

## HEBREWS OVERVIEW

### I. Purpose, Theme, and Authorship of Hebrews

- A. Purpose – To encourage Jewish Christians to be faithful in view of the impending destruction of the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70 and to encourage Christians throughout history to remain faithful by looking into the eternal realm.
- B. Theme – Superiority of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant over the ministers and covenant given at Sinai.
- C. Authorship – God is the author, but the writer is unknown. Although the original King James Version entitled the book, “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews,” Hebrews 2:3 indicates that someone other than an apostle wrote the book.

### II. Divisions of the book of Hebrews

Chapter 1 – 1) Introduction, 2) The Superiority of Christ over the Angels

Chapter 2 – 1) Exhortation to Listen, 2) Humanity of Christ on Earth

Chapter 3 – 1) Superiority of Jesus over Moses, 2) Exhortation to Faithful Finish

Chapter 4 – 1) Sabbath Rest, 2) Encouragement from God’s Word and Our High Priest

Chapter 5 – 1) Christ’s Glorification as High Priest (Superiority over Aaron), 2) Rebuke for Lack of Maturity.

Chapter 6 – 1) Danger of Falling Away, 2) God’s Unchangeable Purpose

Chapter 7 – 1) Melchizedek, 2) Superiority of Melchizedek Priesthood 3) The Perfect Son as High Priest

Chapter 8 – 1) Superior Ministry, 2) Superior Covenant

Chapter 9 – 1) Old Testament Tabernacle, 2) Superior Tabernacle, 3) Mediator of New Covenant, 4) The Consummate Offering

Chapter 10 – 1) Perfect Sacrifice, 2) Exhortation to Enter, 3) Judgment for Insulters, 4) Reward of Confidence

Chapter 11 – 1) God’s Record of the Old Testament Faithful, 2) Superiority of Christians over O.T. Greats

Chapter 12 – 1) Exhortation to Fix Eyes on Jesus, 2) Discipline of Sons, 3) The Danger of Falling Away, 4) The Real Mount Zion, 5) The Eternal Kingdom

Chapter 13 – 1) Heavenly Practices, 2) Greetings

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 1:1-4**

(Introduction)

The writer of Hebrews doesn't give the typical salutation of most letters in the New Testament. Like I John, he gets right to the point of emphasis upon the ultimate revelation of God. The writer of Hebrews is a wonderful communicator – within the first 4 verses he tells his audience in rapid-fire fashion the main points that he will spend the rest of the book expounding upon. Be prepared to have the Old Testament shadows brought to light as there are approximately 30 direct quotations in the 13 chapters of Hebrews. Truly we find again that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

**1:1 – “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,”** – The writer of Hebrews begins his letter thundering the name of the Eternal One who has spoken. Modern man, who has bought the lie of uniformity of natural causes in a closed system (evolutionary philosophy), cannot logically fathom an Eternal God who has chosen to reveal Himself to man. But when we recognize that the world is a limited system open to reordering by God and even by man, we find it perfectly logical that the One who made man in His own image, has chosen to speak to him. A defining difference between man and the rest of the animal kingdom is man's ability to verbally communicate, in other words, to communicate with language, whether spoken or written. Genesis records that God made man in His image, and the capacity for meaningful conversation is undoubtedly a characteristic reserved for spiritual beings. If our Creator has made us with the ability to communicate, it is perfectly logical to expect that He would communicate with us on the basis of propositional revelation. To quote Francis Schaeffer about God, “He is there and He is not silent.” In the past, God, who is the source as well as the subject of revelation, spoke to the fathers or the patriarchs by means of the prophets. In the dispensations preceding the covenant at Sinai, God spoke directly to many of the patriarchs. Consider God speaking to Adam in the Garden of Eden, prophesying through Enoch (Jude verse 14), warning the people through Noah, coming in person as “the angel of the LORD” to Abraham, and speaking through dreams to Jacob and Joseph. God certainly spoke in many portions and in many ways. Following the rescue of the Israelites from Egypt, God's messages to the prophets from Moses to Malachi were recorded in detail in written form. Some of the prophets heard the voice of God directly as Moses did, some in visions as Isaiah or Daniel had opportunity to, and some through inspired writing such as the psalms of David or the proverbs of Solomon. Again we find that God's message was given in many portions and in many ways. That the words spoken long ago are the literal words of God is plainly stated in 2 Peter 1:20-21.

**1:2 – “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.”** – The progressive revelation given by God through the prophets was intended to focus the eyes of mankind on the appearance of the ultimate Prophet, Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:10-12 clearly indicates that the purpose of the messages of old was to point everyone to the coming Christ. There is a similarity between the revelation of old and the final message through the Son in that they both are

communication from God. However, there is also a major contrast because the word spoken of old was incomplete, while that spoken through the Son is God's revelation in fullness. Jesus, whose name is the Word of God, gets to have the final word. The phrase "in these last days" is important because it teaches that ever since the first coming of Christ, we are in the final dispensation. Since the message of Christ has been recorded by the chosen apostles and New Testament prophets, there is no longer a need for "ongoing revelation." We find that the final revelation through Christ is a continuation, rather, a fulfillment of the revelation given to the fathers. The Holy Spirit now begins to give reason why Jesus, the Son, has the right of the final word. First, God appointed his Son heir of all things. Everything that the Father has, including the authority to speak, has been given to the Son. While the Son has always been the heir, there had to be some visible manifestations for the recognizance of man. The entrance of Jesus into the world through the virgin birth was the first step in helping us understand His eternal Sonship. The next step was the immersion of Jesus by John in the Jordan River. Upon coming up from the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Christ in the form of a dove, and a voice came from Heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." Again, the purpose of this event was not for Jesus' benefit, but "that He might be manifested to Israel." The transfiguration was another important happening wherein the voice out of the cloud declared that Jesus was the beloved Son. But the definitive declaration to all people everywhere that Jesus is the Son and heir of all things was His resurrection from the dead – see Romans 1:4. Following Jesus' resurrection, He told His followers in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Since He is heir of all that the Father has, He is the final spokesperson. Another reason why Christ has authority to speak is the fact that the world was created by Him. The Holy Spirit unabashedly gives credit for the creation of the world to Jesus Christ through the apostle Paul in Colossians 1:16, through the apostle John in John 1:3, and through the writer of Hebrews in this verse. The book of Genesis gives us a clue about the creation when it informs us that God *spoke* this world into existence. Since Jesus is the Word of God, we know that the creation came through Him. Certainly the One who by the first words could bring out of nothing the whole cosmos into existence should have the right to have the last word.

**1:3 – “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,”** – Christ is not simply the Son of God in the sense that we understand sonship in the physical realm. Even when we say that a boy is the “spittin’ image” of his dad, there still is a difference. Although the boy may look like dad, think like dad, talk like dad, and act like dad, he isn't exactly the same as dad. There is no doubt that Jesus in glory is the “spittin’ image” (**ei]kwn**) of God – see 2 Corinthians 4:4. However, even we as adopted sons get to be transformed into the image of God – see 2 Cor. 3:18, Col. 3:10, 1 Cor. 15:49. As Christians, we can look like Dad, think like Dad, talk like Dad, and act like Dad, but we won't ever be Dad. Christ is someone more; He is the radiance of the Father's glory. While Christians get to receive and reflect the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18), Jesus the Son *is* the light of the Father – see John 1:9, 1 Tim. 6:16, John 12:46, John 14:9, John 1:18. He is the exact representation (**xarakth**) of the Father's nature. This means that

Christ is the impress or stamp or precise reproduction in every respect of the Father. He is the perfect facsimile or copy – you can't tell the difference between the original and the copy. Hence, if you have seen Christ, you have seen the Father. It is important to note that it is the resurrected, glorified Christ who is the exact impress of the Father. Paul points out in Acts 26:23 that, "by reason of His [Christ's] resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." The glorified Christ is one and the same as the Father – Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 44:6, John 10:30. In addition to being the Creator, Christ also is the One who keeps this world in existence by His powerful word. While scientists have theories about atoms, quarks, and smaller "God-particles," no one can determine what keeps things together. The Scripture has informed us – it is the word of Christ. (On a little sidenote – thinking about the power released by the splitting of atoms in an atomic bomb, can you imagine how the earth will melt with intense heat when Christ gives the word for everything to explode?) The next point about the Son is that He made purification for sins. Many may begin their study of the book of Hebrews under the impression that this purification for sins was completed at Golgotha, but with careful study of this book, it is impossible to hold this view by the end. The Holy Spirit has already in the first few verses carefully chosen words to lift our eyes to the risen, glorified Christ and will continue to emphasize His work in the heavenly realm. The purpose of the Old Testament Day of Atonement was to prepare the minds of mankind for the true purification of sins by Christ. Leviticus 16:30 speaks of the Day of Atonement in this manner, "for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD." On this day, there were two essential elements for the cleansing of sin: 1) an animal sacrifice, and 2) the offering of the blood by the High Priest on the propitiatory or mercy seat. In one brief statement, the writer here gives an introduction of the sacrifice, priesthood, and offering of Christ. There also is an order to the work of Christ that is presented by the writer of Hebrews. Christ took care of sin before He took His seat on the throne. Kevin Simpson likes to remind us that we (souls of Christians) were first on His mind even in the heavens. After dealing with the issue of sin, Christ took His proper place of honor at the right hand of God. Throughout Scripture, the right hand is the power position; hence, Jesus is the "Executive Branch" (see Zechariah 6:11-13) of the eternal Kingdom. As King, Jesus has authority to rule His kingdom, the Church, and to execute the eternal plan of the Father.

**1:4 – "having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they."** – In preparation for the first point of the letter of Hebrews, the writer points out that Jesus is much better than the angels, for He has a greater name. Angels are created beings who are portrayed in the Scripture as those closest to the throne. Angels are God's messengers who relay His revelation and help give service to those who will be redeemed. However, the first three verses of Hebrews have already portrayed Jesus as: 1) the Son, 2) the Prophet, 3) the Creator, 4) the Heir, 5) the Exact Representation of God, 6) the Upholder of all things, 7) the Sacrifice, 8) the Priest, and 9) the King. Certainly the angels are none of these things. Most who claim to believe in Jesus never get a true understanding of who He is. Some want to make Jesus just a man, while others call Him "a prophet," and still others relegate Him to second place underneath the name of "Jehovah." The reality is that the glorified Christ has been given

a name greater than any other name – see Acts 4:8-12, Philippians 2:9-11. Jesus is not just an angel, but is far greater than any archangel.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 1:5-14**

(The Superiority of Christ over the Angels)

**1:5 – “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’?”** – The writer of Hebrews continues to paint for us a true picture of Jesus so that we will understand the urgency of listening to Him who speaks the final word from heaven. In verse 4, the initial point was made that Jesus is greater than the angels because He has a greater name. This point is now logically proven to us through the quotation and explanation of Old Testament Scripture. The first Old Testament is a quotation from Psalm 2:7. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm is a prophetic psalm from David (it is ascribed to him by the first century church in Acts 4:25) that clearly speaks of the Christ. Psalm 2:2 speaks of the LORD’s Anointed (Messiah) and verse 6 mentions the King who has been installed upon Zion. As mentioned previously, Jesus is the eternal Son, but for the purposes of revelation to mankind, Jesus’ exaltation as the Son had to be manifested to the world. Psalm 2 is unmistakable in making the statement that Jesus was begotten at the time of His ascension. While generally not trusting paraphrased versions of the Bible (what counts is the literal word of God), The Living Bible paraphrases verse 7 in this way, “You are my Son, this is your coronation day. Today I am giving you your glory.” The inspired writers of the New Testament attribute the fulfillment of this verse to Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. The 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts relates the account of Paul’s message to the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch wherein Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 as being realized in the permanent resurrection of Jesus from the dead – Acts 13:32-35. Hebrews chapter 5 also quotes Psalm 2:7 as being fulfilled in the ascension of Jesus to His heavenly throne – Hebrews 5:5-10. The point being driven home is that Jesus was declared to be God’s Son through the resurrection from the dead. Although angels have been called sons of God (see Job 1:6 for an example), they have never been raised from the dead nor taken their seat on the throne of God. Thus, no angel has ever received the title of the “only begotten” Son of God. In line with the quotation from Psalm 2, the writer of Hebrews also brings into view verse 14 of 2 Samuel 7. The immediate context of 2 Samuel 7 pertains to David’s desire to build a house for God’s dwelling place. The general answer from God is that God doesn’t need a house to be built for Him, but that He will build a house (kingdom) for David. In the words of Kevin Simpson, “mi casa su casa” – or, in English, “My house is your house.” The Lord goes on to say that a descendant of David will build a house for God’s name, and that God will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. We understand that there was an initial fulfillment of the prophecy in David’s son Solomon. Truly Solomon built a physical temple for the Lord, and God established the kingdom of Israel in the hands of Solomon. However, we likewise recognize that the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy was in Jesus, a descendant of David according to the flesh. The Holy Spirit interprets this prophecy by the light of the New Testament and cites “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me” not in relationship to Solomon but in respect to His true Son, Jesus. Certainly Jesus realized that the true temple would be established in Him – see John 2:19-22. Again it is apparent that it was the resurrection of Christ from the dead that gave Him the authority as the Son and as the Ruler of the Kingdom. Angels have a part in the kingdom (they

accompany Christ at His return), but not one has ever been recognized by God or revealed to men as God's Son.

**1:6 – “And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him.’”** – The writer continues to establish the superiority of Christ over the angels by bringing forth the words of the prophets. First of all, let us determine what the Spirit means when He speaks of bringing the firstborn into the world. The Greek word here for world (**oi]koumenhn**) has to do with habitation (some will recognize the similarity to **oi]koj** – meaning an inhabited house) and means the inhabited world. This is not speaking of a physical creation of the Son, bringing Him into the world (**kosmoj**) or universe. The significance is bringing Him into the view of man, into the sight of the inhabitants of the earth. When we understand this, we can quickly determine that the meaning of firstborn here has to do with the rights of the firstborn son, which Jesus inherited through His resurrection. That is why both Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5 describe Him as the “firstborn from (or of) the dead.” The Holy Spirit again calls upon the book of Psalms and quotes chapter 97, verse 7. Upon reading Psalm 97:5-9, it is clear that the angels are commanded to worship Yahweh. In the book of Hebrews, the command is made to worship the glorified Son. There is only one possible conclusion – Jesus is Jehovah!

**1:7 – “And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.”** – Again the writer goes to the book of Psalms to establish Christ's pre-eminence over the angels. Whereas the Son is equal to the Father and has sovereignty over this world, the angels are subject to the Father as His servants. While Christ is upheld as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the angels are created beings on par with the physical creation of wind and fire. It is interesting to note that Psalm 104:4 has winds and fire as the direct objects and messengers (angels) and ministers as the objective complements, while the book of Hebrews reverses these parts of the sentence. The Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament) has the same sentence structure as the book of Hebrews (angels and ministers are direct objects) so is quoted by the writer because his point about angels is made clearer.

**1:8 – “But of the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.’”** – The Holy Spirit persists in upgrading our thinking so that we will see the living Christ who is the exact representation of the Father's nature. It is obvious that the final picture of Christ is not Jesus in the flesh, but rather, the Spirit who is on the throne – see 2 Corinthians 5:16. The Catholics leave Jesus on the cross; the Protestants portray Him standing next to the empty tomb, but true Christians, walking by faith, behold Him in glory. Again a Messianic Psalm – Psalm 45 – is introduced to communicate that the revelation of the glorified Christ was the point of God's plan from the beginning. Psalm 45 pictures the wedding of the King. This King is victorious in battle; He rules with justice and righteousness; His palace is filled with joy, and His bride is fitting of a queen. Verse 6 of Psalm 45 gives the King the title of God, which is consistent with the prophecy from Isaiah 9:6-7. Jesus on the throne is the Mighty God! The throne on which Jesus reigns is eternal; He is the eternal King, and He has an everlasting kingdom. His reign is

characterized by righteousness and that righteousness extends throughout His kingdom. This is a beautiful representation of Jesus whose righteousness was demonstrated through His perfect sacrifice and offering. Jesus has also extended the scepter of righteousness to us and has justified us (declared us to be righteous). The righteousness of Christ imputed to us changes our thoughts, words, and behavior with the result that the Church is governed by righteousness. What an awesome display of God's character to His people!

**1:9 – “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your companions.”** – Certainly no person who has sinned could completely fulfill this passage of Scripture. In like manner, the angels haven't experienced the temptations of walking as a human on this earth and so haven't had opportunity to prove their love of righteousness in the same fashion that Christ has. Of course Jesus, the eternal One, has always loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, but this was only revealed to mankind after His entrance into this world. Jesus loved righteousness and hated lawlessness to such an extent that He did something about it. He truly “appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” – see 1 John 3:8. Because of His perfect record in regard to temptation in conjunction with His willingness to sacrifice Himself, He has been anointed and placed above His companions. Scripturally speaking, Jesus was first anointed with the Spirit and with power when He was immersed by John in the Jordan River – see Acts 10:38, Luke 4:18, and John 1:32-34. However, He received the anointing of His coronation when He ascended into heaven – see Acts 2:33. Due to His proven love for righteousness, He has been exalted over all. Every single Christian has also been anointed with the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27), but only because of what Christ has done. We get to be Jesus' companions; we are His brethren, but He is higher than all.

**1:10-12 – “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.’ ”** – One more time, the writer of Hebrews goes to the Old Testament to confirm that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. In the introduction of Hebrews (the first few verses), Jesus was acknowledged as the Creator and Sustainer. While reiterating this point from Psalm 102, the Holy Spirit also communicates that Jesus is the eternal God. In case anybody received the wrong impression and falsely concluded that Jesus was a created being, Psalm 102 speaks of Yahweh (meaning “He is” or “I am”), and the Holy Spirit applies that title to Jesus. These verses establish that Jesus was there in the beginning (consistent with John 1:1), and the One who created the heavens and the earth. The message of Psalm 102:25-27 is the unchangeableness of God, a characteristic ascribed by Hebrews to the eternal Son. The physical creation is temporal (see 2 Corinthians 5:1-4); it was never intended to be the eternal dwelling place for God or man. Since the first sin was committed in the Garden of Eden, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Thermodynamics has reigned. Everything in this world is gradually wearing down – see Romans 8:20-21. The writer of Hebrews compares this to the aging of clothing; at some point our clothes are threadbare and must be thrown away. In like manner, this physical universe is winding down and its usefulness will be exhausted. Christ's existence



preceded this world and will outlast it. Even when the new heavens and new earth have superseded this physical realm, Jesus will still remain. Christ doesn't even age – He is the same forever – see Hebrews 13:8.

**1:13 – “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.’ ”** – The writer of Hebrews ends his discussion about the superiority of Christ over the angels with the same basic rhetorical question with which he started. This question centers on the prophetic words of the Old Testament concerning the Christ, and portrays that the angels were never spoken of in the same light. Never have the angels been given an invitation to take the position of highest rank within God's Kingdom. However, Christ, by reason of His resurrection and ascension (with the purification of sins and cleansing of heaven that accompanied this), has been given the place of honor as the King. Here the quotation is from Psalm 110, a passage recognized by all Jews as a prophecy of the Messiah – see Matthew 22:44, Acts 2:34-35. As a matter of fact, this verse of Psalms is referenced more times in the New Testament than any other Psalm – it is quoted in Matthew 22:44 (Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42-43), Acts 2:34-35, and Hebrews 1:13; it is also alluded to in Matthew 26:64 (Mark 14:62, Luke 22:69), Mark 16:19, Acts 7:56, Romans 8:34, 1 Corinthians 15:25, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12. While angels are servants who stand in God's presence ready to do His bidding, Jesus is given the honor to sit at God's right hand after accomplishing purification of sins. There is a tremendous picture here of Christ's enemies being made a footstool for Jesus' feet. The victorious king places his feet on the neck of a defeated foe to proclaim triumph over him – see Joshua 10:24, Romans 16:20. Jesus successfully accomplished His mission and receives the reward of the throne along with the privilege of placing His feet on the necks of His enemies.

**1:14 – “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”** – While Jesus has taken His position of honor and authority upon the throne, angels continue to be obedient servants. Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve God's people, present and future. Throughout history angels have many responsibilities including: 1) bringing forth the law, 2) delivering messages to individuals, 3) ministering to the needs of God's people, 4) and helping in the gathering of people for judgment at Christ's return. Although angels serve those who will inherit salvation, they don't bring salvation. Christ is the Savior and the Ruler who sends angels to serve Christians and future Christians. The Holy Spirit leaves no room for doubt; after seven Old Testament quotations concerning Jesus and the angels, it is clear that Jesus is far superior to the angels.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 2:1-4**

(Exhortation to Listen)

**2:1 – “For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.”** – The fact of the matter as established from chapter 1 is that the Son is the final means of God’s communication to man. He came in the flesh to begin to explain God to man at a level which man can understand. Much can be learned about the character of God through viewing Christ’s sojourn on earth as recounted in the gospels. But the letters in red, while superior to the message of all previous prophets, are not the final words of God. The full revelation of God to man doesn’t end with Jesus’ words to the apostles on the Mount of Olivet shortly before His ascension to glory. As was stressed in the first chapter, Christ’s message to mankind has its full impact as it is thundered from the throne. The glorified Christ is the Prophet through which God gives complete knowledge of His being. As Moses spoke in the book of Deuteronomy, “The LORD your God will *raise* up for you a prophet like me from among you ...” By virtue of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, He has the right to proclaim the full message of God – see John 1:18, Acts 26:23. Since the words of the risen, glorified Christ (the entire New Covenant) are the completion of God’s revelation to man, we must pay close attention to this message. Jesus on the throne has the highest rank in the universe; hence, His words must be heeded. If we hear His words with indifference, we will backslide. If we are simply casual hearers of His word, we delude ourselves and will face dire consequences – see James 1:22. Throughout Hebrews (along with the whole of Scripture), the Holy Spirit has lifted up our eyes so that we may see the One who is speaking to us. When we behold Christ in His glory, we follow the Scriptural admonition, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

**2:2-3a – “For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”** – Just as Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 establishes that the ministry of the Spirit far surpasses the ministry of death (the Law), the writer of Hebrews brings out the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Testament. There is no doubt that the ministry of condemnation came with glory, but that glory cannot even be compared with the glory which accompanies the ministry of righteousness. In the same way the word spoken through angels (the Law) cannot hold a candle to the word which came through the Son. The fact that the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai was administered by angels is not readily apparent in the Old Testament, but both Stephen (in Acts 7:53) and Paul (in Galatians 3:19) attest this point. Certainly the Law came with authority from God and couldn’t be changed; it proved unalterable. Every transgression and disobedience against the Law given by angels received a just recompense, whether it was the stoning of the man who gathered wood on the Sabbath (see Numbers 15:32-36) or the earth swallowing up the family of Korah due to his rebellion (see Numbers 16). Those who refused to treat God’s word in the Old Testament as holy, such as Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10), perished before the consuming fire of the Lord. If the punishment was sure for disobeying the words coming from the lower ranks, how much more will God exact judgment upon those who refuse to listen to His Son; the Prophet, Priest, and King of the heavenly realm. When the Source of salvation brings the message

personally, we must listen up. In the words of the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” God will not be mocked; those wretches who refuse to respect the Son will be brought to a wretched end. Let’s prove our respect by heeding the Prophet.

