S CHEAP BIRTHRIGHT

### Read Genesis 25:27-34.

And, as we know, with a little coaching from Mom and a little lying through his teeth, that's how it played out for Jacob. Esau was swindled out of his birthright and his blessing by good ol' Mom and by his twin brother. But we sometimes forget—as did Esau himself—that before any of that transpired, he had *sold* his birthright to his brother for a dish of lentil stew.

And that is the point the preacher is making: *Is there anyone in your midst to whom the grace of God is so cheap that it is worth to them as little as a bowl of stew?* Pursue sanctification, pursue holiness; guard the sanctity of the body.

*[See to it that] no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person...*

It is important to note what is *not* being said here. It is not saying to roust everyone from the church who

- hasn't signed a loyalty oath
- has some questions—even doubts—about the faith
- has a different opinion about church polity

The immature, the uninformed, those who bring with them erroneous beliefs—these we are to teach, encourage, strengthen toward a correct, Bible-based faith. But vs15-17 speak of individuals who are actively working against the body, working to lead it into a wrong direction. These are not to be tolerated.

Let's take a closer look at

*...no immoral or godless person...*

**godless, profane**<sup>KJV</sup> = *bebelos* = from the base of <G939> (basis) and *belos* (a threshold); accessible (as by crossing the door-way), i.e. (by implication of Jewish notions) **heathenish, wicked** :- profane (person).

In our vernacular someone who is profane has a filthy mouth—someone who uses “profanity.” But the older use of the word profane just describes someone who is worldly rather than godly or spiritual. In the Middle Ages a book that was considered “profane” just meant that it was not about God.

**But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, (2 Timothy 2:16)**

“Godless” is the better translation because this doesn't mean that Esau necessarily had a filthy mouth; it means that he was not a spiritual person: the earlier scene in Genesis 25 makes it clear that the things of this world—things of the flesh—were more important to him.

### v17

I think the writer is using the story of Esau to illustrate the consequences of apostasy. This passage has been a mirror of sorts of what he wrote in Chapter 10.

**Read Hebrews 10:23-29.**

Now compare that to our passage.

**Read Hebrews 12:14-17.**

The sad story of Esau illustrates what happens when a person turns his back on God and utterly rejects Him. The scene with his father Isaac in Genesis 27 is heartbreaking; no matter how much he weeps and pleads Esau, the older of the sons, will not have his birthright. He will not even have his father's blessing. Yes, it was partially stolen from him by Jacob's deceit, but at the root of his loss was his choice of the things of this world over the things of God.

Now we can't press this too far. The OT narrative of Esau has a lot of holes in it; for example, this is the only passage that even mentions repentance, nor do we have any other documenting evidence for calling him sexually immoral.

Apostasy deals with the rejection of salvation in Christ, while the story of Esau deals with choosing the temporal over the eternal. Similar, and illustrative, but not identical. So let's close by reading what Jesus Himself had to say about how there comes a time when God shuts the door on the "immoral or godless." There comes a time in the economy of God when the polls are closed.

**Read Luke 13:22-28.**

How many in churches today are attending church potlucks, sitting in the pews—"we ate and drank with You, we listened to all Your sermons." But they will arrive at the Pearly Gates, expecting entrance, and Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you." There was no change in their heart—they were just showing up on Sunday mornings. In fact some of them had been "a root of bitterness" in the church, "causing trouble" and "defiling" the body by their behavior.

They, as well as those around them, thought they were under the grace of God—but in reality they had come short of it.

## SESSION 48. HEBREWS 12:18-24

### PREFACE

For more than two chapters now the writer/preacher has been preparing his congregation for a destination. Last week we traced this pilgrimage from v11:1, through the end of Chapter 12. But let's back up a bit more.

**Read Hebrews 10:23-25.**

... but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Notice how he is setting up what we might call today, the "end-game":

**Read Hebrews 10:35-39.**

- v36: "you have need of endurance" [for the long pilgrimage before you]  
"you may receive what was promised" [that which has lain over the horizon]  
v37: "He who is coming will come" [and the end will be in sight]  
v38: "but My righteous one shall live by faith" [so keep looking forward, to this day]  
v39: "faith to the preserving of the soul" [faith is what will get you to the end]

All this time the preacher has been preparing his audience for the fulfillment of the promises of God. He has been encouraging them, exhorting them to encourage and strengthen each other for the tough and trying journey before them. And now, for the rest of Chapter 12, he reaches the climax of his sermon, describing for his expectant congregation that new country, that new city, waiting for them just over the horizon.

### BACKGROUND

Please turn to Exodus 19. The scene is Mount Sinai (or Horeb). Israel has just arrived, and Moses goes up on the mountain to converse with Yahweh, who gives Moses word for the people. When Moses passes this on, then returns to the mountain of God, the Lord tells him that now He wants to address the people directly. The Lord wants to make sure that everyone believes Moses has really been talking with Him. So He gives Moses instructions for the people to purify themselves for the audience.

**Read Exodus 19:10-17.**

**Read Exodus 19:18-22.**

**Read Exodus 20:18-21.**

This is the background story for the first half of our passage today, vs18-21.

### vs18-19

The preacher begins by revisiting that ancient scene around the base of Mt. Sinai, but placing it in a negative context—that is, *This is a picture of what does **not** await you.* More than that, he paints a pretty gloomy, ominous picture of that scene.

**Read vs18-19.**

*For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched...*

The word translated "mountain" is not in the earliest and best manuscripts. It is not necessary to the point being made by the preacher—this opening could accurately be rendered, *You have not come to that which can be touched*—but it is easy to see how "mountain" could have been inserted later, since—though he does not state it explicitly—the preacher is clearly referencing the Mount Sinai moment.

I find more interesting the phrase "a mountain that can be touched," when later, in v20, he quotes a combination of Exodus 19:12-13—which states that to touch even the lower fringes of the mountain would result in death. How do we reconcile these? Well, we don't have to.

Our passage contrasts Sinai to Zion, but it also contrasts the *material* to (for the moment) the *immaterial*—contrasting that which can be apprehended with the five senses to that which can only be apprehended (for the

moment) by faith. That's why it is properly "can,"<sup>NASB,NIV</sup> or "might,"<sup>KJV</sup> rather than "may"<sup>NKJV</sup>): The Israelite did not have *permission* to touch the mountain, but physically he certainly could. He could see it; he could smell the smoke and taste it on his tongue; he could hear the thunder and rumbling; and he could, if he chose, reach out and touch the mountain.

But for the person hearing the reading of this sermon the first time, as well as for any of us here today, the Mount Zion so described cannot be today apprehended by our five senses. For us it remains something seen and touched only by faith. It is promised; it lies over the horizon of our limited vision; but for the moment it is seen and touched only by faith.

*...and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,*

What a terrible scene that must have been—how intimidating, how *holy*—which, of course, was God's point.

*...and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.*

In *The Lord of the Rings* movies, the evil *Nazgul* emit a piercing shriek that inflicts unbearable physical agony upon humans and hobbits. The victims cover their ears and grimace in pain whenever they hear the scream.

That, I imagine, was the scene at the base of Mt. Sinai when the Lord was present. The powerful, unfiltered "voice" of holy God inflicted intense discomfort.