**2:3b – “After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,”** – The true message of salvation didn’t come through angels, but was brought by Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit recounts this fact in John 1:17, “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” As established earlier in the book of Hebrews, this gospel of salvation was first spoken through the Lord, not while in the flesh, but following His resurrection from the dead and ascension to the throne. Certainly the teachings of Christ while He was on earth pointed to the New Covenant which would take effect following His death, but the full message of salvation followed His exaltation as the Heavenly Prophet. When Jesus was on earth, His ministry was, for the most part, limited to the Jewish people – see Matthew 10:5-6, Matthew 15:24. Even the message which He preached to the Jews was unfulfilled until after His exaltation to Heaven – see John 7:38. The whole point of the book of Hebrews thus far is that the full gospel of salvation was thundered from the Son of God after He was declared such through His resurrection from the dead. This fact begs the question: “How has the glorified Christ spoken that He may be heard?” Jesus’ words from heaven are revealed to us through the apostles whom He has chosen. Jesus promised the apostles before He left that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to remembrance everything that He had said to them – see John 14:26. The book of Acts establishes that the original eleven apostles as well as Matthias had accompanied Jesus from the time of His immersion until the day of His ascension – see Acts 1:21-22. In addition to the apostles’ first-hand account of Jesus’ earthly ministry, they got to behold by revelation the exaltation of the Christ – see Acts 5:31-32. In the same manner, Paul got a glimpse of the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus, but received much more directly from Jesus Himself – see Acts 26:16. It is clear from the first two chapters of Galatians as well as from the book of 1 Corinthians 11:23 that the apostle Paul received everything from revelation that the rest of the apostles witnessed. This message was spoken from the Lord and was confirmed to everyone else by the apostles. (As a sidenote, this verse establishes that neither Paul nor any of the other apostles could have written the book of Hebrews. The writer places himself in the group who had the word of the Lord confirmed by the apostles.)

**2:4 – “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.”** – Now that the New Testament is completed, there is unquestionable proof that the Bible is the Word of God. The historical prophecies of the Old Testament, amazingly accurate in detail, prove that the Author of the Bible is the Author of history. The Messianic prophecies, written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, begin to build a bridge between the Old and New Testaments and prove that the entire Old Testament and the gospels are the inspired Word of God. But it is the completed New Testament that brings into the view of mankind the entire plan of God from the creation until the second coming of Christ. It is this transcendent design of God which binds the Old and New Testament into one

complete unit and establishes that the Bible which we today hold in our hands is the absolute and certain Word of God. However, when the letter of Hebrews was being penned, obviously the New Testament writings were not yet completed. In the absence of the “perfect” spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, there was a need for the “partial” – that is, the gifts of the Holy Spirit – to confirm that the word being spoken by the apostles and New Testament prophets was real. God testified with the apostles who received the word firsthand in order to confirm its truth to those who heard. God’s testimony came in the form of signs, wonders, miracles, and other gifts of the Holy Spirit (for a complete listing of the gifts of the Spirit, see 1 Corinthians 12:8-10). This verse of Hebrews is clear as to the purpose of the gifts and this purpose is corroborated in Acts 14:3. Many claim that the gifts of the Spirit are still manifested today, but a careful study of the Scriptures establishes that this cannot be. When both the immersion with the Spirit and the indwelling of the Spirit have been defined from the Scripture, Acts 8:14-19 in conjunction with Acts 6:6-8 and Acts 19:6 establish that the gifts were only given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Since there are no living apostles today, these gifts cannot be conferred upon anyone. This conclusion is backed up by 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, which avers that the gifts were partial and would be done away with once the completed New Testament was in place. The stated purpose of the gifts here in Hebrews shows that there is no further need for the gifts and thus substantiates the conclusion that the spiritual gifts are no longer present today.

### **HEBREWS CHAPTER 2:5-18** (Humanity of Christ on Earth)

**2:5 – “For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.”** – After inserting the practical exhortation for the need to listen to the words of the New Covenant, the writer comes back to develop his theme from chapter 1 – the superiority of Christ over the angels. Already having establishing the present, exalted position of the Son, the Holy Spirit now speaks of the power that Christ will have in the future. It is understood that Christ reigns supreme now in the heavenly realm and is

already King over the Kingdom of heaven, the Church. However, there is a day coming when the present heavens and earth will be destroyed with fire, and the new heavens and new earth will be in view. It is of this age that the writer is speaking when he talks of the world to come. The eternal Kingdom of heaven will also be ruled by Christ and not by the angels.

**2:6-8 – “But one has testified somewhere, saying, ‘What is man, that You remember him? Or the son [Son] of man [Man], that You are concerned about him [Him]? You have made him [Him] for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned him [Him] with glory and honor, and have appointed him [Him] over the works of Your hands; You have put all things in subjection under his [His] feet.’ For in subjecting all things to him [Him], He left nothing that is not subject to him [Him]. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him [Him].”** – To make the point that Jesus will be sovereign over the world to come, the writer of Hebrews again calls upon Old Testament Scripture from the Psalms. This time the passage which is quoted comes from Psalm 8:4-6. If Psalm 8 is read apart from any knowledge of the New Testament, it appears to simply be speaking of the fact that God put the physical creation under man’s dominion as stated in Genesis 1:26-28. However, the true impact of this Psalm is in reference to Jesus, just as we saw in Hebrews chapter 1 that although the prophecy in 2 Samuel 7 had an immediate meaning in reference to Solomon, its final fulfillment is in Christ. There is no doubt upon reading Psalm 8 that it speaks of the awe of finding man as the center of Creation. When a person gazes upon the vastness of the universe, it is absolutely amazing that man has any relevance. Apart from God’s revelation that He made man in His image, the meaning of man would quickly be lost in the immense size and wonder of the world in which he finds himself. (As a sidenote, this is the logical outcome of atheistic Darwinism – man has no significance). That man has been placed in authority over the whole physical realm is certainly awe-inspiring, but the Holy Spirit, through the Psalmist, had a much more remarkable point that He was communicating. As can be seen throughout the book of Hebrews, the Author is attempting to pull our eyes off of the physical and focus them on the eternal. This is evident from the words mentioned in verse 5, “the world *to come*.” The real fulfillment of Psalm 8 is in Jesus Christ our Lord – note that Jesus attested that this was a Messianic Psalm in Matthew 21:16. The writer of Hebrews uses this Messianic prophecy from Psalms to form a bridge between Jesus’ divinity and His humanity. Jesus truly is the Son of Man about whom the Father is concerned. He is the One who was made, for a little while, lower than the angels – see Philippians 2:5-8. He is the One who has been crowned with glory and honor as has already been eloquently portrayed in the first chapter of Hebrews. All the works of the Father’s hands have also been placed under the control of Christ – see Matthew 11:27. The Scripture also emphasizes that Jesus is the One to whom all things have been put in subjection under His feet – see 1 Corinthians 15:27, Ephesians 1:22, Philippians 3:21, 1 Peter 3:22. Most translators of the Scripture miss the fact that the true emphasis of these verses of Hebrews is upon the Christ as evidenced by use of the little “him” instead of “Him.” However, both context (Hebrews has been emphasizing Christ’s rule in particular, not man’s in general) as well as the way in which Psalm 8 is quoted throughout the New Testament make it clear that these verses specifically concern Jesus Christ. When the Father subjected all things to Christ, there is

nothing that wasn't brought in subjection to Him. However, we won't yet see all things subjected until the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of the Lord. This is exactly the point made in 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 wherein it is explained that Christ has to abolish the enemy of death as it relates to our bodies. At the final resurrection of the dead, we will then see all things subjected to Jesus the Christ.

**2:9 – “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.”** – Although we will not be able to see all things subjected to Christ until the final resurrection of the dead, we have had opportunity to behold Jesus made lower than the angels. In God's communication of Himself to man, He first came in the flesh, at a level that every accountable person can understand. As the old song says, “He came down to my level, when I couldn't get up to His.” The apostles were witnesses of Jesus in the flesh as recounted in 1 John 1:1-3. This picture of Jesus in the flesh was verbally proclaimed to the first-century church including the writer of Hebrews (“confirmed to us by those who heard”) and has been shown to all other generations through the inspired gospel accounts. While it is obvious that Jesus had to undergo the same daily struggles which we encounter while in this body, His experience with death is the single greatest display of His manhood. Every honest person who reads the gospels is pierced to the heart as he sees the suffering of death that Christ underwent for the sins of each person in the world. Because Jesus humbled Himself to pay the price for our sins, He has been crowned with glory and honor – see Philippians 2:8-11. One of the beautiful aspects of Christ's death on the cross is that He died for everyone so that everyone could choose to live – see 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. God's grace was manifested in the midst of sin as Jesus chose to die for us while we were yet enemies – see Romans 5:8.

**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.”** – The Scriptural record brings forth the fact that the Eternal Father has an eternal plan. Ultimately this plan is for God's glory; God's wisdom is revealed before men and is also made known in the heavenly realm – see Ephesians 3:8-10. God is definitely the One through whom all things take place and He also is the One who will receive the honor through the execution of His will. God's desire, from before the foundation of the world, has been to bring many sons to glory. However, what is fitting for God in the working of this operation seems to be foolishness to the world. Jesus praised the Father, in a prayer recorded in Matthew 11:25-26, for hiding His agenda from the wise and intelligent and for revealing it to infants. It was fitting for the all-wise God to bring about salvation for man by means of the suffering of His Son. The message of the cross is indeed “foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” – 1 Corinthians 1:18. The crucifixion of Christ has been a source of stumbling to the Jews and has been considered foolishness to the educated among the Gentiles, yet through Jesus' suffering, God's power has been displayed. It is true that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” – 1 Corinthians 1:25. To again quote Paul from his discussion with the Corinthians, if God's wisdom had been understood by the rulers of the world, “they

would not have crucified the Lord of glory” – see 1 Corinthians 2:8. The point is that Jesus had to be made, for a time, lower than the angels so that He could bring other members of the human race to glory with Him. Jesus is here described as the author (**a]rxhgon**) of salvation for these other sons of glory. In other words, He is the source and the leader in this process of salvation. It is easy to recognize Christ as the source of our salvation, but in what case is He the predecessor in the process of salvation? This question will be answered when the other natural question from this verse is addressed: in what sense did Christ have to be perfected? Did Jesus have to be forgiven for sin? Absolutely not! So why did He need to be perfected through suffering? (As a sidenote, this same topic is again encountered in chapter 5, verses 8-10). There is only one arena in which Jesus needed to be perfected, and that is in reference to His physical body being changed to a body of glory. This thought flows beautifully from the O.T. quote brought forth in the previous verses, “Because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor.” Jesus is the first being to ever take on human form, undergo a physical death, rise again from the dead, and permanently receive a body of glory. Hence He is not only the source of salvation for us, but also the predecessor of it.

**2:11 – “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,”** – In order to bring many sons of the human race to glory, Christ has to sanctify or make them holy. Jesus is the only One who can set apart a person for a holy purpose; not only does He remove sin from man, but He also continually serves as High Priest on our behalf. A tremendous concept is herein brought forth: Jesus, the One who sanctifies, led a holy life while on a level playing field with those whom He has sanctified. In other words, Jesus has shown us what is possible to accomplish in a human body when it is in complete subjection to the Father. The One who makes others holy has already defined holiness in a human body. Thus, those who are made holy now understand what they are capable of because of Christ’s sanctifying work on behalf of His brethren. When Jesus, who is seated on the throne, left His place in glory to come and save us, He left no doubt that He is happy to call us His brethren. Let us follow the example of our older Brother!

**2:12 – “saying, ‘I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.’ ”** – The writer of Hebrews again turns to the Old Testament prophecies to prove that his point is grounded in the Scriptures. This quotation comes from the twenty-second Psalm, a great Messianic Psalm. In this Psalm, not only do we receive a clear picture of Christ’s crucifixion, but we get a glimpse of His resurrection – verse 24. After crying out for deliverance, Jesus prophetically declares that He will proclaim God’s name to His brethren. Again we see that where Christ has been, we get to follow. Jesus shouts praise of God to His brethren, those who make up the assembly or congregation (**e]kklhsiaj**).

**2:13 – “And again, ‘I will put My trust in Him.’ And again, ‘Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.’ ”** – Now the writer goes to the book of Isaiah for support of his familial theme. Because of the number of prophecies in the book of Isaiah concerning Jesus, Isaiah is sometimes called the Messianic prophet. Most Christians are familiar with the prophecies of Christ’s birth in chapters 7 and 9 of Isaiah. But there is

also a prophecy of Jesus here in the middle of Isaiah 8, verses 17 and 18. Jesus prophetically declares His trust in Yahweh, and then speaks of the fact that both He and His children (the Church) are for signs and wonders. Just as Isaiah and the faithful remnant were signs to unbelieving Israel, so Jesus and His brethren are a light to a dark world. The point driven home by the Holy Spirit here in Hebrews is that Jesus and the members of His Church have fellowship as they belong to the same family.

**2:14-15 – “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”** – In the previous verses, the writer of Hebrews proved from Scripture that Jesus and His people are all from the same family. In order for these family ties to be completely understood by man, it was necessary for Jesus to become fully human and take on a body of flesh and blood. Jesus’ humanity also was essential for the destruction of man’s greatest enemies, Satan and death. In order to free man from the captivity of Satan and from the curse of sin in death, Jesus had to come and stand in the place of man. For Jesus to deliver man from sin, He had to be on a level playing field with man as He took on the devil. Jesus walked in our shoes and has a right to ask us to follow in His footsteps. Though never succumbing to sin, He lived a life full of needs, desires, weaknesses, and temptations – see Hebrews 4:15. Jesus truly became one of us; He is our brother. By taking on a human body, Jesus took on the dragon in his own lair. After the first sin in the Garden of Eden, death entered this world and, ever since, Satan has used death to hold man in bondage through fear. Satan used death as a weapon against man when, in his role as the Accuser, he was quick to point out the condemnation to death for all who sinned. However, Christ destroyed the devil’s right to stand and bring accusation against man because He paid the penalty for sin through His own death. By paying this penalty for sin, Jesus took the weapon of death away from Satan and set man free from the debt of sin. When God raised Christ from the dead, He set Him free from the power of death (Acts 2:24) and proved that He will do the same for us. Although Christians still die bodily, there is no fear over death, because the One who was made lower than the angels has been exalted, and we will one day see the last enemy, our physical death, brought into subjection under His feet. By coming in a physical body, on an equal footing with us, Jesus proved that He truly cares about us and wants us to be His brethren. He has chosen to take the greatest evil, sin, and turn it to righteousness – see 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus took the greatest human weakness, death, and turned it to strength in life. James Stewart of Scotland explains this very well as he speaks about the phrase, “He led captivity captive.”

It is a glorious phrase – “He led captivity captive.” The very triumph of His foes, it means, He used for their defeat. He compelled their dark achievements to subserve His ends, not theirs. They nailed Him to the tree, not knowing that by that very act they were bringing the world to His feet. They gave Him a cross, not guessing that He would make it a throne. They flung Him outside the gates to die, not knowing that in that very moment they were lifting up all the gates of the universe, to let the King come in. They thought to root out His doctrines, not understanding that they were implanting imperishably in the hearts of men the very name they intended to destroy. They thought they had God with His back to the wall, pinned and helpless and defeated: they did not know that it was God Himself who had tracked them down. He did not conquer *in spite* of the dark mystery of evil. He conquered through it.



In God's great plan of redemption, Jesus, by taking on flesh and blood, not only has shown us that He cares for us but has also set us free from the slavery associated with guilt from sin and fear of death. Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

**2:16 – “For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.”** – When Jesus left His place of glory to come to earth, He dropped two rungs on the ladder. Though far greater than the angels, He didn't come down to their level to redeem them. Rather, He descended to the level of man in order to aid mankind. Jesus showed His willingness to fully identify with man in order to save us. He came as the seed of Abraham in order to help those who would also, by faith, become Abraham's seed – see Galatians 3:16, 29.

**2:17 – “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.”** – Since Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to bring salvation to those who would become Abraham's seed, He had to be made like man in *all* respects. Some mistakenly teach that the human body is “meant to sin” and “made to sin.” In other words, most people's misconception of sin is that as long as a person is housed in the physical body, he is compelled to sin. Yet the Scripture consistently teaches that sin is a *choice* made by man and, hence, has resulting consequences. The fact that Jesus was made just like us, but lived above sin, also proves that it is possible to live without sin while in the human body. In this context, the High Priesthood of Christ is first mentioned. In the Old Testament, the high priest of Israel had responsibility to enter the Holy of Holies and come before God on the Day of Atonement. The high priest had to sprinkle blood on the “mercy seat” first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. When this was done, the sins of the people were covered and God's wrath was taken away. In other words, peace was restored between God and His people. This Old Testament shadow has fulfillment in Jesus Christ, our High Priest. However, before Jesus could be glorified to become a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (chapters 5 and 7 of Hebrews), He first had to experience life on earth as a man. Jesus is merciful to man because He understands the intensity of the struggle that a person encounters while in this fleshly sojourn. The cross of Christ stands as the great beacon of mercy for the lost and for those who are in Christ. By His payment for our sins on the cross, Jesus demonstrated the fullness of His mercy, and thereby communicated that He has no desire to hold our sins against us. For the lost person, the cross is a beckoning call communicating God's tremendous desire to save. For the Christian, the cross is a great reminder that we have been reconciled to God and that our trespasses are remembered no more. Jesus truly is a merciful High Priest! Not only is our High Priest merciful, but He is also faithful. Jesus is not only willing to forgive us for our sins, but He also wants to show us how to overcome sin. Indeed, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil – see 1 John 3:8. By living a perfect life and triumphing over the temptations sent by Satan, Jesus established for us His victory over sin. In His role as High Priest, Jesus atones for our sin and teaches us how to overcome. What an awesome blessing to have such a faithful High Priest!

**2:18 – “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.”** – An interesting characteristic of man is that we desire to share our struggles with others who have experienced what we are going through. Thus there is a tremendous marketplace for support groups and other systems of sharing. One serious drawback is that often in these groups, there is a case of the “blind leading the blind.” At some point all the problems of mankind have their root in sin. Although all men have experienced the struggles of temptation, there is only One who has the strength to lend sufficient help to bring about victory. That we can share our struggles with confidence of Jesus’ understanding is evidenced by His life on earth. He too was tempted by Satan, He experienced hunger and thirst, He grew weary, He was worn out with people, and He experienced pain and sorrow. Jesus is the true Counselor who understands when we share, who intercedes on our behalf when we fall, and who is able to make us stand. What an awesome High Priest!

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 3:1-6**  
(Superiority of Jesus over Moses)

**3:1 – “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;”** – The writer of Hebrews continues to move forward as he connects the final points of chapter 2 with his next theme. At the end of chapter 3, it was established that Jesus took on flesh and blood in order to sanctify us and make us His brothers. In this verse, Christians are able to be called “holy brethren” because of the sanctifying work of Jesus, our High Priest. Now that Christians stand justified before God, we also are partakers of the “world to come.” In other words, we are partakers or sharers of a heavenly calling. Because Jesus paid the price for our sins and intercedes for us as High Priest, we get all the rights bestowed upon us as children of God. Since this privilege of sonship was granted to us by the work of Jesus, we are commanded to consider or think about Him. Particularly in this verse, we are asked to think of Jesus as both Apostle and High Priest. The Greek word **a]postoloj** means “one sent out” or “one who is commissioned.” The tenth chapter of Matthew helps us understand that the twelve disciples who were appointed by Jesus as apostles were given a specific mission. They were sent out by Jesus to preach the kingdom of heaven, particularly to the house of Israel. In line with the communication from Hebrews chapter 1, Jesus is explained to be the final messenger or true apostle of the Father. He is the Word of God; the One who brings the true gospel from the Father. In addition to being God’s messenger, He also is our High Priest. Jesus is the “one mediator between God and men” – see 1 Timothy 2:5. When Christians acknowledge Jesus as Lord, both of these aspects are included in that confession. In the New Testament church, the only standard confession was, “Jesus is Lord” – see Romans 10:9-10, 1 Corinthians 12:3, Philippians 2:11. The writer of Hebrews is asking Christians to stop and consider that this confession involves understanding that Jesus is the final messenger as well as our High Priest.

**3:2 – “He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.”** – As mentioned in the previous verse, Jesus was appointed by God as an Apostle and as a High Priest. Jesus has certainly been faithful as the final messenger of God. He never faltered in His purpose, nor did He compromise the message. Instead, Jesus was adamant concerning the fact that it was His Father who sent Him, and that His desire was to communicate the words of His Father – see John 12:49-50. While on earth, Jesus proved that He would not alter the words of God even when under intense pressure to do so – see John 10:31-38. It is interesting to note that the word translated “was” in this verse of Hebrews should actually be translated as a present participle to show continuing action. Jesus continues His work as High Priest and is faithful to God in His intercessory work on behalf of the saved. The writer of Hebrews uses Christ’s faithfulness to God as an opportunity to make a comparison of Jesus with Moses. In the Old Testament, Moses is upheld as a man who was faithful to God. When Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses as recorded in Numbers 12, they asked, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” In God’s response to this challenge, He related that He spoke face to face with Moses because of Moses’ faithfulness – see Numbers 12:5-8. In the same manner, because of His faithfulness,

Jesus is the One who received God's Word directly. Moses was recognized to be the receiver and giver of the Law, and he also interceded on behalf of the people on numerous occasions. The writer of Hebrews uses Moses' faithful dealings in these areas to compare with Christ's right to speak for God and intercede for us.

**3:3 – “For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.”** – Now the Holy Spirit takes up the theme of Jesus' superiority over Moses. It is true that Moses was faithful in God's house, as Jesus also is faithful. Moses was commissioned by God to take the message of physical deliverance to the people of Israel and also interceded on behalf of the people before God. However, Jesus has a greater role than Moses because He is the Apostle bringing the eternal gospel and the High Priest interceding for the purpose of everlasting spiritual salvation. The writer uses the analogy of a house and its builder to communicate the extent of Christ's greatness over Moses. Certainly a nice house is an object that stimulates praise from those who behold it. The true recipient of this praise, though, is not the house but the architect and builder of the house. The house is the masterpiece of the artist, and is simply a reflection of the greatness of the builder. In the same way, Jesus is due the honor for constructing the spiritual house of God. Jesus is the architect of the household of God, while Moses is just a member of the household. Truly, Moses' faithfulness was great in organizing the construction of the tabernacle (a copy of the real house – see Hebrews 9:24) and directing the exodus of Israel, but Christ's faithfulness has been demonstrated as the architect of the true tabernacle (see John 2:19) and as the head of God's household (see Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:19-22) as well as bringing about the true exodus of God's people from spiritual slavery (see John 8:36).

**3:4 – “For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.”** – In further explanation of the analogy, the writer points out that no house is self-existing. Every edifice has been designed and constructed by some living being. Ultimately it should be understood that God is the source of all existence and is therefore worthy of all the glory. As established in chapter 1, Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of everything. Moses is part of the creation, while Jesus is the Sovereign over all of creation.

**3:5-6 – “Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but 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.”** – In verse 2 of this chapter, Moses' faithfulness was proclaimed for the purpose of comparing him with Christ. Again the writer of Hebrews brings up the faithfulness of Moses, but this time in contrast to Jesus' faithfulness. Two key differences between the role of Moses and the role of Jesus are here mentioned. Moses is described as a *servant in* God's house, while Jesus is called a *Son over* God's house. The Greek word that is here translated “servant” is **qerapwn** which has the connotation of a willing servant, as an attendant. (A related word, **qerapeuwn**, is translated “healing” when Jesus attended to the people.) Moses wasn't an indentured servant, nor was he a scared slave, but he was an attendant, a willing partner, to God within God's household of Israel. However, while Moses was a helper to His superior, God, in the house, Christ is the Son over the house. Jesus is the heir, and, as such, has full authority over the

house. While the physical nation of Israel was the house of God in the Old Testament, the Church is the house of God in the New Testament – see 1 Timothy 3:15. Moses was faithful in erecting a tabernacle, whose true significance is in its relation as a shadow of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched – see Hebrews 8:2, 9:11, 9:24. Moses was God’s servant who attended the people of Israel, but this too was simply a testimony to the work which Christ would do for true Israel, the church – see Ephesians 2:19-22, Galatians 3:28-29, 4:23-26. Christians are definitely described as God’s house (**oi]koj**) or dwelling place – see 1 Corinthians 3:16 (**naoj, oi]kei**), 2 Corinthians 6:16 (**naoj, e]noikhsw**), 1 Peter 2:5 (**oi]koj**). However, the fact that Christians are the house of God is a conditional statement here in Hebrews (and in other places also). The stipulation put forth by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews is that we hold fast our confidence (**parrhsian**) and the boast of our hope (**e]lpidoj**) firm until the end. In other words, because we have the “hope” (**e]lpida**) of glory, “we use great boldness (**parrhsia**) in our speech” (2 Corinthians 3:12). As long as we keep longing for the salvation of our body, we will make the good confession of Christ with courage, and we are God’s dwelling place. Let’s continue to the end!

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 3:7-19**  
(Exhortation to Faithful Finish)

**3:7-11** – “Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways’; as I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ” – The writer of Hebrews uses the conditional statement of verse 6 as a springboard to interject a whole section on the necessity of being faithful to the finish. He turns to a familiar passage from the Old Testament, Psalm 95:7-11. The 95<sup>th</sup> chapter of Psalms apparently was a psalm spoken by a Levite to the Israelites assembled at the temple, inviting the people to worship God. In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer acknowledges that this recorded Psalm contained a message from the Holy Spirit. If it was important for those worshiping under the Old Covenant at the physical temple to consider this warning from the Holy Spirit, how much more should we who, under the New Covenant, are commanded to worship in Spirit and truth heed this exhortation from the Spirit. The first point of emphasis worth noting is the word, “Today.” For the Christian, the past is buried and forgotten, the future is beyond our control, but the present is to be used wisely. There is continual importance placed upon “today” throughout the New Testament – see Luke 9:23, 2 Corinthians 6:2, Hebrews 3:13. Each Christian needs to set his mind “today” to hear God’s voice, that is, to listen to the words of the exalted Prophet. Again, in the gospels and in the book of Revelation, there is consistent stress upon actually “hearing” what is being said by Jesus – Matthew 11:15, 13:9, Luke 14:35, Revelation 2:7,11,17,29, 3:6,13,22. As an example of those who hardened their hearts at the word of God, the Holy Spirit turns to the time of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness following her exodus from Egypt. The original account of this “place of trial,” recorded in Exodus 17:1-7 was called “Massah” (meaning “test”) and “Meribah” (meaning “quarrel”). The quarrel of the people was that there was no water for them to drink, but the real challenge was that in their complaint the people tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?” God answered their challenge that day and gave them water from the rock, but they continued to test Him, even refusing to believe the report of Joshua and Caleb that the Promised Land was theirs for the taking. On account of their grumbling, they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, but were forced to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Over and over again in this time period, God proved Himself with His mighty deeds, but the people continued to disbelieve. Because the heart of Israel continually went astray and they never came to know God’s ways, He was angry with them and swore that they would not enter His rest. The Old Testament is clear that from that generation of Israelites, only 2 (Joshua and Caleb – the two faithful spies) out of more than 600,000 got to enter the Promised Land of Canaan – see Numbers 14:22-24,30.

**3:12** – “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.” – Although the warning of Psalm 95 was first given to those under the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit has chosen to relate it to all who live under the New Testament. Many obstinate Israelites were refused entrance into

the Promised Land because of their lack of faith, hence the necessity of a faithful finish for Christians to truly be considered as God's household – see verse 6 of this same chapter. Walter Scott, one of the great minds of the Restoration Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, emphasized the importance of self-examination in a Christian's journey to perfection. This emphasis on self-examination has its roots in Scripture, as evidenced by this passage out of Hebrews. It is important for all Christians to “test yourselves to see if you are in the faith” – see 2 Corinthians 13:5. The travesty of “falling away,” the sin of apostasy, always has its origin in unbelief. One of the purposes of a Christian's prayer life is to pinpoint areas of unbelief within the heart and to renew the mind with faith gained from the Scriptures – see Psalm 26, esp. vs. 2-4, Romans 10:17. The heart of someone who loses faith and thus falls away is described as evil. The only means of justification always has been, and always will be based upon faith – see Romans 4:3-5. Therefore, the living God who sees all and knows all doesn't take the sin of unbelief lightly, but will certainly judge those who fall away.

**3:13 – “But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”** – To remain faithful in the midst of an evil, perverted world is indeed rare. The pagans of the world, lost in darkness, are always attempting to trip up those who wear the name of Christ. Men who have the mark of the beast turn their fury against those who wear the seal of Christ on their foreheads. Those who have fallen away in the past, and those who presently are on the slippery slope of apostasy, wish to take as many with them as they can. As a matter of fact, Psalm 101:3 mentions the “*work* of those who fall away.” Because of this barrage from the world, Christians truly need encouragement from their fellow saints. This encouragement from the brethren is to be a *day after day* happening. One of the primary purposes of the assembly of the saints is so that individual Christians can encourage and be encouraged – see Hebrews 10:23-25. The church is to be a family comprised of members that are intensely interested in the lives of fellow members of the family. The Holy Spirit stresses the importance of giving encouragement *today* while there is still opportunity. The sixth chapter of Hebrews clearly reveals that there is a “point of no return” upon which, when an individual comes to this point, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. Love of souls compels us to encourage each other so that we will be faithful to the end. The reason there is such a need for encouragement is because of the deceitful enemy called sin. This powerful foe has been masterfully described by Jay Wilson in his booklet, Cleansing the Inside of the Cup.

Make no mistake about it, sin is a major problem. Indeed, it is the bane, the destruction of the human race. And sin is a deeply entrenched enemy. Having entered the world through the disobedience of Adam, sin has since been burrowing into the depths of the human heart, setting up battlements and defenses, so that, once dug in, no amount of human goodness can root it from the hole of its darkened headquarters. From its hide-out sin wields the wrecking bar, destroying relationships between man and man, and throws the cleaver which splits asunder the God-ordained union of man and wife. Out of the blackened fastnesses of unregenerate hearts flows rapacious greed, the love of money being a major “root of all sorts of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10), including the production and distribution of the drugs which are destroying modern society. From the walled-in fortresses of sin-twisted human hearts ooze the evil thoughts which produce life-destroying pornography, the drive for power which ruthlessly plots wars and rips civilization to enslave others, and the pride and foolishness which plunge men and women into

the declivity of eternal ruin. Sin chortled mercilessly in the blackened hollow of Adam's heart as it forced him who had been in Eden to clean up the remains of his son Abel, and witness the banishment of his older son, the murderer Cain. Sin is the bane, the destruction of the human race.

While the Scriptures are clear that “no amount of human goodness” can remove sin, they also communicate that the Holy Spirit within the Christian does help the Christian put to death the deeds of the flesh – see Galatians 5:16, Romans 8:13. However, even the Christian has to be aware of the deceitful nature of sin and must continually renew the mind lest sin again be a cause of death – see Romans 12:2. This verse in Hebrews warns against being “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Hardening takes place when a person either no longer wants to overcome or when he no longer believes that he can overcome. Continual willful indulgence in sinful thoughts, words, and actions can “sear” the conscience, whereby a person no longer even wants to overcome. Part of sin’s deceitfulness is characterized by licentiousness which results when a Christian uses “grace” as an excuse to continue to sin – see Romans 6:1. Thus the Scripture exhorts the Christian, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make *no* provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” – Romans 13:14. All excuses and mental escape routes must be destroyed so that sin will not harden the heart of the Christian. On the flip side, attempting to escape sin’s dominion by means of law, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (Colossians 2:21) puts a person back into the clutches of sin – see Romans 7:7-11. When a Christian attempts to be justified through keeping the law, the inevitable result is repeated failure. Sin uses the discouragement of repetitive failure to harden the heart of the well-intentioned, but frustrated Christian so that he loses faith and no longer believes that he can overcome sin. Whether by means of the deception of licentiousness or of law, sin will harden the heart of anyone who remains in its grasp. The only way to overcome sin is to “walk by faith.” Thus the encouragement from the brethren should be focused on building faith within the brothers and sisters that each Christian might truly believe that “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” – see 1 John 4:4.

**3:14-15 – “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.’ ”** – In verse 6 of this chapter, it was emphasized that we are God’s house *if* we are faithful to the end. After interjecting the bad example of the Israelites as a warning to all Christians, the writer returns to the same point of emphasis, that is, the necessary condition of faithfulness. When a person is immersed into Christ, he is united with Christ (Romans 6:6). Following the remission of sins at his immersion, the believer is given the indwelling Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) so that he may become a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). However, this sharing with Christ is an eternal union only if it is maintained by the Christian until the end of this life. Again we see the conditional *if* mentioned in verse 14, “*if* we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.” The faith which every Christian had upon their immersion into Christ must be held onto and increased. There is a tendency to forget our “purification from our former sins” and to become again “entangled in the affairs of everyday life.” As mentioned earlier, it is easy to slide back on the slippery slope of licentiousness or to come back under the snare of law. Jude strongly warned the brethren of the first century about the condemnation which will be incurred by those “who turn the



grace of our God into licentiousness.” He further communicated that this path is a result of unbelief as he set forth the example of the destruction of those who came out of Egypt, but did not believe. In like manner, the apostle Paul attributes the root of the problems in Galatia to lack of faith, although this unbelief manifested itself in a return to the law. He rebukes them because, even though they had begun by faith, they were attempting to be perfected by works of the law – Galatians 3:3-5. In the same way, the push of this part of the letter to Hebrews is emphasis upon holding fast the faith which we had in the beginning firm until the end. Living by faith is tied in again with the quotation from Psalm 95, with stress upon today. An attitude of faithfulness may be best described when the apostle Paul communicated his longing for his glorified body, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14). Brethren, let us imitate Paul’s example of following Christ “today.”

**3:16-18 – “For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?”** – To fully call attention to the necessity of belief for entrance into the eternal kingdom, the writer of Hebrews describes the absolute destruction of unbelief. He asks a number of rhetorical questions concerning the Israelites of old to get our minds to grasp the serious consequences of unbelief. The forty-year period of wandering in the wilderness by the Israelites following their rescue from Egypt is brought forth to communicate that our God, whose lovingkindness endures forever, is also a jealous God who can be provoked to anger. All those led out of Egypt by Moses had seen God’s power displayed in almost every imaginable way. They had beheld the utter destruction of the Egyptian world through the plagues God poured upon them. The Israelites were eyewitnesses to God’s conquest of the greatest army on earth as the Egyptian soldiers perished in the depths of the Red Sea. The chosen nation of Israel also was fed with manna from heaven and drank from the water which gushed forth from the rock. Certainly, it would be expected that people who had beheld such miracles would believe in the power of God. However, their grumbling and challenging provoked God to the point that He no longer would bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey. They repeatedly transgressed His commands, including their worship of the golden calf and their attempt to stone Joshua and Caleb when they said that the Promised Land was theirs for the taking. Because of this continual disobedience of the people, God was angry and swore that they would not enter His rest.

**3:19 – “And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.”** – In the previous verses, it is brought forth that God was angry with the Israelites because of their sin and disobedience. This example of disobedience and the resulting consequences has been “written for our instruction” (1 Corinthians 10:11), so that we would not crave evil things, or be idolaters, or act immorally, or try the Lord, or grumble. While any sin can

harden the Christian, this concluding verse of Hebrews 3 brings out that the root of all sin is unbelief. As in James, the Holy Spirit sets forth the principle that true faith always results in good works, here He establishes that unbelief always leads to sin. Faith and obedience are inextricably linked, so also unbelief and disobedience are always joined together. Unbelief allows no room for the display of God's glory, and it robs the soul of the blessings that come from God's power. Just as the unfaithful members of Israel were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, so in the last days all who are rebellious and refuse to believe in God's power will be denied entrance into His rest, which He has provided for His household.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 4:1-11**

(The Sabbath Rest)

**4:1 – “Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.”** – After logically leading our thoughts through the downfall of the Israelites in the wilderness, the Holy Spirit brings this example home to the Christian living under the New Testament. Almost everything in the Old Testament was a physical shadow pointing to a spiritual fulfillment under the New Covenant. If we quickly review what has so far been brought forth in the book of Hebrews, we already see a number of shadows mentioned. In chapter 1, the writer established Christ’s superiority over the angels, which leads to the logical conclusion in chapter 2: the New Covenant spoken through Jesus is far greater (actually is the fulfillment) of the Old Testament given through the agency of angels. In chapter 3, it was brought forth that Moses was a type of Christ, with Moses as the shadow and Christ as the substance. Also in chapter 3 and on into chapter 4, we see that the nation of Israel was a foreshadow of the true house of God, the church. Hence, the lessons of Israel’s unfaithfulness ultimately serve as a warning for God’s people of the last days, that is, the church of the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit makes it very clear that the promise of entering God’s rest still stands today. As a matter of fact, if we are following the pattern established thus far in the book of Hebrews, we see that the Old Testament quotations really serve us in our present time, and the true rest was always intended for Christians. Therefore, Christians need to fear because of the history of the Israelites. If all of the unbelieving were denied entrance to the physical Promised Land, then anyone lacking in faith will fall short of the true Promised Land. While love is the greatest inspiration of all, fear is a powerful motivator also. As the Scriptures bring forth, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” While love pulls us on to great feats, fear holds us back from complacency and apostasy. Fear keeps us from drawing near to the dangerous precipice of unbelief and helps us maintain our distance from the point of no return. The failure of the Israelite nation as a whole should remind us that God’s promises are only granted to those who hold their faith with vigilance. The clear warning of the Holy Spirit is to make sure that no Christians come short of God’s rest. The terminology “come short” carries the connotation of not completing a race. This invokes in my mind the catchy phrase from the PowerBar commercials, “Don’t bonk.” “Bonking” is the phenomenon that occurs in endurance events when a person’s body begins to shut down because it literally doesn’t have the energy to continue. “Bonking” generally results from lack of training or insufficient nutrition. It is terrifying to imagine what it would be like to see your name in the eternal newspaper with a DNF (did not finish) next to it. The imagery stirred up by the writer of Hebrews should make a person consider standing before the great white throne to receive the victor’s crown, and finding out that you had been disqualified, that your name had been blotted out of the book of life. It is imperative for the Christian to remember that, “A winner never quits; a quitter never wins.” Let us fear God enough to develop the faith necessary to press on to the finish!

**4:2 – “For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.”** – In line with the point made from verse 1, the Holy Spirit reminds Christians

that it is not enough simply to hear the word. The opportunity to enter the race is far different than to cross the finish line exultantly with hands in the air. While entrance in the race is essential to be declared a legal finisher, the course must also be completed in accordance with the rules – 2 Timothy 2:5. In like manner, the first step to gaining admittance to the Promised Land is to hear the gospel, but hearing alone is not sufficient for eternal salvation. The Israelites had opportunity to hear the good news on numerous occasions before and during their wandering in the wilderness. However, the word they heard did them no good because their hearing wasn't accompanied by faith. Substituting the letters engraved on stones (the Law) as given by Moses for the New Covenant given by Jesus isn't enough to guarantee entrance into the eternal kingdom. Faith is the necessary agent to transport the law of liberty from words on a page to a letter written on the hearts and minds. True belief in God is characterized by actual faith in His Word. Scriptural faith includes believing that God's power raised Christ from the dead as well as having done the same for us.

**4:3 – “For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,’ although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.”** – After bringing to remembrance the faithless example of the Israelites resulting in their banishment from the Land of Promise, the writer is equally emphatic concerning the reward for those who do believe. While God swore that those who didn't believe would not enter, His promise of rest is guaranteed for those who have Scriptural faith. The Old Testament account in Joshua is adamant that the next generation of Israelites after the Exodus received rest – see Joshua 1:13-15, 11:23, 14:15, 21:44-45, 23:1. However, lest anyone get caught up believing that the earthly land is the ultimate rest, the Holy Spirit brings forth more information from the Old Testament Scriptures. The physical picture of rest in the Promised Land was simply a foreshadow of the heavenly land, wherein we will forever experience God's rest. The original and true concept of rest in the Scripture comes from the Creation account in Genesis, and is obviously a heavenly rest. God's works of creation were accomplished during days 1-6, each defined by evening and morning, while His rest began on the seventh day, which has never ended.

**4:4-5 – “For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’; and again in this passage, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’ ”** – Again the writer of Hebrews turns to the Old Testament Scriptures to prove his point. Genesis 2:2 is cited to establish that, following the creation of man in His image, God has ceased from His works of creation. Combining the original example of God's rest with that of the rest attained by those Israelites who had opportunity to enter the “land flowing with milk and honey,” the Holy Spirit clearly asserts that only those who believe in God's power get to enter God's rest. Certainly, by faith, this rest has become a reality for those who have ceased attempting to be justified by law and have learned to walk with reliance upon Christ. However, the repeated warning from Psalm 95 is clear – let no one think that they can stop living by faith and enter the eternal rest. One generation after entrance into the land of Canaan, the people turned away from the God of Israel, and God's promise of rest was subsequently replaced with a curse. Thus, “let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

**4:6-7** – “Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” 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.” – Although God made sure by His oath that the unbelieving wouldn’t enter His rest, this doesn’t nullify the promise of rest for those who believe. Sometimes, after “crunching the numbers” (such as 2 out of 600,000), a person can begin to wonder if anyone will make it. This basic question appeared in the gospel of Luke when someone wondered aloud, “Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?” Jesus responded, “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” – see Luke 12:23-24. While the reality is that there are only “few” who are being saved, the positive message is that some do make it. Some will yet enter the true Promised Land, that is, the heavenly land of rest. While God didn’t allow the unbelieving generation to enter Canaan, this lack of faithfulness didn’t disqualify Joshua and Caleb who did believe. God isn’t partial, nor is He arbitrary about His decision of who gets to enter. Some “theologians” subscribe to the idea of “predestination” whereby God chooses to save individuals apart from decisions of the individual. This position is a blatant misrepresentation of Scripture. Anyone who enters God’s rest will enter because of diligent obedience flowing from faith, while those who fail to enter are disqualified because of disobedience, which is the end result of unbelief – see Romans 11:20-23. The promise of rest spoken of by David in Psalm 95 is repeated by the Holy Spirit to those living under the New Covenant. The real message of “today” wasn’t for those who were rescued from Egypt, but for us who have been delivered from our sins. The exhortation to hear God’s voice and obey has even more application for Christians than it did for those who lived under the terms of the Old Testament.

**4:8** – “For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.” – For those whose minds are still set on earthly things, the physical realm is everything. The fleshly tendency of the Jew would be a desire to once again be offered the physical property of Canaan, where the land flowed “with milk and honey.” There are many claiming to be Christians today who are still hoping for the physical inheritance promised in the Old Testament to be granted to the Jews. Others have alternative theories about how God will allow us to live in some sort of earthly paradise. But in line with the purpose of the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit establishes that the physical land of promise was not God’s real intention, but was a physical shadow to communicate the eternal reality. As mentioned previously, the book of Joshua clearly states that the Israelites did enter the land of rest. However, if this was the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise, there would be no reason to speak of another day of rest after that. As the writer of Hebrews has been bringing forth the superiority of everything associated with the New Covenant over the Old, so he now emphasizes that there is a rest that exceeds any physical fulfillment in the Promised Land.