Along with contrasting Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion, here we have a description of what happens when people try to approach God on their own. Put this in modern terms: When people say, *I don't need Christianity; I don't believe in Jesus. I have a personal relationship with God. I go directly to Him.*

Well, here is a description of what awaits those who reject Christ. You think you can approach holy God on your own? Boy, are you in for a rude awakening! Set aside the issue of trying to buy your way in with your good works; even while you are still well away from Him—as far away as the plain is from the mountain peak—you won't be able to stand the pain of His holiness. You will hold your ears to the thundering pain of His voice; your eyes will ache from the fire and smoke; you will tremble and quake with fear at the terrible sight.

And, without Christ, you will perish in your arrogance and presumption.

Then too, what a beautiful type of Christ is offered in the Israelites' begging to hear the word of God only through the mediator, Moses. *Please, we can only bear the power of God if it is filtered through a mediator. We can't take it firsthand.* The prophet Isaiah was a believer, but even he, when faced with the awesome power and holiness of the Lord God, fell on his face and resigned himself to death.

Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! (Isaiah 6:2-5a)

Imagine what it will be like for those who have rejected the Mediator, Christ!

## vs20-21

Caught up in the terrible imagery, the writer of Hebrews—as he has before—plays a little fast and loose with his quotations

**Read vs20-21.**

The “quotation” in v20 is drawn from Exodus 19:12-13. It’s interesting to note that when God commanded that anyone—man or beast—who touched the mountain be killed, the method of execution—stoning, or shot through with darts or arrows—was prescribed so that those carrying it out need not come close enough to touch the mountain themselves.

The “quotation” in v21 is not found anywhere in the Sinai narrative. Many have suggested possible explanations—of which probably the most plausible is that the preacher lifted it from the golden calf narrative in Deuteronomy 9, where Moses says,

“For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the Lord listened to me that time also.”  
(Deuteronomy 9:19)

But we get the point: This was not a pleasant experience for anyone involved—which was God’s purpose. By revealing Himself, He meant to slap the people up-side the head with His terrible holiness. At Sinai God was saying, *Don’t mess with Me. Don’t take me for granted.* I’m reminded of a scene in the old Bill Cosby sitcom. Cosby, who plays a doctor, is upbraiding his son for his slovenly behavior, and he looks his son in the eye and says, “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out,”

God was saying much the same to Israel: *You are right to fear me. I rescued you from slavery in Egypt, and I can just as easily put you back.*

v21 is where the similarity between Moses, as mediator, and Christ breaks down. Moses, along with everyone else was “full of fear and trembling.” But one cannot imagine any circumstance in which Christ the Mediator would be afraid of His Abba Father. So this bridges us to the contrasting picture of Zion, in vs22-24.

## vs22-24

The children of Israel, coming out of Egypt, had as their goal, the holy mountain of God on earth. Christians—the children of God in Christ—have as their goal the eternal holy city of God in heaven. Their pilgrimage was toward a desert mountain where they witnessed the glory of God on earth. The pilgrimage of Christians is toward the glory of God upon His heavenly throne.

### Read vs22-24.

I considered a number of ways to approach these verses, and finally settled on painting a picture of the scene from the inside out. We cannot—and will not—ignore the sundry components of the scene, for they are important. But what must linger in the mind (and thus what must be emphasized) is the glory, the joy, the profound sense of love and family—the sense of community—that permeate this incredible scene.

Before we begin, let me point out the verb tense; we will return to this later, but for now just note that the writer does not place this in the obvious future tense: He does not say, “You *will* come...”, or even “You *are about to* come...”, but “You *have* come...” How astonishing! But more on this later.

### What

*the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,*

**What have we come to?** What is the purpose of our being here? Well, it seems there is something going on: v23 says it is a “general assembly.”

**general (joyful<sup>NIV</sup>) assembly** = *panegyris* = from <G3956> (pas) and a derivative of <G58> (agora); **a mass-meeting, i.e. (figurative) universal companionship** :- general assembly.



The two words from which this word is built give us a beginning sense of it:

***pas*** = including all the forms of declension; apparently a primary word; **all, any, every, the whole** :- all (manner of, means), always (-s), any (one), × daily, + ever, every (one, way), as many as, + no (-thing), × thoroughly, whatsoever, whole, whosoever.

***agora*** = from *ageiro* (to gather; probably akin to <G1453> (*egeiro*)); properly **the town-square (as a place of public resort)**; by implication a market or thoroughfare :- market (-place), street. **[a place for the common people to gather]**

“General assembly” sounds a bit staid, as if we were speaking of some political congress. But that is not the setting at all. Most commentators (if not the translators) prefer to interpret this as “*festal* assembly”—i.e., a festival. We find one clue for this in the OT.

**Read Isaiah 66:10.**

The tone of that is obvious: joy, gladness, rejoicing, celebration.

Here is how that verse is translated to Greek in the Septuagint:

Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and all ye that love her hold in her a **general assembly**: rejoice greatly with her, all that now mourn over her.

Do you want a contemporary visual illustration of this word—the *what* to which we have come? The end of the closing ceremonies of the Olympics, with the stands packed with shouting people, loud celebratory music playing, and all the Olympians assembled *en masse* in the center of the stadium, screaming, shouting, hugging each other, taking pictures of new friends, etc.

That is a perfect illustration of what is being described in Hebrews 12:22-24. In this instance, those in attendance are “the church of the firstborn [Christ] who are enrolled in heaven.” If your name is written in the Book of Life, you are there.

## Where

*Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,*

**So where is this party being held?** At our destination—that place we have been seeing only by faith for so long. The writer went to his thesaurus and found three different ways to say it, just to make sure we got it: *Mount Zion* and to *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*.

There is one more aspect of this “party.” To the Jew, Mount Zion was the place of worship, and Jerusalem represented the place of God’s presence. So this is a celebration like no earthly event; here all the joy, all the rejoicing is directed toward and in celebration of God upon His throne.

## Who else

*myriads of angels... the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus... the sprinkled blood...*

**And who else will be in attendance?** The writer gives us the guest list—or, more accurately from the perspective of the earthly redeemed, the *host* list:

### v22: myriads of angels

John, in Revelation 5:11, describes it this way:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands...

The ESV and KJV translate it, “innumerable.” That’s pretty good.

### v23: God, our Judge

Enough said.

### v23: the spirits of the righteous made perfect

Thomas Hewitt describes this as speaking of the “faithful departed.” OT (Chapter 11), NT, through to today.



**v24: Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood, which is superior even to that which Abel shed (Chapter 11:4)**

So much of this letter/sermon has been taken up describing Christ Jesus as the superior sacrifice and mediator—our faithful High Priest—and here we see both roles glorified: Jesus the Mediator sitting at God's right hand, and Jesus the once and final Lamb of God who shed His own blood in our place.

*But you have come to...*

Finally, we return to this matter of "you have come"—we are already there. I would like to close with what William Lane writes about this:

**Read from p169f.**

## **SESSION 49. HEBREWS 12:25-29**

We close Chapter 12 today—and right off the bat I take issue with the heading supplied by the NASB. “The Unshaken Kingdom” should be “The Unshakable Kingdom”. But let’s get right to the meat.

### **v25**

At first reading it is natural to think the writer is referring to the person standing before the congregation, reading this sermon—especially if your translation is the KJV or NIV.

#### **Read v25a.**

You have to love the writer of Hebrews: he doesn’t lose his train of thought; he never forgets the point he is making.

#### **Read Hebrews 1:1-2.**

Now, twelve chapters later, he returns to his inaugural point:

#### **Read v25a.**

Just who is this speaking, that we are not to refuse His words?

**in these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son**

The one speaking is still Father God—only now He is delivering His message through His only begotten Son.