**4:9-10** – “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.” – The writer of Hebrews has already established that the rest from war which the nation of

Israel experienced after occupying the physical land of Canaan was not the true rest intended by God. Now he further explains that the rest which remains for God's people really relates back to the Sabbath rest, which God took after completing His works of creation. This promise will be fully realized when a Christian experiences physical death or when Christ returns. It is obvious from reading Philippians 1:21-24, that the apostle Paul understood that he would get to rest from his work only after his physical death. He challenges the Christians at Corinth to recognize that the painful experiences associated with this body will be forever removed upon receipt of our eternal body – see 2 Corinthians 4:17-5:8. Revelation 14:13 may describe this eternal Sabbath rest best, “And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’ ’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.’ ” Brother Steve Doty from Michigan has brought forth the concept that unless we learn to rest in God now by faith, we will not get to experience the eternal rest. Consistent with everything seen in the book of Hebrews thus far, our level of belief in God and His power determines whether or not we get to participate in the abundant life – now and eternally.

**4:11 – “Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.”** -- At the close of this section about entering God's rest, the writer goes back to the thought which he began to develop in verse 6. There are those who will yet enter God's eternal rest by faith. Whether or not a person enters depends upon the diligence of the individual in learning to live by faith. In many different ways the Scripture exhorts the Christian to be obedient to the truth. Those who are disobedient will fall and ultimately will be disqualified. As has been pointed out previously, the difference between the winners and those who are disqualified comes down to faith. James reminds us that a man can't simply say he has faith, but must have deeds which prove it. The Holy Spirit concludes through James that Genesis 15:6 (“Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness”) was *fulfilled* when Abraham offered up Isaac as a sacrifice. In other words, Abraham's actions proved what God already knew – that Abraham believed Him. The Holy Spirit speaking through Paul reminds us in the second chapter of Philippians to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” In the book of 2 Peter, we are also exhorted to “be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you.” The distinction between attempted justification by works of the law and true righteousness by faith is the difference between death and life. Living by faith doesn't mean that a person does nothing, but rather goes to the root of why and how a person lives. A person who truly walks by faith turns to God as the source of his strength and is able to maintain a relaxed attitude while being very productive. In the words of Steve Doty, God doesn't want us to “try harder,” but wants us to “believe more.” It is guaranteed that God will perform great deeds through those who really believe. Brethren, let us be diligent to develop our faith. Let's be those who enter God's Sabbath rest forever.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 4:12-16**

(Encouragement from God's Word and Our High Priest)

**4:12 – “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”** – The latter part of Hebrews chapter 3 and early portion of chapter 4 really focused on the connection between faith and obedience, and the corresponding link between unbelief and disobedience. The writer of Hebrews, through the Holy Spirit, has strongly exhorted Christians to be diligent to live faithfully unto the end. Now he turns his attention to God's Word, the only source which will expose unbelief on one hand, and build faith on the other hand. The first characteristic brought forth about the Scriptures is that they are living and active. The Bible isn't merely a collection of religious writings from the past, but is the communication of the thoughts and character of the living God to man. The Scriptures are not to be interpreted in light of the philosophy of the present culture, but must be understood as pertinent and alive with the same meaning to every culture. God's Word is active (Greek – **eJnerghj**), meaning that it is powerful to accomplish its purpose. As an example, consider purchasing a cleaning agent. In the list of ingredients, there is always an *active* ingredient, that is, the chemical which effectively produces a change. In like manner, God's Word is energetic in producing change within the Christian. The next point made about the Bible is that it is sharper than any two-edged sword. Using the picture of the sharpest weapon of the ancient world, the writer is communicating the power of the Scriptures. Those who refuse to obey God will be strictly judged in accordance with God's Word – see Psalm 149:6-9. No one can inconsequentially ignore the Scriptures; for their judgment is swift and sure. For those who are in Christ, God's Word is a tremendous source of protection and is a mighty weapon to be used in spiritual warfare – see Ephesians 6:17. As a matter of fact, the Bible is so powerful that it is able to make real distinctions, where nothing else can. The surgery able to be performed by this amazing scalpel is far greater than what can be accomplished through laser technology in our day. What else can divide between soul and spirit? If you have ever attempted to do a word study on soul and spirit, you know that it is incredibly difficult to understand the difference in meaning between these two words, let alone to be able to pinpoint how they comprise the life of man. Yet the Scriptures succeed where all else fails; they can pierce to the inner heart of man, like separating joints from marrow. The deepest thoughts and attitudes of the inner man which so often hide from a person's own consciousness are thoroughly exposed by the Word. A person's response to the Holy Scriptures is the tell-tale sign of a good or evil heart. The Bible truly is the great revelation of God to man, whereby man's heart is revealed back to God. This is the perfect test; it is not an I.Q. test, but an integrity test. Brethren, test yourselves to see if you are in the faith! – see 2 Corinthians 13:5.

**4:13 – “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”** – Notice the slight change in emphasis from God's Word in verse 12 to God Himself in verse 13. The same theme is being expounded upon, but there is a subtle change of terminology. This change allows us to understand that the means by which God views all creatures is through His Word.

Many people who don't like the way in which the Scriptures expose their wickedness attempt to make God "bigger" than the Bible. If you take the stand that the Bible means exactly what it says, an accusation will be made that you are attempting to "hold God in a box." The reality as brought forth from Hebrews 4:12-13 is that God uses the Scriptures as His eyes into the heart of man. Nothing is wrong with God's eyes; He has perfect vision. He doesn't need to consult a doctor to determine if He is myopic or hypermetropic. God can see perfectly; there is nothing that can hide from His eagle-eye. It is certainly possible for an omnipotent, omniscient God who created man in His image to develop the perfect instrument for gazing into the recesses of man's heart. While many attempt to hide from these spiritual eyes, there is no escape. Just as there will be no mountain or rock big enough to conceal sinners from God's face on the Day of Judgment, in like manner there is nowhere in the universe that can provide a hiding place from God's eyes that search throughout the earth. David well communicated God's ability to know everything about him in Psalm 139, when he said among other things, "O LORD, You have searched me and known me . . . Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (Psalm 139:1,7). God's omniscience is frightening or comforting depending on your spiritual condition. As Paul told the Corinthians, "to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life." For the nonchristian who is ducking responsibility, it is a scary recognition that God sees everything. For the Christian who is persevering, this is a tremendous source of encouragement, even while encountering temptations of discouragement for past failure. The message is that God knows and He understands. He sees the desire of the Christian to be righteous, and He knows the struggle necessary to overcome the evil one, and He understands if the Christian falls short. Everything is presently visible to the One to whom we will one day give an account. God knows the worst about us, and has already proven that He loves us anyway. He won't be surprised by any confession in our prayers – He just wants us to talk to Him so that He can help us overcome.

**4:14 – “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”** – Now it can be readily seen that the intent of verses 12 and 13 are to comfort and encourage the Christian, not to paralyze him with fear. The writer of Hebrews comes back to the fact that we have a great High Priest, an intercessor who stands in the presence of God on our behalf. This is the One who shed His own blood while on earth to demonstrate His love for us and His earnest desire that we be rescued from the snares of the devil. God didn't spare His own Son even while we were enemies, so He certainly will hold nothing back from us now that we are His friends – see Romans 8:32. Jesus is the great High Priest, far superior to Aaron, or other Old Testament high priests. While they entered into the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary, He has passed through the heavens into the very presence of God. If God overlooked the sins of the Israelites upon the sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat by the Old Testament high priests, how much more will God look with favor upon us who have been cleansed by the offering of Christ in the true Holy of Holies! Since we have this great High Priest who intercedes for us, we should stand firm in our faith. The only way a Christian could lose is to quit. Let's press on!



**4:15 – “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”**

– The Holy Spirit continues to provide encouragement and perseverance to Christians through the writer of Hebrews. God doesn't want mankind to mistakenly think that He can't relate to us because His ways are higher than man's ways. The glorified High Priest whose eyes are like a flame of fire is the same One who came in the flesh so that his eyes could experience the burning of fatigue and the stinging of tears. When His eyes pierce into the corners of Christian hearts, He looks with compassion upon us. Jesus had to go nose-to-nose and eyeball-to-eyeball with the dragon on the dragon's home turf. Jesus experienced firsthand in the wilderness the wily deception of Satan as the devil twisted Scripture to tempt Jesus to sin. Jesus felt the heat of the dragon's breath in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the devil attempted to discourage Him with the thoughts of the physical pain of the crucifixion and the spiritual agony of separation. Jesus felt the bruise of the serpent's bite when He succumbed to physical death on a cross because of the sins of mankind. We can take courage, for Jesus knows what we have to go through, and He understands! Along with the understanding that Jesus conveys, He also brings with Him the sure hope of victory. While encountering the worst that Satan could throw His way, Jesus overcame the power of the evil one. Jesus never succumbed to one temptation to sin, nor did He stop short of His purpose of delivering us. At Christ's resurrection from the dead, He paid back the serpent for his evil, and crushed him in the head. Our High Priest is One we can look to for understanding in our times of need, for intercession in our weaknesses, and for power to overcome. Let's continue to consider the High Priest of our confession!

**4:16 – “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**

– The previous verses of this chapter have been building up to the climax of this point. The reality that God's Word can judge our hearts' intentions, that God sees everything, and the fact that we have a great High Priest all combine to strengthen us to draw near to God. This verse is the first of six times that the phrase “draw near” is used in the book of Hebrews. It is a reoccurring theme throughout the book that Christ has sacrificed, made His offering, and continues to intercede for us so that we might come close to God. Regardless of a Christian's past sins or present shortcomings, he can stand in God's presence with confidence because of Christ's ongoing work on his behalf. The picture of the throne of grace in this verse reminds us that the Sovereign who will one day judge all is the same One who has declared the Christian as righteous. If anyone sins, he can come to this throne of grace, knowing that he will receive mercy. The Christian can openly confess his sins, with full confidence that he has an Advocate with the Father. “If we confess our sins,” says the Holy Spirit through John the Apostle, “He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). When a Christian knows that he will be forgiven, and remembers that God sees everything anyway, he can be completely honest with God about his present performance. This open-door policy established by our Heavenly Father is essential for helping us learn how to live victoriously over sin. The “throne of grace” is a refuge; it is a place where mercy is freely given, but it also is the source of strength. Not only is mercy offered at Christ's throne, but grace is also imparted. Our English word “grace” comes from the Greek

word “**xarij**” which literally means gift. While this word has many connotations, one of the aspects of grace includes the point that God gives us the tools necessary to overcome. Thus the Christian can “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:18). In other words, the Christian can, through his prayer life, receive the special one-on-one teaching concerning righteousness from the One who has been called the “Good Teacher.” Jesus is the perfect coach who knows when we need reproved, rebuked, exhorted, encouraged, consoled, motivated, or told to just relax. God really wants us to spend an eternity with Him, so He has provided everything we need to do so. Don’t shrink back in shame, but draw near to Him with confidence!

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 5:1-10**

(Christ's Glorification as High Priest – Superiority over Aaron)

**5:1 – “For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;”** – At the end of chapter 4, the writer of Hebrews instilled confidence in all Christians by bringing forth the encouraging work of Jesus, our High Priest. Now in preparation for our full understanding of Christ's role as the true High Priest, he begins to teach about the office of the priesthood by first examining the Old Testament shadow, the Aaronic priesthood. Notice that the high priest is taken from among men and appointed on behalf of men. In other words, God chose a fellow man to represent sinful man in matters pertaining to God – see Hebrews 2:17 for similar terminology. The primary responsibility of the high priest was to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. Under the Old Testament, the high priest seemed to oversee the daily responsibilities of offering sacrifices (see Exodus 29, Leviticus chapters 1-7, Hebrews 7:27) as well as his special duties on the Day of Atonement – see Leviticus 16. Burnt offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings were specifically for the purpose of atonement for sin, in order that the people could be reconciled with God, while grain offerings and peace offerings were expressions of thanksgiving for God's goodness and the joy of fellowship with God. Thus, whether the high priest was directly involved with offering the sacrifices as on the Day of Atonement or mostly indirectly involved through supervision of the daily offerings made by the other priests, he served as an intermediary between God and the people.

**5:2 – “he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;”** – Because the high priest himself was a man subject to temptations, he could deal gently with the ignorant and misguided people of Israel. Under the Old Covenant, God made provision for sins that were committed in ignorance or in weakness, not those that were purposely committed in rebellion against God. In order to be gentle with those who had transgressed, it was absolutely essential that the high priest understand the difficulties of this earthly life. Every high priest under the Law was a sinful man who had fallen short of the glory of God. This weakness was helpful to the high priest in dealing gently with sinners, but was a serious flaw that disallowed a true clean conscience for either the high priest or the people (this matter of conscience will be further examined in chapters 7, 9, and 10). Thus, the high priest was linked to the people both because he was a man and because he was a sinner.

**5:3 – “and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.”** – In this verse, the writer further explains his point from the previous verse, that the high priest is also beset with weakness. Even on the Day of Atonement, the high priest first had to offer sacrifices for his own sins before he could make atonement for the people – see Leviticus 16:6, 15-16. When the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (the tenth day of the seventh month), he had to perform a number of things. These included the offering of a bull for his own sins and the sins of his household, and the offering of a goat for the sins of the people, and sending a scapegoat away into the wilderness.

**5:4-6 – “And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He 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.’ ”** – In these few verses, the Holy Spirit both compares and contrasts Aaron, the Old Testament high priest, with Jesus, the High Priest under the New and Eternal Covenant. The writer first uses the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood to relate to the foundation of Christ’s high priestly office. However, after pointing out some similarities, he then really emphasizes the superiority of Christ’s calling over Aaron’s appointment. First, it is important to note that no individual under the Old Testament could just take the office of high priest. Initially, when God first laid out the plan to Moses concerning the tabernacle, Aaron was chosen by God as the high priest. When Korah challenged that Aaron and his sons were the only priests, God definitively declared Aaron as his chosen one – see Numbers chapters 16 and 17. As a result of Korah’s attempt to take the honor for himself as a priest, God destroyed him by opening up the ground and swallowing him up. Next, God destroyed all 250 men (who weren’t priests) who attempted to offer incense to Him with the censers that were only to be used by priests. Finally, God showed His approval of Aaron and the tribe of Levi by making Aaron’s rod sprout, put forth buds, produce blossoms, and bear ripe almonds. Through these miraculous events, God was proving to everyone that the priesthood wasn’t just anyone’s for the taking, but could only be received when a person was called by God. Consistent with this principle, Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest. As Jesus told the Jews in John 8:54, “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me...” Jesus never attempted to take the priesthood on His own, for He wasn’t glorified while on earth – see John 7:39. Thus, He never was a priest while on earth at all – see Hebrews 8:4. Jesus only became a priest following His glorification, that is, following His resurrection from the dead and ascension to the throne. While Psalm 2:7 was quoted in Hebrews chapter 1 to establish the superiority of Christ over the angels by proclaiming His Sonship, here it is referenced to assert Christ’s superiority over Aaron and announce His calling as the true High Priest. As previously established in notes from chapter 1, verse 5, this clear Messianic prophecy from Psalm 2 specifically refers to Jesus’ ascension – see Acts 13:32-35. The logical conclusion is that Jesus was declared to be High Priest following His resurrection from the dead upon receipt of His glorified body – see Hebrews 7:15-16. To further explain that Jesus received His appointment as High Priest when He was glorified, the Holy Spirit through the writer of Hebrews turns to another Old Testament Scripture. This time quoting from Psalm 110:4, the writer clearly makes the point that Jesus received His position as High Priest in accordance with an oath from Yahweh. Psalm 110 is another clear prophecy of the Christ, which the Jews readily acknowledged in a discussion with Jesus – see Matthew 22:41-46. One of the amazing aspects of Jesus’ high priesthood is that it is held by the Messiah or Christ. Many of the Old Testament prophecies of the Christ clearly delineated that He would be a descendant of David, of the tribe of Judah. This apparently would disqualify Him from being a priest, for the priests were called by God only from the tribe of Levi, from the family of Aaron. (This seeming impossibility of Jesus being both a descendant of David on the throne, and also a priest is logically resolved in chapter 7 of Hebrews). Yet, here in Psalm 110, the Scriptures say that the Christ would be a

priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek, who is first mentioned in Genesis chapter 14, predated the Law of Moses and Levi. He was Himself a king-priest, for He was king of Salem, and also a priest of God Most High. The concept of a future king-priest was not only prophesied in Psalm 110, but also was spoken of in Zechariah 6:12-13. While more comprehensive study of Melchizedek's priesthood will be undertaken in the seventh chapter of Hebrews, this preview from chapter 5 is enough to establish that God's declaration of Jesus as High Priest didn't happen while He was on earth, but was spoken in reference to His resurrection and ascension to the throne.

**5:7 – “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.”** – Prior to His glorification, Jesus walked the same road that every human being has to travel. In order for the glorified Christ to effectively function as High Priest on behalf of man, He too had to be taken from among men. In other words, Jesus had to become flesh and blood, and undergo the sufferings commonly experienced by man. While here on earth, Jesus was completely dependent upon His Father for strength – see John 5:19. Even the prayers that He said while on earth were not offered so much in the role of the Intercessor (see John 16:24), but were given as a person who was in complete subjection to the Father. While Jesus was in the flesh, He was vulnerable to sickness, physical weakness, and death; thus, He prayed earnestly to the One who was able to save Him from death. The substitutionary death of Christ on the cross for us was not the offering of the High Priest in the Holy of Holies, but was the precursory sacrifice. The reason that Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient is because of His sinlessness. Although He was a man and could identify with the weaknesses of men, He was without sin and therefore could be the perfect sacrifice. Jesus was heard in His prayers because of His piety or submission to the Father. Even in His intense prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus requested that the Father's will prevail over His human will. Jesus indeed could be the perfect sacrifice, wherein He stood as the substitute for our sin.

**5:8 – “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”** – Even though Jesus was the Eternal Son, when He came to earth, He left His place as God and became a man – see Philippians 2:5-8. This participation of Jesus in a physical existence as a man was an essential step in order for Him to become a High Priest who could truly relate to man in his weaknesses. Once Jesus chose took the form of a bond-servant, He was committed to the same journey in this life that every other person must travel. As a child, He had to learn things in the same manner that other children do. He had to subject Himself to His earthly parents just like every other child does – see Luke 2:51. He had to *increase* in wisdom; He had to *increase* in stature; He had to *increase* in favor with God; and He had to *increase* in favor with men. The Scripture communicates that Jesus had to undergo a natural progression in all of these areas, just like the rest of us do. Of course, suffering is one of the greatest teachers of all in this physical realm. Consider the purpose of physical pain; it is there to protect us from danger and to teach us to make wise choices. While initially it seems that a world without suffering would be a great place, it would instead be a realm not very conducive to learning. The January 24, 2005 issue of People magazine included an article about a 5

year old girl named Ashlyn who had a genetic condition which did not allow her to feel pain. At only 5 years of age, she had already knocked out eight teeth, dug a hole in her eye, and had mistaken hundreds of biting fire ants for dirt. Obviously physical suffering has a strong purpose as a teacher. When we honestly consider emotional pain, we come to the conclusion that it too teaches us about ourselves, about others, and about God. Upon willingly taking His place here, Jesus too had to learn from the school of hard knocks. All of the suffering which He encountered was producing obedience in Him, culminating in His obedience of death on a cross, which ultimately led to His exaltation as a reward. Please don't misunderstand and mistakenly conclude that Jesus sinned and had to pay the consequences of misdeeds as an adult. The Scripture emphasizes that Christ was without sin. However, the Bible is equally clear that Jesus had to undergo a progression of learning, including that which came through suffering, for Him to be able to carry out His purpose on earth. Jesus truly has been made like His brethren in all things, and as a result of His physical existence, can really relate to man in His role as High Priest.

**5:9-10 – “And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.”** – The final verses of this section of Hebrews beautifully conclude the contrast, that is, the superiority of Christ over Aaron. First, it must be asked in what sense Jesus needed to be made perfect. Did His learning obedience by suffering indeed mean that He had to learn to quit sinning? Absolutely not! As was mentioned earlier, the Scriptures are clear that Jesus never sinned. In order to fully understand this statement of Jesus having been made perfect, it may be helpful to turn to the teachings of Walter Scott, an early leader of the Restoration Movement. In a series of articles beginning in January 1 of 1840, Walter Scott argued for “Christian perfection, whatever that may be.” He went on to break down the issue of perfection as described in the Scriptures into three parts: 1) perfection of the conscience, 2) perfection of character, and 3) perfection of the body. Since the Scripture has much to say about perfection, these categories are a logical and helpful means for understanding this issue. It may be asked, “Did Jesus need to be made perfect in the sense of perfection of conscience?” The Scriptural answer to this is a resounding, “No!” As a matter of fact, one of the great differences between Jesus and the earthly high priests under the law is that they had to first offer a sacrifice for their own sins before they could intercede on behalf of the people, while Jesus had no sin – see Hebrews 5:3, Hebrews 7:26-27, Hebrews 9:7, Hebrews 4:15. As will be seen upon study of chapter 10, because the earthly high priests themselves could never truly receive a clean conscience, neither could the common people. However, since Jesus never sinned, He always had a clean conscience and did not need to be perfected in this area. The next logical question is, “Did Jesus need to be perfected in regards to His character?” While Jesus certainly had to undergo suffering as part of His training to fulfill His mission on earth, He was never imperfect in character, for He was without sin. If a true definition of sin is “falling short of God’s glory,” then it is apparent that Jesus was never lacking in character. In what way, then, did Jesus need to be perfected? Was it in regards to perfection of the body? Clearly this is the only area in which Jesus was not perfected while here on earth. Jesus had to shed the physical body and put on His eternal, spiritual body in order for Him to receive His perfected

body. Philippians 3:20-21 states, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the *body of His glory*, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” The gospel of John plainly states that Jesus didn’t have this body of glory while on earth – see John 7:39, 17:5. The rest of the Scriptures further bring out that Jesus in His glorified state has a far superior body to that which He had while on earth – see 1 John 3:2, 1 Timothy 6:15-16. It is logical to then conclude that when this passage of Hebrews says of Jesus, “having been made perfect,” it is speaking in reference to Jesus’ ascension wherein He received His body of glory. Certainly this fits with the other thrust of these verses, where we see that Jesus has been designated as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Chapters 7 and 8 of Hebrews fully establish that Jesus received this High Priesthood upon His ascension – see 7:15-16, 8:1-4. It is in His exalted, glorified position as High Priest that Christ is the source of eternal salvation for those who obey Him. While the blood that Jesus shed on the cross is sufficient for the propitiation of the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), He serves as a High Priest only for those who have obeyed Him. (As a sidenote, the Scriptural concept that God doesn’t hear the prayers of sinners is fully consistent with the stance that Jesus only serves as an intermediary for those who have obeyed the gospel.) While the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was an absolutely essential part of God’s plan for redemption, the Scripture emphasizes that it is through Jesus’ work as High Priest that we receive eternal salvation. This point from Hebrews is exactly the same as that made in the eighth chapter of Romans, “Christ Jesus is He who dies, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” The work of Christ was not finished on the cross, but is finished in the heavenly realm where He stands always as High Priest for the Christian. In the conclusion of this section of Hebrews, we see that our High Priest can serve perfectly on our behalf. He was a man who learned obedience through His suffering on earth, so He truly understands our situation and He can deal gently with us. He lived without sin on earth, so He can make His offering of His sacrifice with a clear conscience, which, in turn, can cleanse our consciences. Finally, He has been glorified to His position as High Priest, where He can stand in the presence of God to make ongoing intercession for us. What a far greater High Priest than Aaron could ever be!