But there is also another “voice” here. In vs22-24 the preacher explained how believers have come to Mount Zion, and now, instead of the painful, thundering voice of Yahweh, we hear the sweet voice of Jesus. But we are to give Him our attention no less than God expected Israel to listen to *His* words at Mount Sinai.

There is no need to guess the identity of the speaker. The context makes it clear:

**But you have come to Mount Zion . . . and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22a-24)**

Jesus the Christ speaks *to us* the word of God from Mount Zion, and He speaks to God *for us* through His sacrificial blood.

The second part of v25 requires a bit more sorting out to understand.

#### **Read v25b.**

Who does the preacher refer to when he contrasts, “him who warned them on earth” to “Him who warns from heaven”? There are essentially two schools of thought on just who is doing the speaking/warning here.

Most of the older commentators believe this contrasts Moses to Christ. I’m guessing the NASB translators are in this camp, since they leave the first “him” in lower case. [\[This is also clear from the margin notes in the 1977 NASB.\]](#) But the NKJV capitalizes both, meaning deity. So which is it?

Better than thinking this is contrasting Moses to Christ, is to think of it as contrasting *the old and new covenants*. Under the old covenant God warned them from Mount Sinai; they refused to obey, so they did not escape Sinai to enter the Promised Land. They paid a price for the unbelief and disobedience. Likewise, under the new covenant, those who turn away from [\[apostrepho—i.e., apostasy\]](#) the new life God offers in Christ will not escape judgment.

Our God is one who speaks. To the Jews Yahweh said to them “on earth,” *Obey this covenant and you will thrive; disobey this covenant and your life will be miserable*. To all peoples today, the Lord God warns “from heaven,” *Believe in My Son and you will live with Us for eternity; reject Him and you will die for eternity*.

## vs26-27

Once again the schedule of my Bible reading has me in the first few chapters of the gospels. And, as happens every year, I am reminded how ignorant most of the world is about Jesus Christ. Those who don't know Him very well at all like to paint Jesus in shades of pastels; an insipid, flower-child wafting through Canaan land, his feet never quite touching earth; loving everybody; handing out daisies with a wan, simpering countenance.

That is not at all the Jesus of the gospels. He was no milquetoast; he was no simpering flower-child from the sixties. Jesus *was* love, and He loved the souls of His creation, but he hated sin, hypocrisy, deceit, and any religious leader who was selling the people a bill of goods. Jesus was strong, dynamic, outspoken.

To put it more succinctly, *Jesus shook things up*.

And shaking things up is what the remainder of Chapter 12 is all about. The pastor contrasts the shakable kingdoms of this earth to the *unshakable* kingdom of God in Christ.

### Read vs26-27.

*His voice shook the earth then...*

**Read Exodus 19:16-19.**

This was the terrible wrath of God evidenced at Mount Sinai. That is history; now let's look at the future.

*"Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."*

**Read Haggai 2:6-7.**

**Read 2 Peter 3:10.**

The writer of the Hebrews sermon reminds us that God creates with His voice—and He *destroys* with His voice.

**voice** = *phone* = probably akin to <G5316> (phaino) through **the idea of disclosure; a tone** (articulate, bestial or artificial); by implication **an address** (for any purpose), saying or language :- **noise, sound, voice**.

**shake** = *seio* (say-oh) = apparently a primary verb; **to rock (vibrate, properly sideways or to and fro), i.e. (genitive) to agitate (in any direction; cause to tremble); figurative to throw into a tremor (of fear or concern)** :- move, quake, shake.

I have two powerful memories that illustrate this:

During the Vietnam war I was stationed on the *U.S.S. Chicago*, on station in the Gulf of Tonkin. One night I dreamed I was clinging to the very tip of the mast. As the ship (in my dream) would roll to one side, I would reach down and touch the water on that side of the ship, then, as the ship would roll back, I would reach down and touch the water on the other. I awoke to the sounds of unsecured furniture sliding across the floor and crashing into bulkheads. Suddenly everything in my world was being tossed about like furnishings in an upended dollhouse.

Years later, while living in San Diego, I was at work at my desk when, from out of the east, I felt the earth rumbling toward me. This was not like the vibration caused by a passing truck—or even the pounding iron wheels of a diesel locomotive; no, this was the earth itself rolling toward me as if it were a subterranean steamroller, huffing and puffing toward me. The rolling approached from out of the distance—the earth quivered and shook like a huge carpet that someone had grasped from the other end and given a good snap. The rolling wave passed beneath my feet and the foundation of our house, then rolled on into the opposite distance. In that moment the concrete slab beneath my feet felt like pudding.

Frankly, I was surprised at the many different interpretations of v26—specifically, the moment in history to which the shaking of earth and heaven refers. The older commentators, especially, assume that the writer of Hebrews is lifting not just the words from the prophet Haggai, but also his time frame. So there are the interpretations that

- the first shaking was when Jesus came the first time; the second shaking when He comes again (Barnes, JFB);
- the first took place at Mount Sinai, but the second refers to “the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and the total abolition of the political and ecclesiastical constitution of the Jews” (Clark);
- the first is Mount Sinai, the second the *birth* of Christ (Gill);

For the purposes of this study, and the understanding of what the writer of Hebrews is saying, we need not fine tune this second shaking to a specific event in God’s economy. His point is that at Mt. Sinai Yahweh shook the earth with His awesome holiness, and there will come a day, during the end times, when He will shake *everything*—Leon Morris refers to it as an “event of cosmic grandeur.”

From Noah and the flood, to Jesus’ parable about houses built on sand and rock, and peppered throughout all of the Bible, are examples and images and prophecies of the destruction and reordering of all creation by our righteous and holy God. In fact, I am amazed at just how many times in God’s word this is mentioned in one form or another.

But the main point of this passage is not so much wholesale destruction, but of winnowing out, of *sifting*. Perhaps when reading this passage your first thought, like mine, is one of upheaval, of the earth being ripped apart and remade. But another way to understand this supernatural process is the process that occurs at the threshing floor. That too is a recurring theme in God’s word [70 occurrences of “threshing floor”]. After all, where did God build His Jerusalem temple? Upon the site of David’s threshing floor:

Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where *the Lord* had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. (2 Chronicles 3:1)

The first Psalm speaks of how Yahweh will winnow the wicked from the righteous:

The wicked are not so,  
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.  
(Psalms 1:4)

And John the Baptist used this imagery in describing the Messiah:

**Read Matthew 3:11-12.**

**Read v27 again.**

There will come a day—just when, no one knows—when God will take hold of all creation—with His *voice*!—and begin shaking. He will shake both earth and heaven—that is, this globe and the visible universe [ESV, NIV: “heavens”].

When He is finished, all that will remain will be those things which cannot be shaken.

## vs28-29

And v28 tells us specifically what the principal unshakable thing is.

**Read v28.**

*...we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken,*

For the purpose of this study, let us not differentiate between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ. Jesus referred to both: He told the scribe, “You are not far from the kingdom of God,” and He answered Pilate,

“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” (John 18:36)

The concept of “kingdom” in the NT is fascinating and multi-faceted: there is the kingdom of God; the kingdom of Christ; we, believers, are a kingdom. Fascinating—and far beyond the scope of this study. But I want to point out just three passages that help us understand the progression of the kingdom of heaven as it applies to us.

### Read Colossians 1:13.

He—God the Father—transfers believers from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Christ.

### Read 1 Corinthians 15:23-24.

During the end times, during the resurrection of the church, Christ will deliver everyone in His kingdom to the kingdom of God the Father.

Then in The Revelation we see how the two kingdoms are described as one:

### Read Revelation 11:15.

What the preacher is telling us is that this kingdom—that is, the entity and rule of this kingdom, as well as the *populace* of this kingdom—“cannot be shaken.” Note: he does not say it *will* not be shaken; it *cannot* be shaken. It is otherworldly. It is supernatural. And we, as believers, “receive” or “are receiving” this kingdom.

**receive** = *paralambano* = from <G3844> (para) and <G2983> (lambano); **to receive near, i.e. associate with oneself** (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); by analogy to assume an office; figurative to learn :- receive, take (unto, with).

The idea behind this word is that of receiving something from another so as to then be nearby that person [*para* = *alongside*]. It is used to express fellowship offered and accepted. So our inclusion in this kingdom was not something delivered by airmail; it was delivered by God’s outstretched hand wishing to draw us near to Himself. And this is a permanent, eternal kingdom.

**cannot be shaken** = *asaleutos* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a derivative of <G4531> (saleuo); unshaken, i.e. (by implication) **immovable** (figurative) :- which **cannot be moved, unmovable**.

What are we to do as a result of our being a part of this fellowship in His kingdom?

*...let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;*

The word translated “gratitude” is really the word for “grace,” so the KJVS are more literally correct.

**gratitude/grateful**<sup>NASB/ESV</sup>, **thankful**<sup>NIV</sup>, **grace**<sup>KJVS</sup> = *charis* = from <G5463> (chairō); *graciousness* (as *gratifying*), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including *gratitude*) :- acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace (-ious), joy, liberality, pleasure, **thank** (-s, -worthy).

But the context seems to favor the idea of gracious appreciation, gratitude. Through no effort of our own believers have been given (by God’s grace!) a part in this unshakable, immovable, eternal kingdom. The obvious response to this is one of thanksgiving, which motivates our reverent, awe-inspired worship of/service to (v29) “our God [who] is a consuming fire.”

*katanalisko* = to consume utterly.

Here is a picture of both *contrast* and *consistency*.

First, the contrast of the *grace* of God to the *wrath* of God. The same God and Father who graciously gave us eternal life in His Son is also a “consuming fire.”

But this is utterly consistent. Our God does not change. It is the same God who wraps His arms around us in protection—and who belched forth smoke at Mount Sinai.

**Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. (Exodus 19:18)**

Mt. Sinai did not spew smoke in greeting to God; God *was* the fire and smoke. It is only the blood of Christ that keeps us from experiencing that same wrath visited upon the Israelites.

## **SESSION 50. HEBREWS 13:1-6**

### **PREFACE**

For twelve chapters now the preacher has been addressing powerful, even cosmic aspects of these pilgrims' life of faith.

- He begins, in Chapters 1 and 2, with Christ's superiority to angels.
- Then, for an extended passage over several chapters, he speaks of Jesus Christ as our great high priest, including the delightful interlude on Melchizedek—that mysterious king/priest of Salem (Jerusalem), who was “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.” (Hebrews 7:3)
- The preacher then moves into an extended passage on the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over the old covenant system, giving us the admittedly strange image of Christ as high priest carrying the sacrifice of Himself into the holy of holies.
- In Chapter 11 he encourages His congregation with the roster of the faithful who had preceded them, emphasizing repeatedly that they (and those hearing this sermon) are “looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” (Hebrews 11:10)
- And in Chapter 12 he contrasts the historical Mt. Sinai with the far-future Mt. Zion.

It has been a heady, exhilarating, sometimes confusing journey for both the original congregation hearing this sermon read to them and for us today. The writer has sojourned into the supernatural glories of life in Christ as he has endeavored to encourage these people living under the very real threat of persecution, even death, for their faith.

But now, after all that, in Chapter 13 the preacher adopts a very different tone. He just finished saying, at the very end of Chapter 12,

**Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28-29)**

And his very next words are,

**Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers... (Hebrews 13:1-2a) [woa! who is *this* guy?]**

We can think of this change-up in this way. The pastor is speaking to people who are on a pilgrimage—a long, tough, sometimes painful journey of faith and trust in the Lord Jesus during hard times. I think about Londoners during those early days of World War Two, all during 1940 and into 1941 enduring night after night of the German blitz, bombs dropping all around, firestorms, whole city blocks leveled.

Living with this, day in and day out changes people. They can adopt an almost fatalistic attitude of grim determination, of taking on (at least for the moment) behavior in kind. When death and destruction becomes the norm all around us, it can become the norm in our own way of life, our own thinking. Kindness, courtesy, grace—these are forgotten in the practical, day-after-day struggle just to stay alive.

The people hearing this sermon for the first time were living under similar conditions. They were being blitzed by persecution, death. Their faith in Christ was daily under attack; their pilgrimage was getting pretty grim. For them, mere survival was overwhelming everything else. So the preacher closes his sermon by exhorting them—even as they are in the midst of this struggle—not to neglect the common virtues of family life—the Christian family:

- brotherly love
- hospitality to strangers
- support of those imprisoned
- the sanctity of marriage
- being content with what they have

These and more are addressed in the closing moments of this pastoral message.

## v1

Today we will look at the first six verses of Chapter 13. What follows are words of affectionate counsel from a shepherd to the sheep in his flock. He cares about these people; he earnestly wants only what is good and edifying for them.

### Read Hebrews 13:1-6.

The preacher begins by addressing fundamental love—love for those within, *and* for those without.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is referred to as the “city of brotherly love” because the Greek word for “brotherly love” is *philadelphia* [fil-ad-el-fee'-ah].

**love of the brethren, brotherly love** = *philadelphia* = from <G5361> (philadelphos); **fraternal affection** :- brotherly love (kindness), love of the brethren.

And most translations say that this brotherly love is to “continue.”

**continue, remain**<sup>VL</sup> = *meno* = a primary verb; **to stay** (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy) :- **abide**, continue, dwell, **endure**, be present, **remain**, stand, tarry (for), × thine own.

But I would like to suggest a slightly different, richer color for this word. I do not challenge the translation of “continue,” but I wonder if that expresses the potential depth of the word in this context. Certainly where brotherly love exists it should continue—it should keep taking place.

I believe the apostle Peter—strong, virile, emotional Peter—captures a deeper application of this same word.

### Read 1 Peter 1:22-25. [NASB or NIV]

Remember our context in Hebrews. Endurance was a key theme just one chapter back:

- 12:1** – let us run with endurance
- 12:2** – [Jesus] endured the cross
- 12:3** – [Jesus] endured hostility
- 12:7** – It is for discipline that you endure

The preacher is telling his congregation, *No matter what, no matter what trials are thrown at you from without, let nothing short-circuit your love for each other. Hang together!*

This exhortation in v1 is here for two reasons:

1. It sets the theme of this passage
2. It focuses tightly on the immediate church family

Within the immediate Christian family there exists a mystical bond that is based on the commonality of the Spirit. Those who are sons and daughters of God through Christ Jesus are, in a very real sense, brothers and sisters. When nurtured, this bond can be as strong—even stronger—than that of a human family, because it is established in the same way: by blood. But in this case it is established by the sacrificed blood of Christ, and sustained by the indwelling Holy Spirit. That makes the bond unique.

But because we remain flesh, with the weakness of flesh, the church family can be as fragile and contentious as the human family. That is why we must continue nurturing the bond we have with our spiritual brothers and sisters; it must be tended like a fine garden:

- the ground plowed and tilled deeply by an understanding of who we are in Christ;
- the seeds of love carefully planted with acts of kindness and forbearance;
- everything fertilized generously with prayer for each other;
- and all benefiting from the harvest of strength and encouragement within, and the profound witness of the unified church to those without.