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 5:11-14**  
(Rebuke for Lack of Maturity)

**5:11-12** – “Concerning him we have much to say and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, 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.” – In the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit continues His pattern of inserting a reprimand into the middle of a subject in order to get the audience to listen up. At the beginning of chapter 2, the exhortation was “Pay much closer attention!” In chapter 3, the warning was issued, “Take care, brethren.” Chapter 4 began with the words, “Therefore, let us fear ...” Now in chapter 5, the writer of Hebrews would like to teach further about the priesthood of Melchizedek, but is concerned that it will pass over the heads of his audience. In order to ensure that the message about Melchizedek truly gets through to his listeners, the Holy Spirit gives a rebuke to get His students’ attention. Sometimes in schooling, a subject can be difficult to master because of the limitations of the teacher. However, the majority of the time, difficulties in learning are due to disinterest or laziness of the student. While the topic of Jesus’ priesthood is more advanced than some of the basic teachings of Christianity, the Holy Spirit is not lacking in His ability to communicate through the writer of Hebrews. The only glitch in this communication process is on the side of the learner. Without mincing words, the Holy Spirit rebukes His listeners for becoming dull of hearing. In other words, most of these Christians had become slow learners. At the time of this writing, it was expected that the majority of Hebrew Christians would have fruit from teaching others. Instead of there being a number of “masters” or at least “journeymen,” everyone seemed to still be in the apprenticeship program. Although there should have been many upper-level students who could teach the basics, there was still a need for elementary principles to be taught to everyone. This naivety of Christians was disappointing to the writer of Hebrews, for the Scripture places much emphasis upon maturity in the discipleship process. In Jesus’ teaching about the parable of the sower, the good soil brought forth fruit to maturity – see Luke 8:11-15. One of the Apostle Paul’s goals was to present every man complete (mature, perfect) in Christ. Here in Hebrews, we see that these Christians should have been eating solid food, but were still on the milk. In the physical realm of raising children, most children are consistently eating solid food by 1 year of age. If after this age, they continue to drink milk only, there is cause for concern because they won’t grow, and will finally die. The writer of Hebrews is clearly disappointed that the Hebrew Christians were still in need of being “nursed,” while they should have been able to be “nursing” others.

**5:13** – “For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.” – One of the surest ways to get a response from a child is to chide him for acting like a baby. The writer of Hebrews is really pouring it on to immature Christians for being a bunch of “spiritual babies.” Immaturity of Christians is obvious in many ways. In Paul’s first recorded letter to the Corinthians, he calls them infants in Christ because of their fleshly behavior – see 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. Jealousy and strife between Christians is childish behavior which can only be overcome through increased maturity. However, in the letter of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit identifies baby



Christians as those who are not accustomed to the word of righteousness. It seems like there is a connection between fleshly behavior and an unwillingness to diligently study the Scriptures. According to 1 Corinthians chapter 3, the fleshly-minded Christian isn't ready for solid food (same point made here and in the next verse). However, the lack of effort in understanding the Scriptures is a sure means of continuing on as a fleshly-minded person. The implication here in Hebrews is to get on a "weaning" program. Every Christian needs to start consistently studying the Scriptures and get a solid grasp on the basic teachings. After mastering the basics, he needs to work to understand some of the "meat" of the word, with the long-term goal being to comprehend the entire Word of God. God has written with a purpose for man to understand; we should want to understand – see Deuteronomy 29:29.

**5:14 – “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”** – It has been said that some people know just enough to be dangerous. In other words, they have knowledge, but no discernment. The Scripture phrases it this way in 1 Corinthians 8:1, “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.” There is a certain amount of maturity required to be able to “handle accurately the word of truth.” In spite of man's tendency to shirk any responsibility to be a “role model,” God has always intended for there to be a connection between the message and the messenger. Proverbs chapters 25 and 26 have much to say about messengers, both good and bad. The following verses are a sample to communicate God's desire for a messenger who will “walk the talk.” On the positive side, “Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters” or “Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land.” On the negative side, “Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble” or “Like an archer who wounds everyone, so is he who hires a fool or hires those who pass by.” God is no fool and He intends for His messengers to be faithful – to back up their words with their life. Thus Paul told the Philippians, “The things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:9) It is clear that God expects those who will eat the solid food to be mature enough not to choke on it. As Christians, we must not only “be diligent to present ourselves approved to God as workmen who do not need to be ashamed,” but we also must have our senses trained so that we won't be taken in by those who “distort the Scriptures to their own destruction.” As we mature as Christians, we don't just want to know the Bible intellectually, but we want to know it in practice as well. Let's grow up and start spiritually eating like we should.

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 6:1-8**  
(The Danger of Falling Away)

**6:1-2 – “Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, 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.”** – After closing chapter 5 by challenging his audience to grow up spiritually, the writer of Hebrews now prepares to delve into some of the more mature teachings of Christianity. Although it is essential for a Christian to understand the elementary principles of Christ, he must move on to some more mature doctrine in order to continue to grow. In the physical arena, every successful coach stresses the importance of basic skills for a team to reach their potential. “Back to Basics” is a rallying cry at the beginning of every season, and at various times throughout the season. However, perfect execution of the basic skills is not alone sufficient to guarantee success. Coaches have particular sets that they run for their offense or defense, with “wrinkles” thrown in as the season progresses. Mastery of the basics is a necessary foundation in order for comprehension and execution of the more complicated plan. In the same manner, Christians must have a solid grasp of the elementary teachings of Christianity as a precursor for comprehension of more mature doctrine and continued growth. At this point in the book of Hebrews, the writer has put forth a challenge to his audience, and is now ready to charge forward for those who are willing to press on to maturity with him. Understanding of much of the rest of the book of Hebrews will rest on a firm comprehension of the basic teachings of Scripture including the shadows of the Old Testament. Although it is not the intent of the Holy Spirit to reexamine or explain again about these elementary principles in this section of Scripture, He briefly mentions exactly what these “basics” of Christianity are. He first speaks of the foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God. Repentance is well defined as a “change in mind which results in a change in actions.” The Scripture clearly teaches that an individual must repent before he can have his sins forgiven – see Acts 2:38, 3:19. Faith toward God is another prerequisite for salvation as consistently communicated throughout Scripture – see Ephesians 2:8-9. The whole of Scripture is really dedicated to help the individual develop a reasoned belief in Jesus and His words. As Romans 10:17 declares, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” The next basic teaching mentioned by the writer of Hebrews is “instruction about washings.” This literally should be translated “instructions about immersions” and includes immersion as described in the New Testament. Immersion into Christ in water, immersion with the Holy Spirit, and the immersion of suffering should all be understood as part of the elementary teachings. The Christian should also recognize the purpose behind the laying on of hands as taught in the Scriptures. This would include the Old Testament concept of leadership being passed on, as well as the gifts of the Holy Spirit given through the apostles, and the appointment of evangelists and elders. Finally, the writer of Hebrews mentions the resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment. It is important for the Christian to realize that Christ’s resurrection from the dead guarantees our final resurrection – see 1 Corinthians 15. It is also essential that we recognize that every person who dies outside of Christ will receive a judgment with eternal consequences. This is the Holy Spirit’s summary of the elementary

teachings about the Christ. Those of you who are familiar with the New Creation study booklet series by Jay Wilson will recognize that a good understanding of the material therein is a solid foundation for learning some more mature information from the Scriptures.

**6:3 – “And this we will do, if God permits.”** – It is the clear intention of the writer of Hebrews to press on to the more mature teachings, and it is his desire for us to accompany him. However, he is aware that we are dependent upon God’s will for us to understand – see Acts 16:14, Matthew 13:10-17, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12. There are those who will never understand the Scriptures because they don’t love the truth enough to diligently search it out. As will be seen in the following verses, some people will never comprehend these teachings because they have passed the point of repentance.

**6:4-6 – “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”** – There is repeated emphasis in the book of Hebrews on the serious need to pay attention to the Prophet who has spoken from heaven in these last days. The dire consequences of a Christian’s casual attitude are frighteningly put forth in this section of Scripture. If a Christian is too lazy to press on to mature teachings, he will not grow, and will eventually die. While the Calvinist doctrine of “once-saved, always-saved” is predominant in denominational teaching, this passage from Hebrews clearly refutes it. The fact that this passage is speaking of people who were once Christians is evidenced from the description of their one-time participation as children of God. These apostates are first described as those who have once been enlightened. In a metaphorical sense, enlightenment can mean a person’s knowledge of the truth. In other words, we might say that their eyes had been opened. In order to be consistent with other Scriptures, it is certain that “enlightened” means not only those who know the truth, but those who have been immersed into Christ – see Ephesians 5:7-14, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. These people are next spoken of as those who have tasted of the heavenly gift. This expression again is referring to those who are in Christ, who have Christ within, and a hope of eternal life. The writer of Hebrews further speaks of those who have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 explicitly states that a person is in the Spirit if the Spirit of God dwells in him. Again there is no doubt that a person who was once a true Christian is being described. Finally this passage is written about those who have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. Christians have definitely tasted the good word of God, and only Christians have got a glimpse of the powers of the age to come. Jesus made this very point when He told Nicodemus, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3) When people who have experienced these blessings of Christianity fall away, it is impossible for them to come back. As a physical example of apostasy, chapter 3 of this letter referred to the Israelites who perished in the wilderness. Hebrews 4:11 gave a sound warning to the church to learn from their example, “so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.” Obviously the Scripture is not simply speaking of a person who has fallen into sin, but rather portrays someone who

gives up instead of finding Scriptural help to overcome. Although the Scripture does not define the line at which, upon crossing, it is impossible to return, it does give some indicators. First of all, there is a warning throughout this book against unbelief settling in. As Jesus taught in the parable of the sower, apostasy can happen to brand-new Christians (rocky soil) as well as to Christians who have been in the faith for a long time (thorny soil). When a Christian consistently chooses to put the things of this world above the spiritual, there is great danger. Hebrews 10:26 speaks of the danger of willful sin, and 3:13 warns of the hardening process of deceitful sin. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the need to hold our faith firm to the end. The twelfth chapter of Hebrews holds Esau as an example of someone who couldn't find repentance (though he sought for it with tears) because he despised his birthright. This passage in chapter 6 summarizes all these things by saying that those who fall away "again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." In order to avoid the danger of falling away, Christians must really prize their calling as children of God. We must "seek first His [God's] kingdom and His righteousness." The child of God also needs to renew his mind constantly so that he can withstand persecution and/or the passing pleasures of this life. Simply put, we must learn to live by faith so that we can receive God's help in finishing this race.

**6:7-8 – "For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned."** – In these verses, the writer of Hebrews uses an illustration to drive home his point of the previous verses. In the physical realm, God sends rain for a purpose – He wants the earth to yield fruit – see Acts 14:16-17. So it is true in the spiritual sphere; God gives good things to Christians so that they will bear fruit for Him. Isaiah 55:10-11 states clearly the intent of God's Word, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will my word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." In this passage of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit says that God will reward or bless the ground which brings forth useful vegetation. In addition to receiving the rains from above, this ground must be tilled in order for it to be productive. When there is no cultivation, only thorns and thistles arise although there is plenty of moisture. When relating this back to Christians, we see that God always does His part; there is plenty of spiritual moisture. However, if the Christian doesn't cultivate his heart by uniting the gospel with faith, there will be no good fruit. In the end, we are judged by our fruit, because it cannot lie – see Matthew 7:16-20. For those who produce good fruit, both the fruit of the Spirit and disciples, there will be a bounteous reward. On the other hand, for those whose lives are like a worthless field of thorns, there will only be the judgment of fire. Let's be motivated to produce useful vegetation for God!

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 6:9-20**  
(God's Unchangeable Purpose)

**6:9-10 – “But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.”** – In the previous section of this book, the writer of Hebrews amply pointed out that there are those who become Christians and then fall away from the truth. He further highlighted the eternal judgment that will be meted out to those who have become apostate. While reprimanding his audience at the end of chapter 5 for their lack of maturity, the Holy Spirit now turns His attention to encouragement of the brethren. He wants the Hebrew Christians (and us, for that matter) to realize that they can make it to the eternal Promised Land. The writer of Hebrews “sticks up” for the brethren as he maintains that he is convinced of better things about them than what happens to those who have fallen away. He is confident that his audience will do things that are consistent with those who are being saved. He is sure that these Christians would grasp the fundamentals of Christianity and then press on to maturity. The same main point is made by Paul when he communicated with the Corinthian brethren that, if they held fast to the gospel which he preached to them, they would be saved by it. The writer of Hebrews definitely believes in those Christians to which he is writing, and the implication is that God believes in us. God earnestly desires for each of us to make it to heaven, and He is willing to do everything in His power, without taking away our free will, to help us get there. While God has no memory of the sins of a Christian who is living by faith, He doesn't forget the work that we have done for Him. Abraham successfully appealed to God's recognition of the deeds of the righteous when he was attempting to save Sodom and Gomorrah as he asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” Malachi 3:16-18 paints an awesome picture of God's remembrance of those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. God, who desires that we work in His field, is proud of the work that we accomplish for Him. In many of Jesus' parables, He brings forth God's pleasure for those who have dutifully and lovingly carried out their responsibilities – see Matthew 25:19-23, Luke 12:37. One of the great themes of Scripture is God's reward for those who have labored for Him – see 1 Corinthians 15:58. One other aspect that is brought forth in these verses is that love toward God is shown by ministering to the saints. In Matthew 22, when Jesus was asked about the great commandment in the Law, He responded that the greatest was to love God. He then added that a second commandment was *like* it – to love your neighbor. Love of God is truly demonstrated through works of love for our brethren – see 1 John 4:19-21. God appreciates a fervent, sincere love of the brethren because it covers a multitude of sins – see 1 Peter 4:8. Anyone who will walk as a true new creature, as evidenced by faith working through their love, doesn't have to worry about falling away, but will receive God's peace and mercy upon themselves – see Galatians 6:15-16.

**6:11-12 – “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence 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.”** – The Holy

Spirit brings this thought of working for the Lord down to a personal level. At some point, it doesn't matter what everyone else is doing, what matters is you! God's desire is not for *any* to perish, but for all to come to repentance – see 2 Peter 3:9. In these verses of Hebrews, the desire is for *each* one to exercise the same diligence. It takes diligence – a consistent, perseverant effort – to reach the finish line in Christianity. In 2 Peter 1:5-11, the Spirit emphasizes the importance of diligence for entrance into the eternal kingdom. Successful Christianity requires consistent effort on the part of the Christian as evidenced by Jesus' requirement for the disciple to pick up his cross *daily* and follow Him. As was spoken of twice in chapter 3, there is focus directed on reaching the end of this journey. A ferocious finish, breaking the tape, is necessary for eternal victory, and this can only be accomplished through endurance built up in diligent training. The type of diligent and consistent training necessary to complete a marathon or triathlon in the physical realm is a good example of the discipline required for completion of life's journey. When a person "hits the wall" in an endurance event, his/her muscles begin to feel rubbery, and even the brain starts to shut down. In much the same manner, a person can become sluggish on the spiritual walk to heaven. Thankfully, the Lord is a perfect coach who knows when we need some extra recuperation, some extra nourishment, and some extra endurance to press on. He provides us with perseverance and encouragement through the Scriptures (Romans 15:4), nourishment through communion with Him and our brethren (John 6:55), and endurance through the *second wind* of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 40:31, Ephesians 3:16). Completion of this race is doable with the help of the Spirit, so the only question that remains is if we are willing to do our part. Anyone who truly longs to make it to heaven needs to be an imitator of those who have made it. There is a pattern that becomes obvious over time: those who desire success surround themselves with successful people and imitate their habits. People who associate with quitters usually end up dropping out themselves. Let's imitate those who have gone before us and inherited the promises. Two characteristics of the spiritually successful are faith and patience. Faith is paramount as evidenced by the recurring focus of this book and the whole Bible upon it. Faith is belief in God's Word; it is absolute assurance that what God has spoken will come true. As will be clearly pointed out in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the common thread of all the Old Testament greats is faith. The book of Romans unequivocally makes the point that the only people who are justified are those who have faith. Patience is another attribute common to those who receive the promises. The King James Version of the Bible often translates this word for patience "longsuffering." In this context, the implication is that those who receive the promises must wait upon the Lord with perseverance. As Christians, we need to imitate those who have completed this race before us by holding to our faith with patient endurance.

**6:13-14 – “For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.”** – This promise was first put forth in slightly different words to Abram when he was seventy-five years old. This is recorded in the twelfth chapter of Genesis when God told Abraham to leave his family and depart for the land which God would show him. Abraham believed God's promise as evidenced by his departure from Haran for the land of Canaan. The same basic promise was restated some years later in Genesis 15 when Abram considered making Eliezer of Damascus his heir. This time,

when God promised that Abram's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in heaven, Abram again believed God, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness. God made a covenant with Abram, with God alone, as a smoking oven and flaming torch, passing between the pieces of the animals. Many years later, upon Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac on the altar, God swore by Himself that He would bless Abraham and his seed, and multiply his seed – see Genesis 22:15-18. The initial gift of God's promise to Abraham was the birth of Isaac and the subsequent formation of the nation of Israel through Isaac's son, Jacob. However, the real promise from God was a mystery in the Old Testament that was only fully revealed in the New Testament. The third chapter of Galatians really brings to light the fact that the fulfillment of this promise was the gift of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul logically argues that the promise was made to Abraham and to his seed, not to seeds. His point is that the promise was ultimately made to Christ (see Acts 2:33), and this promise would then also be given to those who are immersed into Christ (see Galatians 3:22-29). The promise is defined as the Holy Spirit in Galatians 3:14, wherein it is made known that even the Gentiles would get to receive the blessing of Abraham through Jesus Christ. If Abraham's initial receipt of this promise was Isaac and Israel, the fulfillment of the promise is the indwelling Holy Spirit and the Church, which is spiritual Israel.

**6:15 – “And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.”** – As was brought forth in commentary in the earlier verse, it was many years between the initial promise made to Abraham and the physical realization of it. Abraham was seventy-five when he was first told that he would be blessed, and he was one hundred years old when Isaac was finally born. During this time, there were multiple opportunities for doubt and substitute attempts other than God's way. Yet, even in the midst of some personal mistakes, Abraham persevered in faith. As Romans 4:20-21 states, “yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.” Let us imitate Abraham, and doggedly hold on to our belief that what God has promised us as new creatures, He will perform.

**6:16 – “For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.”** – The whole purpose of oaths throughout the history of the human race has been to appeal to a higher source of authority as the backing behind their words. Whether this oath was based on God as the ultimate truth, or on His Word as the final authority, or upon some other object associated with God, the concept was that a person who broke their oath would receive divine revenge. The serious nature in which the ancients held to their oaths is communicated in various ways in the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 summarizes the command given in the Law when it says, “When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.” As an example of the solemn attitude with which a vow was upheld, Jephthah, one of the judges of Israel, followed through on sacrificing his daughter due to a thoughtless vow which he had made to the Lord – see Judges 11:29-40. Of course, Jesus brought the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount for Christians not to make an oath at all, but to be true to their word. However, the main point here in Hebrews is to

establish that men swear by an authority greater than themselves to communicate the truthfulness of their words.