## v2

The rest of this passage expands on this fundamental call to affection and consideration in the family of faith. The preacher now encourages them to “show hospitality to strangers.”

### Read v2.

**neglect**<sup>NASB</sup>, **forget**<sup>KJV,NIV</sup> = middle from <G1909> (epi) and <G2990> (lanthano); **to lose out of mind**; by implication to neglect :- (be) forget (-ful of).

**hospitality to strangers**<sup>NASB</sup>, **entertain strangers**<sup>KJV,NIV</sup> = *philoxenia* = from <G5382> (philoxenos); hospitableness :- entertain strangers, hospitality.

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...*

This is no casual remark. Think of it this way: Imagine yourself a poor black man or woman traveling alone through a wealthy, predominantly white community in the early 1950s. Night is coming on and you need a place to stay. You are weary from walking, and your belly aches with hunger. You have no money, only the clothes on your back. And all around you are people who will not even open their door to you, much less invite you inside. They distrust you; some may even hate you. None of them want anything to do with you.

But you walk another block and come upon someone placing his garbage can out on the curb. He greets you with a smile and handshake. And he asks you if you need a place to spend the night. Within moments you are inside his home, enjoying the evening meal with the rest of his family. After dinner the man's wife conducts you to the guest bedroom and shows you the nearest bathroom, where there is a deep tub and fresh luxurious towels.

You sleep peacefully that night, enjoy a hearty breakfast, and are soon on your way with a full belly and some cash in your pocket for a new pair of shoes to replace the thin-soled ones you have been wearing for many miles. In your other pocket is a slip of paper containing the name, address and phone number of another Christian in the city where you expect to be that night.

*...for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

This was the situation for Christians in the first century. Remember that the word translated “angels” here need not be limited to heavenly beings with wings. The word *angelos* means “a messenger,” and can also be used for a missionary, a prophet, even a pastor—anyone who brings a good message. Christians traveling in the first century through often hostile territory would depend on welcoming brethren to take them in for the night. Welcoming them into one's home would be—and remains—a fundamental part of life in the Christian family.

## v3

And a form of this hospitality is to be extended even to those in prison.

### Read v3.

The writer of Hebrews states that we are to “remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them...” There is the picture of life in the family of God—so beautifully expressed by Paul in his letter to the Romans.

### Read Romans 12:10-13, 15-16.

And Paul gets even more specific in 1 Corinthians.

### Read 1 Corinthians 12:24b-26.

My guess is that today few of us know a Christian brother or sister incarcerated for a crime. But most of us know one or more imprisoned by illness, infirmity, or otherwise isolated from the rest of the body. We are called to share in their suffering, and do everything we can to lighten their load.

Then the writer applies this principle to marriage.

#### Read v4.

*Marriage is to be held in honor among all,*

First a note about the mechanics of this verse. The original Greek does not have a verb; this is the reason for the difference between the translations at the beginning, because they had to supply the verb. The verse as a whole, along with its context, would seem to speak against the choice of “is” in the KJV. That makes it sound as if everyone *already does* hold marriage in honor—which is not what the writer is saying. This is an exhortation to do something, not a declaration that something is already being done.

The preacher uses two important, descriptive words:

**honor** = *timios* = including the comparative *timioteros*, tim-ee-o’-ter-os; and the superlative *timiotatos*, tim-ee-o’-tat-os; from <G5092> (time); **valuable**, i.e. (object) **costly**, or (subject) honored, **esteemed**, or (figurative) beloved :- dear, honourable, (more, most) **precious**, had in reputation.

This word is most often translated “precious.” In 1 Peter the apostle writes that

...you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

In God’s economy and plan, marriage between man and woman is deemed valuable, precious, because it is the earthly illustration of the relationship Christ has with the church.

#### Read Ephesians 5:22-32.

Before we move on to the second important word, note the “among all.” The covenant of marriage is to be respected and honored even by those who are not in it. So this is directed, for example, not just to the married partner who commits adultery, but to the single person with whom he has the affair. *Everyone* is to consider marriage precious, and do nothing to harm it.

...*the marriage bed is to be undefiled;*

(The original text just says, “the bed undefiled.”)

**undefiled, kept pure**<sup>NIV</sup> = *amiantos* (ah-mee’-an-tose) = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a derivative of <G3392> (miaino); **unsoiled**, i.e. (figurative) **pure** :- undefiled.

The “a” at the front of this makes it negative—that is, the opposite of “defiled.” The preacher used the un-negated form of this word in Hebrews 12 when speaking of how one apostate may defile others.

#### Read Hebrews 12:15.

To understand the extent to which the writer of the Hebrews sermon considers this word translated “undefiled,” we see in Chapter 7 how he used it to describe the purity of Christ as our high priest.

#### Read Hebrews 7:26-27.

The first word speaks of how we are to *consider* or think of marriage—honorable, precious—and the second word speaks of how we are to *practice* marriage—keep it pure, unsoiled.

## vs5-6

Finally the preacher applies the concept of “brotherly love” in family life to how we think of money and possessions.

### **Read vs5-6.**

It is no accident that we have tandem exhortations for sexual purity and against monetary greed. These are used together in a number of Paul’s epistles, for they are indeed related; both speak of a self-centered, avaricious heart: the first, greed for what lies outside the marriage, and the second, greed for what lies outside the purse. And both evidence a heart dissatisfied by God’s provisions.

But perhaps the best way to approach these two verses is to see them in light of the situation in which these Hebrews found themselves at the first reading of this sermon. In varying degrees, they were in peril. We already know from Chapter 10 that many of them had had their property seized.

### **Read Hebrews 10:34.**

Even when we have the right spirit in times of adversity (“accepted joyfully the seizure of your property”), later the loss can begin to nag at us, and we begin coveting what we no longer have. In my experience some of the most preoccupied with wealth are those who claim satisfaction with poverty.

The preacher uses texts from Genesis and Deuteronomy in the first quotation to reinforce the idea that in such times they can trust that the Lord will never forsake them.

The second quotation, in v6, is, surprisingly for the preacher, a direct quote from the Septuagint version of our Psalm 118 (Psalm 117 in LXX):

**The Lord is my helper; and I will not fear what man shall do to me.**

Again, these are people who had experienced and *will* experience more persecution in the future. They needed the reminder that they need not fear anything from mere man.

Let’s close with the most eloquent rendering of this same concept by the apostle Paul in Romans.

### **Read Romans 8:31-39.**

## SESSION 51. HEBREWS 13:7-14

### PREFACE

Every Friday on the Fox News *Special Report with Bret Baier* they have the “Lightning Round,” during which the host expects (but doesn’t always get) short answers to a collection of quick questions from the roundtable participants.

We are now in the “lightning round” of the letter/sermon called Hebrews. As he closes out his sermon, the preacher delivers his conclusion, followed by a series of brief exhortations, seemingly unrelated to each other, but all having to do with the general health of the local church and its individual members. Some are new thoughts, but some hearken back to topics he addressed earlier in-depth.

Some commentators, like William Lane, try to over-organize Chapter 13, linking everything together into a common thread. But these efforts seem strained, forced. Let’s just take each statement for what it says.

### v7

An important part of church-life is the role of the leader or leaders—and the witness of their lives to the rest of the body.

### Read v7.

The tense of this verse is a little slippery, with the various translations referring to

- those who led you in the past, and are now, perhaps, deceased (NASB);
- those leaders still with you, but have taught you for a while (KJVS, NIV);
- or both (ESV).

The reason for thinking this may refer to leaders who have died is that the word translated “result” in the NASB *can* refer to that.

**result**<sup>NASB</sup>, **outcome**<sup>NKJV, NIV, ESV</sup>, **end**<sup>KJV</sup> = *ekbasis* (ek'-bah-sis) = from a compound of <G1537> (ek) and the base of <G939> (basis) (meaning **to go out**); **an exit** (literal or figurative) :- **end**, way to escape.

Several clues point to this being the reference. **First**, look at v17.

### Read Hebrews 13:17.

This clearly refers to their present church leaders, and would be a little redundant if v7 also referred to their present leaders.

**Second**, even though the translations do not agree on the beginning tense for v7—“those who led,” “have the rule”—they *do* agree on the second: their teaching (speaking) took place in the past.

**Third**, the whole tone of this seems to speak of a concluded life—or at least a concluded ministry. That is, after all what *ekbasis* means.

I have often said that I cannot quote from any of the sermons from any of the many pastors I have known for the last 62 years. But I remember their *lives*. The most enduring work a pastor or elder does is not in the finely crafted words of his sermon or class lesson, but in the testimony of his *life*—how he conducts himself in the leading of his family and the church family, his compassion, his faithfulness to the Lord. We are to—

**consider, considering** = *anatheoreo* = from <G303> (ana) and <G2334> (theoreo); **to look again (i.e. attentively)** at (literal or figurative) :- behold, consider.

—their lives, from beginning to end, and, if they have modeled Christ, we are to—

**imitate, follow** = *mimēomai* (mim-eh'-oh-my) = middle from mimos (a “mimic”); **to imitate** :- follow.

—imitate *them*? No; imitate their *faith*.

## v8-9A

### Read v8.

Why does he say this here? At first reading it seems to poke out like an island unto itself. But perhaps not.

- Perhaps the preacher, aware of his own human frailties, adds this in counterpoint to what he has just said about their church leaders. No matter how righteous, no matter how pious, every church leader is still just flesh and blood. He will have his high moments; he will have his low moments. (Thus parishioners must use discretion in the form our “imitation” takes, making sure it is their *faith*, we imitate.) But Christ *always* remains the same.
- Perhaps he states this to set up what follows—

### Read v9a.

—that when tempted to choose “varied and strange teachings” we are to instead choose the unvarying Christ.

- Perhaps he meant to tie together all three verses—as does John MacArthur:

Just as those who led us who spoke the word of God [v7], and just as Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today [v8], so we should be in our doctrine and practices. We are not to be carried away by varied and strange teachings [v9].

MacArthur’s interpretation isn’t bad; when we remain grounded in Christ—His Spirit, His example—and in the testimony and witness of righteous men who have taught us from God’s word, we will not be carried away by the world’s (and sometimes the church’s) fanciful teachings. Our faith will remain in the truth.

## v9-14

On the other hand, another way—and, I believe, the *best* way—to see v8 into v9 and through to v14 is as the punch line to the entire book. It kind of sneaks up on you, but this, I believe, is the preacher’s resounding conclusion, the summation, to his entire sermon. If he were there in person, this is where he would lean over the pulpit and look them square in the eye to drive home that which we wanted them never to forget.

The overarching point of the preacher’s entire sermon has been to drive home the superiority of Christ over the old faith of Judaism. And this paragraph is how he wraps it up.

[ **Illustration for vs9:** the perhaps common experience of aging, that that which is important gets whittled down to the essentials. When we are younger trivialities are important: fashion, the current fads, popular personalities and “stars,” fancy and “correct” food, faddish philosophies... But as we get older, these trivialities are seen more clearly for what they are: trivial. We lose interest in the fads of this world and begin to concentrate more on the important essentials—and among them, faith. ]

That illustration will help focus our thoughts as we dig deeper into the specifics of the passage.

## v9

### Read v9.

*Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods...*

It is good [better] for the whole of your inner, spiritual life to be—

**strengthened**<sup>NASB, NIV, ESV</sup>, **established**<sup>KJV</sup> = *bebaioo* (beb-ah-yah'-oh) = from <G949> (bebaios); **to stabilize** (figurative) :- confirm, (e-) **stabilish**.

—grounded securely by and in grace—that is, the entire economy of Christ’s atonement for our sins and for our salvation. The old covenant was all about regulation, rules, practices, ceremony and ritual; what not to eat, what to eat and when to eat it. But Christ is all about grace.

**Read Hebrews 2:9, 17.**

**Read Titus 3:5-6.**

*...not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.*

**Read Hebrews 10:3-4, 11.**

These rituals were just placeholders until the real thing came along in the fullness of time.

### **vs10-11: LITERAL**

MacArthur states that vs10-14 are the most difficult in the whole book of Hebrews. And it is true that you will find almost as many different interpretations as there are interpreters. [\[the book of Hebrews is unrelenting: just when you get to the final chapter, and you think you can just cruise on out, it still makes you work for it\]](#)

The imagery of vs10-14 is indeed challenging. Just when you think you know what he is talking about in one spot, you realize that it doesn't hold up in light of another spot. So the commentators are all over the map on how to interpret this passage—and we won't take the time to itemize them all.

Let's begin by just examining the words and *literal* imagery of the passage. We must understand that before we can extend the literal into metaphor.

**Read vs10-11.**

*For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp.*

The literal imagery here seems to be of the tabernacle sacrifices on the annual Day of Atonement, which the preacher addressed earlier.

**Read Hebrews 9:6-7.**

By law, the meat from the normal daily sacrifices in the tabernacle and temple would be consumed by the Levitical priests and their families; this was their portion, part of their salaries, so to speak. But not so on the Day of Atonement.

**Read Leviticus 16:27.**

### **v12: LITERAL**

**Read v12.**

In the time of Christ, Golgotha, where He was crucified, was located outside the north city wall of Jerusalem. There Jesus suffered, there He died and shed His blood for the once and final atonement of all sin for those who would believe in Him.

### **vs9-12: USE**

The challenge of this passage is evident right off: In vs10-12 he refers to what is left after the formal atonement sacrifice—the leftovers—being taken outside the camp to be burned up. He associates this with Jesus with the "Therefore," but the comparison is skewed, because what Jesus suffered outside the city gate was the *actual* atonement—the literal shedding of the sacrificial blood (His life) for the atoning of sins, not the burning up of what remained.

Thomas Hewitt reminds us that the altar is not the sacrifice, but that on which the sacrifice is killed.

For Christians the altar is the cross, and we remember how Christ died upon it every time we participate in the ordinance of Communion. Because of the preacher's mention of those who "have no right to eat" in v10, it is convenient to extend the Christian altar of the cross to the *remembrance* of that sacrifice in Communion. And those who remain under the Old Covenant, having rejected the New Covenant in Christ, are not allowed to participate. It is only for those who have placed their trust in Christ Jesus.

But I believe this to be a diversion from the true point. Our challenge here is to determine, *Just what is the preacher saying? What is the point of the passage?* Go back to v9.

Let me suggest a way to read this verse. Here's the context; here is how we approach it:

- The preacher is wrapping up his message.
- In the final moments he is doing two things, taking care of last-minute details *and driving home, once again, his primary point.*
- Which is: the superiority of Christ (New Covenant) over the Law (Old Covenant).
- Another way to express this is "faith" and "grace" over "ritual" and "works".
- In v7 he tells us to imitate the good faith of our leaders.
- In v8 he tells us that we can find no better foundation for that faith than in the unchanging Christ Jesus.
- In the first part of v9 he tells us not to be sidetracked by strange teachings—that is, those that would attempt to pull us away from the true faith.
- Why? "For...