**6:17-18 – “In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.” –**

As the Maker of man, God fully understands the intricate workings of the human mind. God has been willing to go to great lengths to get some important information through our thick skulls. In order to prove the seriousness of His promise to the heirs, God was even willing to swear by Himself. When the Sovereign God of the universe makes an oath, it is definitely time to listen up! God truly wants all Christians to recognize that His purpose is unchangeable, and that there is no force in the heavens or on earth that can stop His plan. There are many different opinions about the two unchangeable things spoken of here in Hebrews. Some say that the two unchangeable things are God’s promise and His oath confirming that promise. Others maintain that God’s promise to Abraham had two oaths in it, for God said, “I will *surely* bless you and I will *surely* multiply you.” While it is difficult to nail down exactly what these two unchangeable things are, it seems to me that they are two distinct oaths given in the book of Hebrews. The oath is God’s guarantee that what He has spoken will come about. Two different oaths given in the book of Hebrews really strengthen and encourage Christians to lay hold of the hope set before us. One of these oaths is clearly the promise given to Abraham, which is ultimately fulfilled in the granting of the Holy Spirit to Christians. The rest of the New Testament really emphasizes the guarantee that the Holy Spirit gives us. Ephesians 1:13-14 relays that the Spirit of promise is given to us as a pledge of our inheritance. The Holy Spirit is also called “Christ in you, the *hope* of glory” (Colossians 1:27). It seems from the Scripture that both the blessing of Abraham as well as the multiplication of his descendants are fulfilled through the promise of the Spirit being given to both Jews and Gentiles – see Acts 3:19-26, Galatians 3:13-29. That leaves us with one other oath given in the book of Hebrews, which is also a tremendous source of encouragement for the Christian. This oath is God’s promise that Christ would be made a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. The confidence granted to the Christian because of Jesus’ High Priesthood will be brought into focus in the next few chapters of Hebrews. The encouragement from these two unchangeable things is specifically for those who have “fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.” To fully understand the significance of this statement, it is important to recognize the Old Testament provision for the Israelites of the cities of refuge. The purpose and laws of the cities of refuge are specified in Numbers 35 and Joshua 20. Any person who unintentionally had killed another person could flee to one of six appointed cities, a city of the Levites, and thereby escape the blood avenger. However, if the refugee left that city anytime during the life of the residing high priest, he could be put to death by the blood avenger. The horns of the bronze altar appear to be the final place of refuge under the Old Testament – see Exodus 21:12-14, 1 Kings 1:50-53, 2:28. Under the New Testament, there is provision for the Christian because of the combined sacrifice and High Priesthood of Christ. It is because of Jesus’ sacrifice that our sins have been forgiven so that we could receive the Holy Spirit, and it is due to His ongoing



intercessory work as High Priest that we can presently stand uncondemned before the Father. As Christians, we need to flee for refuge from the evil conscience of the old man and lay hold of the hope of glory that is set before us in Christ.

**6:19-20 – “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”** – For the Christian, there is one great hope. As the fourth chapter of Ephesians says, “just as you also were called in *one hope* of your calling.” This one hope of the Christian is the hope of our bodily resurrection – see Romans 8:23-25. As mentioned in previous verses, the two oaths of God referred to in the book of Hebrews are God’s promise to Abraham (the promised Holy Spirit), and Jesus’ glory as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Both of these oaths are directly related to our hope of glory. The Holy Spirit is actually termed “the hope of glory” in Colossians 1:27. The Spirit has been given to us as a pledge of our inheritance, that is, the guarantee of our bodily resurrection – see Ephesians 1:13-14. In like manner, Christ’s glorification as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek is also a surety of our hope of a glorified body. According to Hebrews 5, Christ’s High Priesthood came upon His glorification; He received it upon having been made perfect. In other words, Jesus became High Priest when He took on His body of glory. As revealed in Hebrews 1:10 (also corroborated in Romans 8:29-30), God’s purpose includes bringing many sons to glory, with Jesus being the author of our salvation. Thus, Jesus’ ascension to the throne guarantees our future bodily resurrection – see also 1 Corinthians 15:12-20. Our hope of glory, then, is an anchor for our soul. The purpose of an anchor on a boat is to give it stability in the midst of stormy seas. The guarantee of our resurrection grants security to us in a temporal world full of trials and temptations. This hope gives us the appropriate perspective as we now can view everything with eternity in mind. The Scriptural usage of the word “hope” is unlike the use in our modern English language. We may get our hopes up that we *might* get to vacation this year or some such thing. When the Bible speaks of hope, it speaks of something that is *sure*, not a *might* or *maybe*. Our hope of a bodily resurrection is both sure and steadfast; the guarantee keeps us on course in the midst of even the most difficult circumstances. This hope even enters within the veil; in other words, it takes us behind the curtain of the Holy of Holies into the very presence of God. At Jesus’ crucifixion, the veil of the physical temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This signified the removal of sin, the barrier separating man from God. Upon Jesus’ ascension, He was glorified to High Priest and entered into the Holy of Holies just as the Aaronic High Priest did on the Day of Atonement under the Old Covenant. However, Jesus entered into the true Holy of Holies, into heaven itself, to remain there forever. This trailblazing on our behalf allows us to faithfully draw near to God with confidence. Let’s be imitators of our Big Brother, and follow Him to glory.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 7:1-10**

(Melchizedek)

**7:1-2 – “For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.”** – Finally, the writer of Hebrews turns his attention toward Melchizedek, about whom he has had “much to say” since chapter 5. Very little is known about Melchizedek aside from the Holy Spirit’s revelation in the book of Hebrews. Outside of the book of Hebrews, his name is only mentioned twice, both times in the Old Testament. The first time that Melchizedek appears in the Old Testament is in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Genesis. The setting of this appearance is Abram’s return from defeating Chedorlaomer and three other kings who were with him. Chedorlaomer and his allies had taken Lot captive while squashing the rebellion of 5 kings, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram took with him 318 trained men of his household and routed the armies of Chedorlaomer. He then brought back Lot and all his possessions along with all the other goods and people that had been plundered. Upon his return, the king of Sodom came out to meet Abram in hopes of receiving back his people. At the same time, Melchizedek, king of Salem (not involved in any of the aforementioned fighting) and priest of God Most High, brought out bread and wine. Melchizedek then blessed Abram, and Abram, in turn, gave a tenth of all the spoils of war to Melchizedek. Melchizedek’s name literally means “my king is righteous” or, as the Holy Spirit says here in Hebrews, “king of righteousness.” He also was king of the city of Salem (which means peace), which is another name for Jerusalem – see Psalm 76:2. In summary, Melchizedek was a joint priest and king who lived in the days of Abraham. He was both “king of righteousness” and was “king of peace.” He also was superior to Abraham, the father of the faithful, as evidenced by the fact that he both blessed Abraham and received a tithe from him. The only other time Melchizedek is mentioned in the Scriptures is in Psalm 110:4, where it is prophesied that the Messiah will be a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. This oath made by God approximately one thousand years before the birth of Jesus will be expounded upon later in this chapter of Hebrews.

**7:3 – “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.”** – The Holy Spirit, through the writer of Hebrews, now gives us some extra insight into Melchizedek, which would be impossible to know with certainty apart from this revelation. Genesis’ silence concerning the genealogy and life span of Melchizedek seems strange considering the precedent of listing these facts for every other prominent person of God mentioned therein. However, the book of Hebrews tells us why this information was neglected in the book of Genesis – it simply didn’t exist. Melchizedek didn’t have a father or mother or earthly lineage at all. He had neither a birthday, nor a date of death. As a matter of fact, the Scripture says that he was made like the Son of God, and that he abides a priest forever. While there are those who maintain that Melchizedek was simply a foreshadow or type of Christ, this chapter of Hebrews leads me to the conclusion that Melchizedek was a manifestation of Christ in the Old

Testament. A man who was greater than Abraham, who had neither birth nor death, and who served as both priest and king, seems like an Old Testament appearance of the Son of God. One thing is certainly clear – God sent Melchizedek to Abraham for the ultimate purpose of communicating to Christians the High Priesthood of Christ.

**7:4-5 – “Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.”** – Having brought out the history of Melchizedek from the Old Testament, the writer of Hebrews challenges his audience to think about the greatness of this priest. Abraham was a truly great man, but he gave his tithe to Melchizedek because he recognized Melchizedek’s superiority over him. Consider that Abraham is called “the patriarch” because God chose him to be the father of the entire Israelite nation. As is established in the fourth chapter of Romans, Abraham is not only the father of the faithful among the circumcised, but among the uncircumcised also. In other words, Abraham is “the father of us all [the faithful]” – see Romans 4:16. It seems as if God chose Abraham because he was the most spiritual man alive in his day (he was even called the friend of God), yet Abraham willingly gave a tenth of the spoils of war to a man greater than he. This fact again makes a person consider that Melchizedek must not have been a mere man. This may well be a time when, in the words of Jesus, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” The writer of Hebrews continues to establish Melchizedek’s superiority from another angle. The Old Testament relays the fact that every tribe received an inheritance in the Promised Land except for the tribe of Levi. They were instead scattered throughout all of Israel, and they received a tithe from the other tribes – see Joshua 21:41-42, Joshua 13:14, Numbers 18:24, Deuteronomy 14:27-29. The Old Covenant, given by God through Moses, clearly delineated that the priests from the tribe of Levi were to collect a tenth from the rest of the people of Israel. In other words, although the Levites were brothers with the rest of the tribes because they were all descendants of Abraham, they received a tenth from their brethren because it was required by the Law. The writer of Hebrews has set the stage to drive home Melchizedek’s greatness in the coming verses. Let’s review a few key points in summary of his foundation: 1) the priests as descendants of Levi are held above the rest of the people, as evidenced by their receipt of the tithe, 2) the patriarch, Abraham, is greater than his descendants, including Levi, and 3) Melchizedek, since he received a tithe from Abraham, is obviously superior to Abraham.

**7:6-7 – “But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.”** – Before Abraham ever met Melchizedek, God had already given Abraham the promises. Abraham ended up being the great-grandfather of Levi, the tribe from which later the priests would be chosen. In contrast, Melchizedek had no genealogical line, either ascending or descending, but stood alone as the king-priest in Salem. As priest of God Most High, he gave a blessing to Abraham. As a result of this blessing, Abraham fully recognized Melchizedek’s greatness and voluntarily offered him a tenth of all his spoils. Not only can Melchizedek’s superiority over

Abraham be established on account of his receipt of the tithe, but also because of his impartation of the blessing. Using simple logic, the writer of Hebrews says that it is obvious that “the lesser is blessed by the greater.” Sons don’t bless their fathers, but dying fathers bless their sons. Jacob didn’t bless the “man” who wrestled with him all night, but received a blessing from God who changed Jacob’s name to Israel. Always, the greater being gives a blessing, while the lesser receives it.

**7:8-10 – “In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.”** – Under the terms of the Law, the Levites in general received the tithes from the people, and in turn, would give a tenth to the priests – see Numbers 18:26-28. Although the Levites as a whole, and certainly the priests among them, were set apart within the nation of Israel for holy service to God, they were still mortal men. They were brothers of the rest of the Israelites, and had simply been honored because of God’s calling them – see Numbers 3:12-13. However, Melchizedek wasn’t a part of this group, but was a singular person. In contrast with the mortality of the Levites, Melchizedek is immortal – the writer here says that “he lives on.” (This is another indicator that Melchizedek was an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament, for who else is immortal?) Obviously the priesthood of Melchizedek is greater than the priesthood of the Levites. To further drive the superiority of Melchizedek home, the writer of Hebrews brings up one more logical assertion. In a patriarchal society, it is impossible for a descendant to be greater than his ancestor – see Matthew 22:41-46. Hence, if Levi’s descendants received tithes, the honor would go back to Levi himself. In the same way, since Levi was a great-grandson of Abraham, Abraham would receive the honor as the patriarch of the whole nation of Israel. In this sense if Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, then Levi was paying the tithe. The only logical conclusion is that Melchizedek and his priesthood have supremacy over Levi and his priesthood.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 7:11-19**

(Superiority of Melchizedek's Priesthood)

**7:11 – “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?”** – Throughout the entire book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit has been communicating that God has ushered in a new order, and that the old order has been brought to an end. In the first few chapters, it has been shown that Christ is far greater than the prophets, the angels, and Moses; hence, the words brought forth through Jesus are superior to those of the Law. Now, the writer of Hebrews is emphasizing the superior order of Melchizedek's priesthood over that of the Levitical priesthood. Thus, the new covenant inaugurated through the blood offered by Jesus is far better than the old covenant which was inseparably linked to animal sacrifices and the imperfect priesthood of mortal men. There are a number of key points brought out in this verse. First of all, it should be clear that God's ultimate intention is perfection for His people. If perfection wasn't His aim, then an imperfect priesthood could be sufficient. However, if God's goal for His people is perfection, then nothing less than a perfect sacrifice and perfect priesthood will do. A second, and related, point here is that God does have a perfect system put in place to bring forth perfection in His people. The Old Testament itself foretold that it would be replaced with a New Covenant having a better sacrifice, a greater priesthood, and superior laws. This fact makes it clear that God's purpose was much more far-reaching than what could be accomplished under the Old Testament. Just as God's promise with Abraham set the stage for fulfillment of that promise through the indwelling Holy Spirit, so Melchizedek's priesthood of Abram's day was a preview of the work of that priesthood being accomplished through Jesus on our behalf. In the same manner that the Law couldn't invalidate the promise previously given by God through oath to Abraham, so the Levitical priesthood was never intended to replace the priesthood of Melchizedek which was sworn to Jesus. Both the Law and its accompanying priesthood were added for the sake of preparing mankind for the coming of Christ – compare this thought with that made in Galatians 3:14-24. A third, and very interesting, point found in this verse is that the Levitical priesthood was the basis on which the people received the Law. At first glance, it may seem that this simply relates the role of the priests under the Old Covenant to teach the people the Law – see Leviticus 10:10-11, Ezekiel 44:23. However, there seems to be something deeper here, for the terminology is that the priesthood was the *basis* for the people's reception of the Law. Let us consider a few hints that have been left for us throughout the Scriptures. First of all, we find that Moses served as a Levitical priest, although he was a brother and not a descendant of Aaron – see Psalm 99:6, Exodus 40:17-33. Fast-forwarding in the book of Hebrews to chapter 9, verses 18-21, we see that Moses served as a priest in the inauguration of the first covenant. Thus the Holy Spirit chose His words carefully when He used the term “Levitical priesthood” in Hebrews 7:11 and not “Aaronic priesthood.” However, the order of Aaron's high-priesthood is next mentioned. Only the descendants of Aaron were allowed to serve as high priests under the first covenant. In other words, the priesthood was the basis for the Law, but the Law was also the basis for the priesthood. While this may be difficult to explain, the priesthood and the Law are obviously linked together.

There is a mutual dependence of each one upon the other. If we could borrow a phrase from the “intelligent design” camp of the “origins” controversy, here is a case of “irreducible complexity” in the spiritual realm. To borrow a different thought but similar concept from I Corinthians 11:11-12, “However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.” The priesthood and the Law cannot be independent. Just as the Law could not come into place without Moses’ service as a Levitical priest, so no man could be a priest apart from the specifications given in the Law.

**7:12 – “For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.”** – Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that He didn’t come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. This sentiment is consistent with everything put forth in the book of Hebrews. The Law was a shadow of things to come, while the New Covenant is the substance of God’s mind and plans. As mentioned earlier, from the beginning, God’s eternal plan constituted the priesthood of Melchizedek, not of Aaron. It was simply a matter of timing, then, when the priesthood would be changed. Since the Levitical priesthood and the Law are inextricably joined together, if one is changed the other must also be changed. Thus, when Aaron’s order was replaced with the order of Melchizedek, there had to be a change from the Law of Moses to a New Covenant.

**7:13-14 – “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.”** – The Hebrew Christians would clearly recognize the Messianic teaching from Psalm 110. The majority of the Jews readily accepted that the Christ was to come as a descendant of David, from David’s hometown of Bethlehem – see Matthew 22:42, John 7:42. The genealogical records from both Matthew’s and Luke’s account establish that Jesus was from the Davidic line. However, it was contrary to the teachings of the Law for Jesus of the tribe of Judah to serve at the altar. The Old Testament was clear that only the descendants from Levi could minister at the tabernacle or temple. Any layman who came near was to be put to death – see Numbers 3:9-10. When Uzziah, king of Judah, attempted to burn incense in the temple, Azariah and eighty priests with him opposed him. When he persisted, God struck him with an outbreak of leprosy on his forehead. For Jesus to attempt to minister as an earthly priest would have been a violation of the Mosaic Law. Jesus, however, became a high priest in the heavenly realm, and brought with Him a change of law.

**7:15-17 – “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.’”** – Earlier in verse 11, the writer of Hebrews made the point that the priesthood was the basis for the Law. Hence, if the priesthood was changed, there would have to be an accompanying change in the Law. Now, the argument is brought forth from the other side. The Law prescribed that priests could only be chosen from the tribe of Levi. If then there was a

priest whom God called who was not a Levite, the Law would have to be altered for this to occur. (As a sidenote, God never goes against His word as set forth in the terms of His covenant with man. Whenever God brings in a new era with a different intention, He brings with it a new testament. All of the religious people who attempt to cut and paste the words explicitly stated in the New Testament must disregard the precedent set by God Himself. He is One judge to whom I wouldn't want to give a dissenting opinion. Along with this thought, groups like the Mormons attempt to avoid the surety of the Scriptures by claiming that there is another testament of Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews leaves no "wobble room" for such false doctrine. Implied in the book of Hebrews is that while the Old Covenant wasn't perfect, the New Testament is the perfect culmination of God's plan. Secondly, since the New Covenant was inaugurated through the blood of the one-time, perfect sacrifice, whose blood would inaugurate "another testament of Jesus Christ"? The final point in relation to this faulty position that there is another testament which supersedes the New Testament of the Bible is that Hebrews 13:20 speaks of the blood of Christ as the "blood of the *eternal* covenant.") The fact is that Jesus' priesthood is according to the likeness of Melchizedek, not of Aaron or Levi. The covenant given on Sinai required a physical lineage for the priesthood, but the eternal covenant requires the power of an indestructible life. By reason of Jesus' resurrection from the dead no more to return to decay, He has the priesthood of Melchizedek, and the authority to change the old law by replacing it with its fulfillment.

**7:18-19 – “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.”** – From before the foundation of the world, it was already in the mind of God for Him to have fellowship with the church as fully expressed in the New Testament – see Ephesians 1:3-6, 3:8-12. That this is true is evidenced by the two unchangeable things set forth in the days of Abraham. The first was the promise made to Abraham and his seed, connected with the covenant of Genesis 15, which would only be fulfilled through Christ, particularly following His ascension to the throne. The second unchangeable thing was the priesthood of Melchizedek, which also was fulfilled in Jesus' glorification. The blessing of the Holy Spirit is reserved for Christians under the New Testament, as is the benefit of Jesus' priesthood. However, in order for mankind to be able to comprehend these spiritual blessings, God first needed to establish a covenant that was primarily physical or external in nature. Thus, the Law given on Sinai established a set of rules on tablets of stone, a system of animal sacrifices, and a human priesthood passed on through the bloodline of Levi. Under this system, there was a clear distinction between the holy and profane in the physical realm. However, the Law was weak because of its external nature. Man could only attempt to get cleansing from the outside, hoping that this would work its way into the heart. Because of the nature of man's psyche, the external force of law couldn't and never will be able to change the desires of the heart. Since the Law couldn't make anything perfect, the former commandment of Moses' day had to be set aside. (Understand that this *former* commandment wasn't the first in God's mind, but came before the New Testament because mankind needed the physical tutor to lead him to Christ – see Galatians 3:23-24). Therefore, Jesus brought in a new covenant, termed here as a "better hope." The only hope under the Old Testament

was that of looking ahead to something better. Job looked ahead to a Redeemer, Moses looked to the reward of Him who is unseen, and David longed for a clean heart that only Jesus could give. The better hope of the new covenant is that we can draw near to God right now! There is no veil separating the Christian from God's presence, for the barrier of sin has been completely removed by Jesus Christ. Melchizedek's priesthood is far greater than the Levitical priesthood, and the new law accompanying this priesthood has no imperfection.



**HEBREWS CHAPTER 7:20-28**  
(The Perfect Son as High Priest)

**7:20-22 – “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’ )’ so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.”** – The writer of Hebrews has taken the theme of the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood over the Levitical priesthood, and made direct application to Jesus’ greatness. The fact that Jesus is High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek wasn’t an afterthought of God. Rather, Jesus’ High Priesthood was a key component of God’s eternal plan for the salvation of mankind. The Levitical priesthood, on the other hand, was a temporal priesthood that God put into place as a physical example or shadow of the spiritual priesthood ushered into man’s view through Jesus Christ. To establish that the Levitical priesthood was never intended to be permanent, the writer of Hebrews reminds his audience that those priests became such without an oath of God. In contrast with that temporal priesthood, Jesus’ priesthood is eternal and was communicated as such through an oath of God. One thousand years before Jesus’ entrance by physical birth into this world, God had sworn that He would be a priest forever. Thus we see that an imperfect, temporary, physical priesthood has been replaced by a perfect, eternal, spiritual priesthood. Just as the old priesthood and old covenant were mutually dependent upon each other, so the new priesthood must have an accompanying new covenant. Jesus’ exaltation as a superior High Priest guarantees that He also has brought with Him a new covenant. This in-depth explanation of the “irreducible complexity” of the priesthood and law combination seems to verify my position of the “two unchangeable things” from the end of chapter 6. The covenant which God made in Genesis chapter 15 in connection with the promise made to Abraham is truly God’s eternal covenant – see Galatians 3:17-18. What then is the priesthood which was, of necessity, linked with this covenant? The answer from the book of Hebrews is the priesthood of Melchizedek. Notice that both the covenant made in Abraham’s day and Melchizedek’s priesthood of that same time could never be fully understood by man until the coming of Christ into the inhabited world and his coming to the throne. With Jesus’ birth, life, death, burial, bodily resurrection, and ascension to the heavenly realm revealed to the eyes of man, God’s eternal plan can now be realized by His people. What an awesome God we serve!

**7:23-25 – “The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”** – The writer of Hebrews here mentions one more reason why Jesus’ priesthood is superior to that of Aaron. The Levitical priesthood was limited by its dependence upon a high priest with a terminal existence. In contrast to that temporal priesthood, Jesus’ priesthood is perfect because of Christ’s indestructible life. One of the shortcomings of the Levitical system was that every priest was destined to die. Every single earthly high priest from Aaron to Annas or Caiaphas was subject to the power of death. Jesus, on the other hand, wasn’t an earthly priest at all, but received His

position as High Priest upon His glorification. His resurrection and ascension proved that He has power over death, and established the fact that He is priest forever. In other words, Jesus' priesthood is unchangeable, and no one can take away His position. God had sworn that His Son would be a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek, and He brought this into the view of man upon Jesus' ascension to the heavenly throne. Jesus is the One and only High Priest! Because of Christ's eternal life, He has the power to save forever all those who draw near to God through Him. The work of Jesus wasn't finished in His role as the sacrificial lamb on the cross, but is finished in His role as High Priest in heaven. God's plan isn't solely to bring us to justification, but rather to bring us to perfection. Jesus paid the price of His earthly life to grant us forgiveness for our sins, but He puts all the power of His eternal life into developing our character. Jesus continually intercedes for us that we may confidently stand before the Father. The point of Romans 5:9-10, 8:31-34 is restated here in the seventh chapter of Hebrews: the God who sacrificed His own Son while we were enemies, does even more for us now that we are His friends. God really wants us to make it!

**7:26-27 – “For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”**

– Finally, with the coming of Christ to the throne of heaven, mankind has a high priest who can meet our needs. The writer of Hebrews says we have *such* a high priest! Earlier in the book of Hebrews, it was amply shown that Jesus can identify with us because He was made just like us while in His earthly sojourn. Now, the attention is turned toward His work as High Priest in the heavenly realm. Jesus is the perfect high priest because of His character and position. He is holy; He is sinless and set apart to fulfill God's will. Christ is innocent; He is blameless. In contrast with the weaknesses of Aaron and all other earthly high priests, Jesus is free from guilt. He can perform His function as High Priest with strength and power instead of from weakness. Jesus is undefiled; He is pure. Sin taints everything and everyone who is touched by it. Since the high priests of the first covenant couldn't have a clean conscience, neither could any of the people for whom they rendered service. On the contrary, since Jesus is completely undefiled, His purity can be passed on to all Christians. Jesus, as High Priest, has been separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens. While on earth He never sinned, but He was called a friend of sinners – see Matthew 11:19. Upon His exaltation to glory, Jesus has been completely set apart from sinners. Only those whom He has sanctified are in fellowship with Him. Because Jesus was willing to descend into the lowermost parts of the earth on our behalf, He now holds the highest position in the heavens – see Philippians 2:8-11, Ephesians 4:8-10, Romans 10:4-10. In this heavenly location, Jesus doesn't need to offer daily sacrifices like the high priests of the Old Testament. They continually had to offer sacrifices for their own sins first, and then offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. The repetition of such sacrifices day after day and year after year clearly indicated the shortcomings of the high priest and of the sacrificial system in general. Since Jesus never sinned, the only sins that He had to offer sacrifice for were the sins of the people. The sacrifice and offering made by Christ were perfect, for it had to be done only once. The

temporal, imperfect sacrifices and priesthood of the old covenant were forever replaced by the eternal, perfect sacrifice and priesthood of Christ.

**7:28 – “For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.”** – The writer of Hebrews summarizes this entire section of the superiority of Jesus’ High Priesthood by succinctly contrasting the old priesthood with the new. On the one hand, the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak. On the other hand, the word of the oath, appoints a Son, made perfect forever. In a quick review, the Law was temporal, while the oath is eternal. The men who served as high priests in the Old Testament were weak, because they were weighted down with their own sins and were destined to meet a permanent death. However, the Son serves as high priest following His sinless existence on earth and His permanent resurrection. The exhortation is for all Christians to get their eyes off of the shadowy, temporal, physical realm, and gaze intently into the real, eternal, spiritual kingdom.

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 8:1-6**  
(Christ's Superior Ministry)

**8:1-2 – “Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.”** – About halfway through the letter of Hebrews, the writer recaptures the main point of everything that he has said thus far. In simple terms, he communicates the importance of the Christ's position as both priest and king. In the introduction of the book of Hebrews, this point was first presented in chapter 1, verse 3. Chapter 7, while emphasizing the priesthood of Jesus, began by showing that Melchizedek was both a king and a priest. The obvious parallel is that Jesus in glory has been revealed to mankind as both Priest and King. With the primary emphasis in chapter 7 on Psalm 110:4 (“The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”), the writer of Hebrews now ensures that we won't miss the rest of that Messianic prophecy. In the first verse of chapter 8 as he speaks of Christ's taking his seat at the right hand of God, he alludes to the first verse of Psalm 110, with its focus on the Kingship of Jesus. One of the truly great themes of prophecy in the Old Testament, particularly the book of Zechariah, was that the Deliverer would be a joint priest-king. It is worth looking at these prophecies from Zechariah to recognize the fulfillment of them in Jesus. First of all, the sixth chapter of Zechariah clearly foretells of a King who would build the temple of the LORD, and be a priest on the throne. Jesus' fulfillment of this very point is brought out in these two verses of Hebrews 8. The third chapter of Zechariah also foretells of Jesus' payment of our sins and His resulting glorification. Christ's garments that were filthy because of our sins were traded for robes of state following His ascension. Not only did Jesus build the temple of the Lord in His resurrection (see John 2:19-22), but He also governs it forever from His position as the “Prime Minister,” both Priest and King. Jesus does indeed have a government (see Isaiah 9:6-7), and He reigns as the only Sovereign, while also performing His intercessory role as High Priest. Again we see that Jesus serves as priest in the heavenly realm, that is, the real holy place and true tabernacle. The true tabernacle is in heaven where the true High Priest lives, while the copy was on earth where earthly high priests served until their death. Both the Old and New Testament speak of the real tabernacle in heaven – see Isaiah 6:1, Revelation 7:15. This real tabernacle was not constructed by man, but by the eternal God for revelation in our time.

**8:3-4 – “For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law;”** – As was earlier pointed out in the fifth chapter of Hebrews, the primary responsibility of the high priest was to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins – see Hebrews 5:1. The Old Testament high priest had the duty of oversight of the daily offerings (see Exodus 29, Leviticus chapters 1-7, Hebrews 7:27), as well as his special part in the Day of Atonement. In offering both daily sacrifices and the yearly sacrifices for atonement, the high priest served as an intermediary between God and the people. Since these offerings for sin was the primary reason the high priest was appointed, it

would be absolutely necessary that Jesus have something to offer if He truly was appointed by God as the High Priest. Although the writer of Hebrews brings this point up in 8:3, he doesn't give a declaration of the nature of Jesus' offering until the middle of the ninth chapter of Hebrews. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Jesus as High Priest must make an offering. Up to this point in the book of Hebrews, it has been clearly established that Jesus wasn't High Priest until His ascension – see Hebrews 5:4-10, 7:15-17. As pointed out in verses 1 and 2 of this chapter of Hebrews, Christ's high-priestly service is performed in the heavenly realm. Now the writer openly states that Jesus wouldn't be a high priest at all if he were on earth. The earthly role of the high priests was in accordance with the Mosaic Law, which only had a shadow of the true heavenly priesthood. All of the earthly high priests were required to offer gifts according to the Law, and Jesus didn't even qualify under that Law to be a priest at all – see Hebrews 7:13-14. Thus, it is again emphasized that Jesus' work as High Priest is performed in heaven.

**8:5 – “who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘See,’ He says, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.’ ”** – The inseparable link between the priesthood and the law is a thread that the writer of Hebrews has masterly woven within the last few chapters, and is again brought to our attention. The earthly high priests who offered gifts according to the Law were never intended to be perfect priests. They simply served a copy and shadow of the heavenly things; they never were able to serve as priests in the true presence of God. The fact of the matter is that the whole Old Testament system, particularly the tabernacle and its accompanying priesthood, was a temporal, physical representation of the eternal, spiritual temple and priesthood. The Holy Spirit uses the words “*copy*” and “*shadow*” to denote that the physical was only a replicate and reflection of God's true building. The picture portrayed here is that of the heavenly original casting a shadow into the earthly sphere. Even when Moses was given instructions concerning the building of the tabernacle, he was told to make it according to the pattern (**tupon**) which was shown to him on the mountain. It is impossible to say for sure how much of the heavenly tabernacle Moses got to observe, but he certainly was given specific instructions concerning the copy. As always, God is very detailed in His plans and sure about His words. Three times in the book of Exodus, God emphasized to Moses to follow the pattern exactly. One of the most amazing proofs tying the Old and New Testaments together into one complete unit is the exact match of the earthly tabernacle with its counterpart in the church and heaven. Such a perfect fulfillment couldn't possibly come about through the evolution of religion, but had to come from God's revelation to man by copying the eternal, original temple onto an earthly blueprint.

**8:6 – “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.”** – While the high priests of the Old Testament served God in a partial manner through their ministry in the earthly tabernacle, Jesus serves as the perfect High Priest in the true tabernacle. In the same way that a real Lamborghini is far superior to its HotWheels model, so Jesus' ministry as Priest is much greater than that of the Old Testament priests.

Jesus is the true Prime Minister in heaven, while Aaron and his descendants were simply physical replicas. (As a side note, one of the benefits of understanding the superiority of Christ's ministry is that it allows us to see that everything in the physical realm pales in comparison to the spiritual. When we understand that we truly have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places, earth's pull has no power over us.) After briefly emphasizing Jesus' superior ministry, the writer of Hebrews embarks on establishing the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. Since the priesthood and law are mutually dependent, it is only logical that a more excellent priesthood would have along with it a better covenant. However, to fully understand the awesome nature of this covenant, it is essential to understand one more role that Jesus serves. In quick review, we have seen from the book of Hebrews that Jesus is the Prophet and Apostle, that He is the Son of God, that He is the King, and that He is both the sacrifice and the High Priest. Now in reference to a new covenant, it is said that Jesus is *mediator*, and in chapter 9 it will be shown that He is also the testator. According to "Vine's Expository Dictionary", the word "mediator" has two possible meanings: a) one who mediates between two parties with a view to producing peace, and b) one who acts as a guarantee so as to secure something which otherwise would not be obtained. While it is certainly true that Jesus acts as a mediator between God and man (see 1 Timothy 2:5), in reference to the new covenant, Jesus guarantees its terms for His people. In this context, Jesus' role as mediator of the covenant communicates that He is the executor of the will. This covenant wasn't a covenant that Jesus could make from earth, but rather is the covenant which is eternal in the heavens. As will be clearly seen in chapter 9, verses 16-17, the death of the testator is essential before the terms of a will or testament are valid. However, just as much as the death of the testator is required for the effectiveness of its terms, so the authority of an executor is absolutely necessary. Thus, in reference to the new covenant, Jesus serves not only as the testator through His death, but also as the executor through His eternal life in the Heavens. It is through His perfect offering in the true Holy of Holies, that the terms of the covenant are guaranteed for His people. This verse of Hebrews also brings out that the terms of this new covenant have been legislated on better promises. While the Old Testament came with curses or blessings depending on if a person could keep it ("He who practices them shall live by them"), the New Testament is based on the promises given to Abraham. As has been pointed out in the sixth chapter of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit is *the promise* made to Abraham and to his seed. However, there was another promise tied in with the covenant shown in the days of Abraham, namely the Promised Land. The inheritance of both of these promises to Abraham will be further explained in the rest of the book of Hebrews.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 8:7-13**

(The Superior Covenant)

**8:7-8 – “For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, ‘Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;’ ”** – The writer of Hebrews clearly states that the Old Covenant was not without fault. If the first covenant would have been perfect, there wouldn’t have been a need for a second covenant. However, there obviously was a need for a New Covenant which could bring about perfection. As a matter of fact, the imperfections of the Old Covenant were many as evidenced by Hebrews 7:19, “(for the Law made nothing perfect).” As was shown in chapter 7, the Levitical priesthood, which was the basis for the Law given from Sinai, was imperfect, because it consisted of priests who were weak. In connection with the weaknesses of this priesthood, the Law was useless to cleanse the people from an evil conscience (this will be further expounded upon in chapters 9 and 10). Finally, the Law was deficient because it could never produce a people who could keep it, which is the primary point brought up in this section of Hebrews. Don’t misunderstand the Scriptures here – it is not as if God’s plan was lacking, or that God couldn’t figure out how to produce holiness in His people. To fully comprehend this issue, it must be examined from two angles. First of all, as has been repeatedly shown thus far in the book of Hebrews, the covenant God made with Israel in the days of Moses was *never intended to bring fulfillment*. The Old Covenant was only a shadow, which was necessary to bring mankind to an understanding of the faith that would be revealed through Christ’s covenant – see Galatians 3:23-4:6. Secondly, the Law consisting of the Ten Commandments wasn’t unholy in itself – see Romans 7:7-12, Galatians 3:19-21. The real problem with the Law, then, was on the side of the people in their inability to keep it. In this context, the writer of Hebrews emphasizes the shortcomings of the Law to impart life, that is, to change the hearts and minds of the people. Notice that in reference to finding fault with the first covenant, it is stated that God found fault with *them*. In other words, as will be shown in the next few verses, God found fault with the people because they couldn’t keep the covenant. In accordance with God’s omniscience, He always had a plan to establish in the coming days (the days of the church age – see Hebrews 1:1-2, Acts 2:15-17) a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. As was shown in chapter 7, God both ratified the covenant and gave a preview of the priesthood way back in the book of Genesis to show that it was His eternal plan. What is meant from Jeremiah’s prophecy when it is said that this new covenant would be with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah? At the time of Jeremiah, the nation of Israel had long since been taken captive by the Assyrians, and ceased to exist as a physical entity. Yet both Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied of a time when the scattered peoples of Israel would again be gathered to their land – see Jeremiah 3:11-14, Ezekiel 28:25-26. The Holy Spirit gives an important key for unlocking our understanding of the prophetic house of Israel in John 11:49-52. It seems clear that the “nation” of prophecy consists of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. This can be further substantiated from Ezekiel’s prophecy of the unity of the two sticks in chapter 37, verses 15-22. According to the New Testament, Israel is not the physical nation, but the spiritual nation of God – see Romans 2:28-29, Galatians 4:24-28. Ezekiel 37:21-22

shows the two sticks being joined into one stick, representing that Judah and Israel will now be one nation. A comparison of Hosea 1:10-11 with its explanation in Romans 9:23-26, as well as Amos 9:11-12 with its clarification in Acts 15:14-18 shows that Ezekiel's prophecy is speaking of the joining of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians into one people. Ephesians 2:11-22 summarizes this concept of bringing Jews and Gentiles together into one kingdom, the church of the living God. Thus, the house of Judah consists of the Jewish core of the church, while the house of Israel represents the scattered Gentiles who would become fellow citizens of God's kingdom. Jeremiah has a later prophecy which paints a beautiful picture of this united kingdom under a new covenant. " 'In those days and at that time,' declares the Lord, 'the sons of Israel will come, both they and the sons of Judah as well; they will go along weeping as they go, and it will be the LORD their God they will seek. They will ask for the way to Zion, turning their faces in its direction; they will come that they may join themselves to the LORD *in an everlasting covenant* that will not be forgotten.' " (Jeremiah 50:4-5).

**8:9 – “ ‘Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for them says the Lord.’ ”** – The writer of Hebrews continues to establish the superiority of the New Testament over the Old, as he highlights the differences between the two covenants. As was prophesied in Jeremiah 31, the new covenant isn't like the old covenant. The covenant which God made with Israel after delivering them from their bondage to the Egyptians was an agreement between a holy God and a sinful people. As has been already alluded to in the book of Hebrews, this new covenant is really an eternal covenant that was ratified in the days of Abraham and was associated with the promise made to Abraham and to his seed (Christ – see Galatians 3:16). As will be seen in the next few verses of Hebrews, only a purified people get to participate in the new covenant with our holy God. Since a covenant is a contract or a conditional will, its fulfillment is dependent upon the ability of all parties involved to live up to the terms of the contract. The Old Covenant was insufficient because the physical nation of Israel “did not continue in My [God's] covenant.” The New American Standard version of the Old Testament source of this quote puts it this way, “My covenant which *they broke*, although I was a husband to them ...” – Jeremiah 31:32. Since Israel of old didn't live up to their part of the agreement, God was no longer obligated to hold to the terms of the covenant. Thankfully, though, God knew that this broken covenant would result under the Law, and He had previously ratified a covenant which would be kept by the seed of Abraham.

**8:10 – “ ‘For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ ”** – As the Holy Spirit prophesied through Jeremiah the prophet approximately 600 years before the birth of Christ, God does have a covenant which He makes with the joint house of Israel, that is, the church. The New Covenant is far superior to the Old because, under it, God's laws are put into the minds and on the hearts of those who constitute God's people. As is fully explained in the third chapter of 2 Corinthians, though the Old Testament came with glory, it was a ministry of death. The letters engraved on stones ended up being a killer



because they couldn't impart life, but could only proclaim the sentence of condemnation upon all who broke them. Because the fleshly mindset of unregenerate man veils him from beholding God's glory, he has no means of true renewal or transformation. Thus, the failure mentality or sinner's tattoo, if you will, dominates his identity, and he cannot keep the law. In contrast to that ministry of condemnation is the ministry of righteousness, or the new covenant. Instead of using the letters of the law to kill, the New Covenant gives life through the Spirit. When a person's flesh is removed in immersion (Colossians 2:11-12), the veil is taken away, and the Christian can now behold the glory of God in the face of Christ. As God's glory transforms the Christian into His image, the desires of the heart and mind are brought into conformity with God's holy desires. (Notice that when Hebrews speaks of the new covenant written on the minds and hearts of Christians, it means much more than God's laws written on the hearts of all people in their conscience. While the conscience makes man aware of good and evil, it is insufficient to provide the will power to fully desire to do the right thing. It is also important to recognize that God's words are still recorded in propositional, written form in what comprises the New Testament. God doesn't speak to a person's heart apart from what He has recorded. However, the working of the Spirit in the inner man of the Christian empowers him to see in the "mirror" of the New Testament the full glory of God. Because the New Testament provides true transformation of the mind and heart, it is spoken of as being written on tablets of human hearts.) Romans 8:3-4 states it this way, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit proves that we are indeed the temple of the living God, and that He is proud to be our God, and for us to be His people.

**8:11-12 – “ ‘And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.’ ”** – The writer of Hebrews continues to quote from Jeremiah chapter 31 since God therein foretold so many wonderful aspects of the new covenant. Consistent with the emphasis in the book of Hebrews upon the heavenly realm, it has been shown (and will be further proven in chapter 9) that Jesus truly makes the covenant with His people from His position as King-Priest in Heaven. The apostle Paul makes the same point in Romans as he quotes from Isaiah, “The Deliverer will come *from Zion*, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.” “This is My covenant with them, *when I take away their sins.*” Notice that the Deliverer comes from Zion; in other words, Jesus brings about purification from the heavens (again, this will be further expounded upon in Hebrews chapter 9). It is also important to note that Jesus makes His covenant with Israel when He takes away their sins. Proper understanding of this point clarifies the reason why those who are under the terms of the new covenant do not need to be taught to “know the Lord.” The only way a person can be brought into this new covenant is if he has already come to “know the Lord.” Sin has always been the barrier between man and God, so when a person's sins are removed, he is brought back into fellowship with the Lord. Therefore, it can be shown that a person comes to “know the Lord” at his immersion into

Christ for the “forgiveness of sins.” As it is further spoken here in Hebrews, “I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” What a tremendous blessing it is for the Christian’s sins to be forgiven and forgotten! Because Christ has completely paid the price for the sins of those who are under the terms of His covenant, there is no price left to pay. The Christian no longer has to make futile attempts to justify himself by his works, for God has already declared the Christian righteous – see Romans 4:4-8. As will be emphasized in chapters 9 and 10, this complete forgiveness grants the Christian a truly clean conscience, which allows him to move forward in freedom and in the grace of God. How awesome it is to know that: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!” (Romans 8:1)

**8:13 – “When He said, ‘a new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”** – Notice that the present covenant mediated by Christ has been called by God Himself the “new covenant.” In the days of Jeremiah, God had revealed that there would be a day when a “new covenant” would be made. In chapter 9 of the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit brings forth the aspect of the covenant as it relates to a will (Hebrews 9:16-17). Certainly, then, it is fair to use the analogy here. When speaking of a “will or testament,” only the last one is really pertinent. In other words, it is possible for a person to change his will at any time prior to his death, but the most recent will at the time of death is the only document that is legally binding. All previous wills are obsolete; that is, they have no bearing on the heirs of the will. In the same way, the terms of the Old Covenant do not directly bear on the Christian because Christ, from His position on the throne, has executed the New Covenant. The book of Hebrews, like many other letters in the New Testament, is focused on getting the Jewish Christians to realize that the Old Covenant is obsolete. (Please don’t misunderstand, and think that the Old Testament is irrelevant. As has been amply demonstrated in the book of Hebrews, the physical shadows manifested in the Old Testament are necessary in teaching the full purpose of God as revealed in Christ. However, the Old Testament consisted of temporal shadows, while the New Testament contains the substance of God’s eternal plan.) While Jesus was winding down His earthly ministry, He openly prophesied of the destruction of the temple which would happen within 40 years of His death. It is as if God gave the Jews the benefit of one full generation of apostolic teaching for them to understand the spiritual fulfillment of the Law in Christ. As a last-ditch effort to get the Jewish people to convert in this time, God had a plan to smash the physical copy of the spiritual building once and for all. As the writer of Hebrews here warns, “whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.” Within a few short years of the writing of this book, Jerusalem would fall to the Romans in one of the most agonizing conquests ever recorded in history. Between the civil war within the city of Jerusalem and the siege enforced by the Romans from without, hundreds of thousands of Jews lost their lives. Including the surrounding areas, well over a million Jews perished in all. Titus, the Roman general, also set fire to the temple and destroyed it completely. Because of the utter destruction of the Jewish system, including the total loss of the genealogical records, never again could even a pretense of the Old Covenant be carried out. God performed a tremendous work in the spiritual realm in bringing forth the New Covenant in Christ, and He also emphasized the discontinuation of the Old by giving a clear physical picture of its destruction. For any

who still were gazing with their physical eyes, the destruction of the Old Testament system was intended to be a clear wakeup-call to peer into the realm of the eternal.

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 9:1-10**  
(The Old Testament Tabernacle)

**9:1 – “Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship [service] and the earthly sanctuary.”** – While continually building the theme of Christ’s superiority, the writer of the book of Hebrews has a central point in each of the chapters of this book. Chapter 1 showed Christ’s superiority over the angels, while chapter 2 related His humility to take on humanity. Chapter 3 established Jesus’ greatness over Moses, and chapter 4 introduced the greatness of Jesus, the High Priest. Chapters 5-7 really emphasized the superiority of Christ’s eternal priesthood over Aaron’s temporal one. Finally, we have seen in chapter 8 the power of the New Covenant to change the minds and hearts of those who “know the Lord.” In chapter 9, the writer of Hebrews masterfully weaves the strands of the superior priesthood and superior covenant into one grand unchangeable purpose of God. He begins to do this by portraying the construction of the earthly tabernacle, and then bringing forth the superiority of the heavenly one. In this first verse, it is shown that even the first covenant had clear regulations for both the divine service and the earthly sanctuary. The first covenant was inaugurated in Exodus chapter 24 (see Hebrews 9:18-22), with the people confirming their part in obeying the terms given by the Lord. The following chapters of Exodus then show the construction of the tabernacle and some of the accompanying regulations for the priesthood. (Notice that although the New American Standard version translates the Greek word **latreiaj** as “divine worship,” it should be translated as “divine service.” Under the Old Testament, only the priests could perform the divine service, that is, offer the sacrifices to God. While the people were required to bring their sacrifices and offerings to God, they had to go through the priests. Hence, in a literal sense, only the priests offered service to God; the participation of the people was very limited. Therefore, in the next two chapters of Hebrews, the emphasis on service to God specifically relates to the offerings given by priests or high priests. The impact of these sacrifices upon the people was only an induced effect through their contact with the priests.) It seems that the writer of Hebrews particularly chose to use the tabernacle construction rather than that of the temple because of the close connection with the instructions for the tabernacle and the giving of the first covenant.