**it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, (not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited...).**

As I brought out earlier, *His point is grace!* not eating. And this steers us in the right direction as we proceed through the rest of the passage. I would suggest that the parentheses—admittedly, my own device—are not closed until the end of v12. That is, the preacher launches into vs10-12 mainly because he mentions foods—hence, sacrifices—at the end of v9.

I don't mean at all that vs10-12 are insignificant—only that we should not let them pull us away from his main point: the supremacy of faith in Christ's grace over the works and regulations of the Law. Considered in this way, we can now make short work of digging into the verses to glean the meaning—hence the application—of what the preacher is saying.

## **v10**

### **Read v10.**

If you are not prepared to leave the tabernacle—that is, if you are not prepared to leave the Old Covenant Law of repeated bloody sacrifices, repeated atonements, none of which had the power to save (v9: "through which those who were so occupied *were not benefited.*")—then you have no part in the altar upon which Christ died. Your faith is not based on the once and final cross, but on the repeated, year after year, killing of animals.

## **v11**

### **Read v11.**

Different from the rest of the year, on the important Day of Atonement the priests did not eat the meat left after the sacrifice. Even so they did enjoy the "benefit" of having their sins, in that moment, atoned for.

## **v12**

### **Read v12.**

Life in Christ includes no ceremonial, covenantal eating of meat.

*Hewitt:* Although [the Jewish priests] were partakers of the benefits of the offerings sacrificed upon the Jewish altar, they did not literally partake of [\[on this occasion\]](#) the flesh of these sacrificial victims. So also Christians, though partakers of the benefits of Christ's work on the cross, cannot literally partake of Christ's body.

## **vs12-13**

### **Read vs12-13.**

Jesus voluntarily went to the cross:

**"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." (John 10:17-18)**

The cross was located outside the city gate. In this we see the symbolism of *His* sacrifice taking place outside the environs of the Jewish Law, the Jewish religious system. He voluntarily shed His blood by means of a hideous, shameful form of execution. And the preacher invites us (but primarily his immediate Jewish listeners along with himself) to leave the tabernacle, leave the temple, leave even the *city* that represents the Old Covenant and associate ourselves with Christ's cross of grace.

#### **v14**

And why not—it is not *our* city.

#### **Read v14.**

The old Jerusalem will one day be replaced by the *new* Jerusalem. *That* will be our city—the lasting city, the glorious city illumined by "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

**I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb. (Revelation 21:22-23)**



## SESSION 52. HEBREWS 13:15-25

Whether it is cause for celebration or welcome relief, we now enter the concluding passage of the sermon we call Hebrews.

### vs15-19

What do our sacrifices look like? We no longer slaughter animals and pour their blood on an altar, so how *do* we sacrifice to our God? The writer suggests that we sacrifice **verbally, generously, and obediently**.

#### **Verbally, openly**

##### **Read v15.**

*let us continually offer up...*

The verb tense means that we are to do this constantly, repeatedly, customarily—this it is to become a habit in our life.

The believer does not just show up to make a sacrifice on ordained days of the calendar year. We “sacrifice”—here, verbally—as a seamless way of life.

#### **Sidebar:**

*a sacrifice of praise to God,*

I must confess that even though it is biblical, I am personally uncomfortable using the word “sacrifice” when referring to anything we do. To me the word “sacrifice” means that it should cost me something; if it is easy, pleasant, and without cost, I have a hard time calling it a “sacrifice.” I think of King David when he wanted to purchase the threshing floor from Araunah the Jebusite, Araunah wanted to just give it to the king free of charge, but David said,

**“No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.”**  
(2 Samuel 24:24)

So when I worship or praise God, when I offer my tithe and my offerings—those, to me, are not “sacrifices,” but joyful devotion of my God and Savior.

*...that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks [confess] to His name.*

The original, secular Greek use of *homologeō*, translated “give thanks” and “confess”<sup>NIV</sup> was “confession”—*homo* = same, *legō* = say, *logo* = word: **to say the same, i.e., agree**. As the use of the word evolved through the OT and NT, it came to mean “praise” or “thanksgiving” as well; it is mostly used for the former in the NT:

**By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses** that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;  
(1 John 4:2)

In the Septuagint *homologeō* often translates the Hebrew *yadah*, which means “praise,” as in

**Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name;  
Make known His deeds among the peoples.** (1 Chronicles 16:8)

The OT *yadah* means **both to praise, to give glory and to confess an offense**, and the ancients would have seen these as two sides of the same coin. At first this may seem strange, but when we back up and think of confession, praise, and thanksgiving in a broader sense, don’t they all have in common an agreement that he is Lord and we are not? Because He is Lord, He is due our worship and praise; because we are not, we are fleshly beings that must agree with Him that we are in need of confession.

So this word *homologeō* is a useful combination of both. And, of course, “His name” stands for everything God is.

## Generously, graciously

Along with those things that pass our lips, our sacrifice of praise should also include those things we do for each other—demonstrations of true *koinonia* [in this text, translated “share”] within the body.

### Read v16.

The apostle Paul explicitly calls this a sacrifice in his letter to the Philippians.

#### Read Philippians 4:18-20.

He describes their generous offering to him in terms of the tabernacle sacrifice—an acceptable, fragrant sacrifice in which the Lord God is well-pleased. The Lord is pleased when we do good for each other, when we share with each other out of our abundance. God takes pleasure in this.

## Obediently, happily

Finally, our sacrifice includes our submission to the leaders the Lord has set in place over the flock. Last week we looked at v7, which encouraged us to remember and learn from—indeed, imitate—the faith of church leaders who are no longer with us—or at least no longer in a role of authority over us. Now, in v17, the preacher exhorts his listeners to obey and submit to the leaders over them right now.

### Read v17.

*they keep watch over your souls...*

This is a beautiful picture; the elders and leaders of the church

**keep watch** = *agrypneo* = ultimately from <G1> (a) (as negative particle) and <G5258> (hupnos); **to be sleepless, i.e. keep awake** :- watch.

“Keep watch **over**” is a mildly unfortunate rendering. The word “over” makes it sound like supervisory ruling, like a shop foreman staring over the shoulder of one of his workers to make sure he is doing his job correctly. That really isn’t the picture. The KJV comes closer: *they watch for your souls*. Even better would be, “they keep watch for your souls.” Here is the picture of the church leaders keeping the flock in their prayers, regularly keeping the spiritual and physical condition of their charges before the throne of God.

When we remember this, we happily submit to their leadership so as not to cause them

**grief** = *stenazo* = from <G4728> (stenos); to make (intransitive be) in straits, i.e. (by implication) **to sigh**, murmur, pray inaudibly :- with grief, **groan**, grudge, sigh.

This orderly, healthy relationship redounds to *our* profit. The members of the body benefit—spiritually, socially, personally—from their respectful, God-honoring sacrifice of submission. And this is the way it always works: we spend our sacrifices of praise to our God, but our coffers are never emptied; He always returns blessings upon us ten-fold.

I read vs18-19 as flowing out of v17. As one of the leaders of this church, the preacher asks, personally, for their prayers of support.

### Read vs18-19.

Since they are doing it for *us*, there is no better way to show honor and submission to our leaders than to “continually offer” prayers for *them* before the throne. The pastor, elders, and deacons of a church are burdened with the “souls” of the flock, and no matter how earnest and sincere their efforts, they are still of flesh. They are but men—sanctified, called, ordained, but still only men. They face the same trials, temptations and doubts as those in their charge, and they require—yes, *require*—prayers upholding them.

### Sidebar:

I commend this action to you even when you harbor some ill feelings toward a church leader (or, for that matter, *any* brother or sister in the Lord). Especially then. I have learned over the years that the most effective way to realign my heart toward someone is to *pray for them*. It is remarkable what a change this can make.

Similar to the word “continually offer” in v15, the tense of the verb translated “Pray” means that we are to make this an habitual lifestyle. In fact, this is with an exclamation mark: We are to commit to doing this long term, keep repeating it. It is as if the preacher *shouts* this word—it is that important to him.

The preacher states that,

*we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.*

Perhaps this had been an issue in the past; perhaps there had been some grumbling about him, so he felt it necessary to make this statement publicly. But I prefer to think of this as the result of his self-examination—something every church leader should do on a regular basis.

Think of the preacher sitting there, writing out this sermon which would later be verbally delivered to the congregation. He is drawing it to a close, and he pleads for their prayers on his behalf. Earlier he had written “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls...” Now he pens the words, “Pray for us,” but then he pauses and sets down his stylus. I can imagine him leaning back, gazing out the window, wondering, “Have I been faithful to these people? Have I been watching over their souls? Have I been a person of integrity? Have I faithfully modeled Christ to all around me?” After this moment of introspection, he concludes (continuing in the editorial, or epistolary, plural) that, yes, “we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.”

This is not legalism; this is integrity. Those in roles of leadership, especially, are to keep short accounts on their life of faith, and be committed to a life of “good conscience.” This is reflected in the word translated “desiring,” which is rather weak.

**desiring** = *thelo* = or *ethelo*, eth-el’-o; in certain tenses *theleo*, thel-eh’-o; and *etheleo*, eth-el-eh’-o, which are otherwise obsolete; apparently strengthened from the alternate form of <G138> (*haireomai*); **to determine (as an active option from subjective impulse)**; whereas <G1014> (*boulomai*) properly denotes rather a passive acquiescence in objective considerations), i.e., choose or prefer (literal or figurative); by implication to wish, i.e. be inclined to (sometimes adverbially gladly); impersonally for the future tense, to be about to; by Hebrew to delight in :- desire, be disposed (forward), **intend**, list, love, mean, please, have rather, (be) will (have, -ling, -ling [ly]).

He is not saying, “I’d like to be honorable,” but “I am *determined* to be honorable.” Big difference.

*And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.*

Although we don’t know enough about his situation to say for sure, the language of v19 suggests that for one reason or another—sickness, imprisonment?—the preacher was physically unable to travel. He wanted the listeners of this sermon to pray that this obstacle would be overcome, so he would be “restored” to them.

### vs20-21

And then, though not his *last* word, the preacher adds a benediction [good word] which ends with a brief doxology [word of praise to God].

Our anonymous pastor has presented the Christian life as a great pilgrimage made possible by the blood of Christ. He has spent much time comparing the old covenant of daily and annual sacrifices of beasts to the new covenant in which Christ Jesus is the once and final sacrifice. In just the few verses leading into this final passage he has exhorted his congregation

- to praise God with the fruit of their lips
- to do good, and share with each other
- to be obedient to their leaders
- to pray for their absent pastor

These and more are all part of a life of faith: Faith is what motivates us; faith is what sustains us. And the sermon closes with a true *pastoral* benediction, one that *any* pastor who cares deeply for the well-being of the flock entrusted to him could speak.

### Read vs20-21.

It is sometimes challenging to find the verb in a benediction, as it is often well-insulated by descriptive, modifying phrases and clauses. What is he saying? What is the nucleus, the purpose of this benediction? We don't get to it until the beginning of the second verse.

*[may] God...equip you...*

What is it that makes a life of faith different from any other kind of life? It is one in which God, through Jesus Christ, is not just the driving, supplying force, but He and His pleasure, are the ultimate goal. It is a life in which God is *Lord*—in every possible sense of that word. And all of this is laid out in this benediction.

Our pilgrimage requires us to be equipped, completed—not by and in ourselves, but from above. God, through Christ, *must* be the one doing it.

**equip**<sup>NASB,NIV</sup>, **make you complete**<sup>NKJV</sup>, **make you perfect**<sup>NKJV</sup> = *katartizo* = from <G2596> (*kata*) and a derivative of <G739> (*artios*); **to complete thoroughly, i.e. repair** (literal or figurative) **or adjust** :- fit, frame, mend, (make) perfect (-ly join together), prepare, restore.

*Now the God of peace...*

Our God is a God of peace—because of that once and final sacrifice of His Son. That peace did not exist (and especially for Gentiles) before the blood of Christ was shed.

*who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep...*

Here, for the first time, the writer explicitly refers to Christ's resurrection. And he calls him not just a shepherd, but the *great* shepherd who leads us with His rod and staff.

*through the blood of the eternal covenant,*

This is what makes it all possible. Had not the Christ been nailed to that cross, had He not been raised from the dead, He could not be our great shepherd. This is the "new covenant in [His] blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25)—here called "eternal," because this was not conceived in Bethlehem, but before time itself.

*even Jesus our Lord,*

Who are we talking about here? "...even Jesus our Lord."

*equip you in every good thing to do His will,*

And here's the punch line: God the Father, through the blood shed by God the Son, does two things:

- He "perfects" or "completes" us—that is, only in the blood of this eternal covenant are we sanctified;
- He "equips" or "repairs" us—that is, God changes us into a new creature (a spirit creature) then supplies the raw materials, the gifts, the talents and skills we will need to do His will.

*working in us that which is pleasing in His sight,*

Romans 8:8 tells us that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God"; only those "in the Spirit". If we are at all pleasing to God, it is only because of His "working in us"...

*through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

It all gets back to Christ Jesus. He is the navel of our existence. And, appropriately, since this entire sermon has been a praise hymn to Jesus Christ, the preacher ends his benediction with a doxology:

*I have just preached to you Jesus the Christ, and all glory is due Him.*

## vs22-25

And in the best tradition of writers the world over, our preacher now claims that his lengthy treatise has been but a snippet of what he *could* have sent them.

### Read v22.

**bear with, suffer**<sup>KJV</sup> = *anecho* (ahn-ech'-oh-mai) = middle from <G303> (ana) and <G2192> (echo); **to hold oneself up against**, i.e. (figurative) **put up with** :- bear with, **endure**, forbear, suffer.

Then he informs them that Timothy—no doubt Paul's companion—is now free—no doubt from prison—and thus may accompany the writer when (and if) he is able to visit them.

### Read vs23-25.

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## BIOGRAPHY

We are David and Linda Lampel, and we live in a large country house in the rural area outside Winterset, Iowa, in the middle of the United States. Our home is surrounded by fields of corn and soybeans, and by dense woods that are home to deer, raccoons, possums, wild turkeys, woodchucks, coyotes, and myriad birds of all shapes and colors. The tranquility and beauty of this place contribute to what we do. In fact, we believe that the Lord brought us to this home because He knew that here we would best be equipped to serve Him and others.

Both of us work at home—Dave with his writing, and Linda (now retired) with her baking, needlework, and crocheting projects that are given to charities. Now that she has been unshackled from the business world, Linda has expanded our gardens, and has returned to baking all our bread—and spending more time with our family of seven cats.

The Lord has given us a good life, and we are most grateful to Him—especially for our 43 years together as husband and wife.