**9:2 – “For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.”** – Recall from Hebrews 8 that the earthly tabernacle was a copy and shadow of the true, heavenly tabernacle. (For an excellent study explaining in detail the shadow of the tabernacle system, see “The Tabernacle of God and the Christian” by Dave Fagan). The outer tabernacle here described represents much of the service that true priests of God, that is, all Christians (1 Peter 2:4-5, 9), continually render to God. The two items (I’m combining the table and the sacred bread as one item) mentioned in this verse both have a counterpart in the church. First of all, the lampstand of the first covenant signifies the completed Word of God. The lampstand (Exodus 25:31-40) was made of pure gold and had seven branches, with three branches on each side and one in the middle. The branches were shaped with a series of flowers, bulbs, and cups ending in a lamp. This golden lampstand was the only source of light within the holy place. As previously

mentioned, it was a foreshadow of the Scriptures – see Psalm 119:105. It is very interesting to note that the lampstand was one piece of hammered work of pure gold, with all of the various parts (cups, bulbs, and flowers) adding up to 66 parts. In the same way, the Bible consists of 66 books written by various people, but authored as one complete unit by the living God – see 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21. Next, the table and the sacred bread are mentioned as continually occupying the outer room of the tabernacle. The table of showbread was situated along the north wall of the holy place. Its construction was a table of acacia wood about three feet long and one and a half feet wide. This table was overlaid with gold, with a gold border around it. All of the dishes, pans, jars, and bowls for use at the table were also made of pure gold. Of course, the primary purpose of this table was for the setting of the bread of the Presence continually before the Lord. The New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament table of showbread is the Lord’s Supper. Under the Old Testament, the priests ate of the holy, unleavened bread, which was replaced weekly on the Sabbath. Under the New Testament, the priests (all Christians) eat of the holy, unleavened bread on the first day of the week. Just as there was a table in the holy place under the Old Testament, there is a superior table for the church under the New Covenant – see 1 Corinthians 10:16-21, Hebrews 13:9-10.

**9:3-5 – “Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.”** – There were two veils of the tabernacle constructed by Moses. The first separated the holy place from the courtyard. In other words, the people bringing sacrifices to the tabernacle could behold the bronze altar of burnt offering and the bronze laver, but they couldn’t see into the holy place containing the lampstand and the table of showbread, because its use was reserved for the priests. In this verse, though, the writer of Hebrews speaks of “the second veil.” This second veil separated the holy place from the Most Holy Place, and formed a barrier between the priests and the presence of God. The first article mentioned by the writer of Hebrews as belonging in the Holy of Holies is the golden altar of incense. Every person familiar with the construction of the physical tabernacle of the Old Testament should give careful consideration to this placement of the golden altar according to Hebrews 9. In the tabernacle, the golden altar of incense wasn’t placed in the Holy of Holies, but was in the holy place – see Exodus 30:6, 40:26-27. One of the purposes of the golden altar was for daily incense to be burned on it, with fresh incense supplied before the morning sacrifice and after the evening sacrifice. It may initially seem as if there is a contradiction between the setup of the Old Testament altar of incense, and the portrayal of it here in Hebrews. However, with a little further study, it can be shown that the golden altar of incense had one other important purpose. On the Day of Atonement, this altar had a special purpose. As a matter of fact, the golden altar of incense was cleansed and made “most holy to the LORD” this one time a year – see Exodus 30:10. On the Day of Atonement, the censer for burning incense became an extension of the altar and was taken behind the curtain by the high priest – see Leviticus 16:12-13. Thus, there is a tip given by the writer of Hebrews that the particular

day of concern in his discussion of Hebrews chapter 9 is the Day of Atonement. The Old Testament altar of incense is a representation of the New Testament prayers of the saints accompanied by the intercession of the Holy Spirit – see Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4. The next piece of furniture spoken of is the ark of the covenant. The ark was almost four feet long, a little over two feet wide, and a little over two feet high. It also was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. The ark was a visual representation of God’s presence with His people. As mentioned by the writer of Hebrews, it held a golden jar of manna, Aaron’s rod which budded, and the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. The jar of manna was a reminder of the provision that God had given His people upon rescuing them out of Egypt. Aaron’s rod was a clear communication from God that He had chosen Aaron as high priest, and no one could take the honor by appointing himself high priest. Finally, the tables of the covenant were a reminder that God had clearly delineated rules by which the people were to live. On the top of the ark was the “propitiatory” or “mercy seat” overshadowed by the cherubim of glory. The cherubim faced each other, with their wings spread over the ark. They represent the guarding of the presence of God, for God was “enthroned above the cherubim” – see 2 Samuel 6:2, Psalm 99:1. The terminology “cherubim of glory” is obviously representative of the very glory of God, “who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” – see 1 Timothy 6:16. Even the high priest on Atonement Day couldn’t behold this glory of God, lest he die – Leviticus 16:13. The propitiatory was the place where the high priest had to sprinkle blood seven times on the Day of Atonement in order for God to extend mercy to the nation of Israel. Without the sprinkling of the blood on the ark of the covenant within the Holy of Holies, atonement couldn’t be made. The lesson to be learned from this for all under the New Covenant will be expounded upon in the rest of this chapter. The writer of Hebrews closes this discussion of the earthly furniture in the physical tabernacle with this remark: “but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.” He may simply mean that he doesn’t have time to further break down the symbolism of each of these parts. However, it may also be that no further detail could be related about the ark of the covenant and everything associated with it, because it had been confiscated and melted down by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The historical record is inconclusive as to whether there was an ark of the covenant placed inside Herod’s Temple. Regardless of whether the ark was present at the time of the writing of Hebrews, the writer clearly desires to get on to the true propitiation offered by Christ in the heavenly tabernacle.

**9:6-7 – “Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship [service], but into the second only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.”** – After describing the various vessels found within the tabernacle, the writer of Hebrews now explains the role of the priests under the Old Testament system. The priests had several daily duties in their ministry. In addition to the daily offering of sacrifices on the bronze altar of burnt offering outside of the tent of meeting, they also had a few responsibilities within the holy place. They were required to offer morning and evening incense on the golden altar (see Exodus 30:7-8. Luke 1:8-9), make sure that the lamps on the lampstand were burning continually (Exodus 27:20-21), and tend to the loaves on the table every

Sabbath (Leviticus 24:8-9). However, they were never allowed behind the second veil. Only the high priest was allowed to come into the Most Holy Place, and his entrance was restricted to once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that special day, he dare not enter without bringing the sacrificial blood of an animal. He first had to bring the blood of a bull and sprinkle it on the mercy seat for the sins of himself and of his family. Next he had to bring the blood of a goat and sprinkle it on the propitiatory for atonement of the sins of the people. Under the terms of the Old Covenant, both the people and priests had severely restricted access to the presence of God. Also, as will be shown later in this chapter and in chapter 10, there was no full forgiveness of sins, but only a “rollover” until Christ’s perfect sacrifice was made.

**9:8-10 – “The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper [the one who serves] perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.”** – It is interesting to note that the writer of Hebrews again gives credit to the Holy Spirit for the eternal plan of God. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit has been cited as the speaker of Old Testament quotations. Here He is praised for His communication of reality through the use of the symbolic, physical structure of the tabernacle. It is important to consider God’s communication through that symbolism. First of all, remember that under the Old Covenant, there was no free access into the presence of God. As was noted earlier, everyone had restrictions; in other words, there was always a separation between God and man. The way into the holy place wasn’t ever truly made available under the Old Testament. Remember that the Gentiles, the women of Israel, the men of Israel, the priests, and even the high priest had unique boundaries in reference to approaching God. However, in contrast to those boundaries, the New Testament provides an entrance into the throne room of God. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom – see Matthew 27:50-51. There is a clear implication of this divine rending of the curtain separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies – man could now stand in the presence of the Holy God. Sin, that great barrier between man and God, was now removed, and all of the redeemed would forevermore be beckoned to draw near to God – see Hebrews 10:19. The physical tabernacle was simply intended to be an illustration for the reality experienced during the time of the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, all of the gifts and sacrifices offered by the high priests could never perfect the conscience even of the high priest. It is true that before the high priest made any offering for the sins of the people, he first had to offer blood for his own sins. If that initial offering failed to completely cleanse his conscience, then obviously the offering made on behalf of the people would be insufficient to produce a perfect conscience in anyone (this same point is again brought forth in chapter 10). The Old Testament system of sacrifices and offerings did make the people ceremonially clean, but couldn’t truly touch the soul of the individual. Thus, participation in those offerings allowed the individual to maintain his membership in the nation of Israel, but couldn’t empower him to stand blameless before God. These temporal regulations were put upon the people until the time of a new order.

Obviously the reformation here spoken of relates to the current dispensation of the New Covenant.



## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 9:11-14**

(The Superior Tabernacle)

**9:11-12 – “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”** – Throughout the book of Hebrews, Christ’s superiority over all has been established. He has been shown to be higher than the angels, greater than Moses, and better than Aaron and Levi. Of course, part of the practicality of Christ’s superiority over these greats is that the New Testament system far exceeds the Old Testament system. The New Covenant brought in by Jesus is far above the Old Covenant given through the angels and Moses. The priesthood of Melchizedek accompanying the New Covenant is much greater than the imperfect Aaronic priesthood of the Old Covenant. The remainder of chapters 9 and 10 will establish the superiority of both the heavenly tabernacle over the physical one, and the greater sacrifice and offering of Christ compared to the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings. First of all, it is important to note that the writer of Hebrews speaks of when Christ *appeared* as high priest. Chapters 5, 7, and 8 effectively proved that Jesus wasn’t and couldn’t be a high priest on earth. Thus, the only realm where Jesus could be high priest is in heaven. Most of the time people relate the first coming of Christ to His entrance into the physical world, but the Scripture actually puts Christ’s first coming in a different light. While His physical birth and life were essential for us to begin to behold Jesus at a level all of humanity can understand, the full communication of Jesus was completed at His entrance into the Most Holy Place of heaven. Upon Jesus entrance into the true tabernacle, He was declared to be both King and Priest – see Hebrews 8:1-2. Thus Daniel sets the stage for Christ’s coronation, saying, “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was *coming*, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14). The thief on the cross recognized Christ’s coming when He said, “Jesus, remember me when You *come* in Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). One of the primary purposes of the New Testament Scriptures is to get us to see beyond the physical into the realm of the unseen. God wants the “eyes” of our “heart” to be “enlightened” (Ephesians 5:18) so that we can, among other things, behold Jesus’ appearance as high priest. Consider the proposition of Christ’s first coming as His entrance into the heavenly realm in the view of man from another perspective. When Jesus entered Jerusalem mounted on a donkey, the crowds lined the streets shouting, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” – see Matthew 21:9. However, following that physical entrance as a king into the physical city of Jerusalem, Jesus said in Matthew 23:39, “For I say to you, from now on you will not *see* Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who *comes* in the name of the Lord!’” There was another entrance which would be made into the spiritual Jerusalem which could only be beheld with the spiritual eye. This is exactly the point made by Jesus when He was on trial before the Jewish high priest and was questioned as to whether or not He was the Christ, the Son of God. His

response was, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will *see* the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and *coming* on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). Thus, it is Christ’s *appearance* in the heavenly realm that God expects us to see with our eyes of faith as it has been revealed through the pages of the New Testament. Again, notice that it is the things that can only be beheld by faith that are real; the physical, temporal things are only a shadow of the spiritual and eternal things – see 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. In other words, the physical tabernacle was only a copy of the real, spiritual tabernacle. In the same way, the animal sacrifices were imperfect in that they were only a physical copy of the sacrifice that Christ made. Under the Old Testament shadow, the high priest was required to bring the blood of goats and calves with him into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement. Without that blood to sprinkle on the propitiatory, he couldn’t be accepted into the presence of God. Before Jesus could enter the true holy of holies on our behalf, He too had to come with blood. However, in this case, Jesus is both the sacrifice and the High Priest. He shed His blood on Calvary in order to redeem all who would become Christians. This blood was brought in a spiritual sense into the most holy place when Jesus ascended into heaven. Unlike the yearly repetition of the Day of Atonement under the Old Testament, Jesus only entered once because it was a perfect offering of a completely sufficient sacrifice. The redemption paid by Jesus isn’t a partial or temporary redemption, but carries with it an eternal guarantee. What an awesome entrance by the High Priest with an indestructible life!

**9:13-14 – “For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 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?”**

– The blood of goats and bulls clearly refer to the atonement made by the high priest once a year for his own sins, the sins of his family, and the sins of the nation as a whole. However, the ashes of a heifer were not associated with propitiation for the nation on the Day of Atonement, but were for the purpose of individual purification from sin, specifically from coming into contact with a dead person. Numbers chapter 19 gives all of the details for the ordinance of the red heifer. A red heifer was brought outside the camp and slaughtered by Eleazar the priest. After Eleazar sprinkled some of its blood toward the tabernacle, the heifer was burned in its entirety in his sight. A clean person (Eleazar and the person who burned the heifer were both unclean until evening) then gathered the ashes and deposited them outside the camp in a clean place. Whenever a person came into contact with a corpse, he was to purify himself using the ashes of the red heifer combined with flowing water. If a person didn’t have this combination sprinkled on him, he would remain unclean and was to be cut off from the midst of the assembly. The practical parallel under the New Covenant is that although Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, none of us can be cleansed without “having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” – see Hebrews 10:22. The Old Testament system of animal sacrifices, blood, and ashes could only make a person externally clean. This outward purification was necessary for the individual to hold his position in the physical nation of Israel, but was insufficient to cleanse the mind or heart of the person. However, God was absolutely consistent when He expected the individual to meet His requirements for purification in

order to be a part of His people. Under the New Testament, there is an offering that is indeed able to cleanse our conscience. While many people attempt to sear their conscience, others attempt to cleanse it on their own terms. Regardless of whether the deeds are of outright rebellion by those who have seared their conscience, or if the deeds are an attempt to serve God by those who have attempted an alternate cleansing than that which God gives, the result is only dead works. The true believer contacts the blood of Christ when he is immersed into Christ's death – see Romans 6:3. Immersion isn't simply an "outward sign of an inward grace" or a ceremonial rite that cleanses the flesh, but is actually a legal demand to God for the clean conscience which He gives through Christ's offering of blood in His resurrected state. Listen carefully to 1 Peter 3:21, "Corresponding to that [the water of the Great Flood], immersion now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Just as God had ordained the physical sacrificial system to provide external cleansing, so God has chosen the perfect sacrifice of Christ to cleanse our conscience. One of the great struggles of the Christian is to fully recognize and believe that his conscience has been cleansed. To fully explain God's ability to know what it takes for true cleansing, I will quote a substantial portion of the introductory section of Alexander Campbell's "The Breaking of the Loaf."

MAN was not made for the Christian Institution; but the Christian Institution for man. None but a master of the human constitution--none but one perfectly skilled in all the animal, intellectual, and moral endowments of man, can perfectly adapt an institution to man in reference to all that he is, and to all that he is destined to become. Such is the Christian institution. Its evidences of a divine origin increase and brighten in the ratio of our progress in the science of man. He who most attentively and profoundly reads himself, and contemplates the picture which the Lord of this Institution has drawn of him, will be most willing to confess, that man is wholly incapable of originating it. He is ignorant of himself, and of the race from which he sprang, who can persuade himself that man, in any age, or in any country, was so far superior to himself as to have invented such an Institution as the Christian. That development of man, in all his natural, moral, and religious relations, which the Great Teacher has given, is not farther beyond the intellectual powers of man, than is the creation of the Sun, Moon, and Stars beyond his physical powers.

The eye of man cannot see itself; the ear of man cannot hear itself, nor the understanding of man discern itself: but there is one who sees the human eye, who hears the human ear, and who discerns the human understanding. He it is who alone is skilled in revealing man to himself, and himself to man. He who made the eye of man, can he not see? He who made the ear of man, can he not hear? He who made the heart of man, can he not know?

It is as supernatural to adapt a system to man, as it is to create him. He has never thought much upon his own powers who has not seen as much wisdom on the outside, as in the inside of the human head. To suit the outside to the inside required as much wisdom as to suit the inside to the outside, and yet the exterior arrangement exists for the interior. To fashion a casement for a human soul exhibits as many attributes of a creator, as to fashion a human spirit for its habitation. Man, therefore, could as easily make himself, as a system of religion to suit himself. It will be admitted that it calls for as much skill to adapt the appendages to the human eye, as the human eye to its appendages. To us it is equally plain, that it requires as much wisdom to adapt a religion to man, circumstanced as he is, as to create him an intellectual and moral being.

God's plan from the beginning was to create souls who would be able to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Since a clean conscience is a prerequisite for an individual to be able to serve God, He had a perfect plan for granting this clean conscience. Jesus was a perfect, unblemished man who willingly offered Himself through the eternal Spirit to

God. When a person has contacted the blood of Christ in immersion, it has nothing to do with external washing, but a true cleansing of the heart and mind actually takes place. Brethren, we can have complete confidence that Christ's blood has purified us, and we can now fully serve God today.

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 9:15-22**  
(Mediator of a New Covenant)

**9:15 – “For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”** – Because of the inability of the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings to cleanse a man’s conscience, there was a need for a new covenant. Chapter 8 emphasized that the new covenant would be one wherein God’s laws would be written on the minds and hearts of His people. When the Roman soldier shoved his spear in Jesus’ side, blood and water gushed forth from Christ and fell to Golgotha’s ground. The only sacrifice that could ever be sufficient to pay the price for the transgressions of mankind had been made. In the process, God’s justice and lovingkindness met and both were satisfied – see Romans 3:21-26. However, as the Old Testament shadow of the Day of Atonement signified, the sacrifice isn’t efficacious until it is offered in the Holy of Holies. (More explanation of that point will be coming at the end of this chapter). Therefore the benefits of redemption are guaranteed not by Jesus as the sacrifice, but through Jesus’ intercessory offering as the High Priest. In the terms of the writer of Hebrews, Jesus is the mediator (**mesithj**) of this new covenant. In other words, He is the executor of the will, who will ensure that the beneficiaries of this covenant receive their inheritance. To fully comprehend the driving point of this passage, let us briefly examine man’s earthly inheritance. Man has made many attempts to control his estate from the grave. Some of the rich and more knowledgeable form trusts and appoint executors of those trusts to try to protect personal interests. However, a sizeable percentage of the estate is generally gobbled up in legal fees or in payment to the executor. Common man names one of their descendants to be the mediator or executor of the will. However, as most of us have experienced, the human mediator’s desires often conflict with the wishes of the deceased, and so some slight changes are made. In God’s perfect planning, He raised His Son from the dead to ensure that the covenant maker would also be the executor of this will. Thus, the beneficiaries are guaranteed to receive the promised inheritance. In the case of the Old Testament faithful, there was no way they could obtain the inheritance on their own. (As a side note, neither can any of us under the new covenant. Remember that we were named as heirs under the new covenant when God took away our sins – see Romans 11:27, Hebrews 8:11-12 and accompanying notes.) The mandates of the Old Covenant were, “He who practices them shall live by them” – see Leviticus 18:5. Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” redemption had to be made for the transgressions of those under the first covenant, or there would be no inheritance. Since Jesus’ death is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, all of the faithful people of the Old Testament also qualify as beneficiaries. Christ’s resurrection and ascension place Him in the role of mediator of the covenant, so the receipt of the eternal inheritance is a sure thing for the faithful.

**9:16-17 – “For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.”** – According to Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament words, the Greek work for covenant (**diaqhkh**) “primarily signifies a

disposition of property by will or otherwise.” The word “does not in itself contain the idea of joint obligation, it mostly signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person.” While God certainly can and does put conditions for a person to be named a beneficiary of His property, He is the sole Being with something to offer. As the entire record of Scripture shows, not one individual apart from Jesus was able to be a beneficiary of God’s promises under the Old Testament. Of course, God’s purpose has always been to bring “many sons to glory,” so He had to bring in a New Covenant through Jesus. Here the Holy Spirit makes a very important point in the discussion of covenants. For a will to have any power, the person making the will has to die. In order to fully catch the significance of this statement, let us again examine the human undertakings of disposing of property through means of a will. As an example, my dad has composed a “living” will. The last that I’ve seen of the will is that I am the sole beneficiary of the books that comprise his library. (My brother Matt gets the house and is the executor. Can anyone spot the favoritism here? Whatever happened to the oldest male getting a double portion?) However, since my dad is still living, the will currently has absolutely no power. I cannot go and legally take all of the books from his library, because the will is not yet in effect. A related corollary is that, as long as my dad is alive, he can (unfortunately) give away any books to anyone he wishes (I’m terrified that my sister will have them all by the time that he dies, but I’m not wishing for a soon death or anything). In like manner, the new covenant didn’t take effect until Jesus died. Not only is Jesus the mediator or guarantor of the covenant, He is also the maker and testator of it. Thus His death both validates the New Testament and makes its terms unalterable. The only recipients of this will are those who have been named as sons and daughters who remain in good standing with the Father. The terms of becoming a son of God (see Galatians 3:26-27, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18) are now unalterable, and the inheritance is guaranteed to all the rightful heirs.

**9:18-22 – “Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.’ And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”** – In the first verse of this chapter, the writer of Hebrews brought out the fact that even the first covenant had regulations. The obvious implication as he further expounds upon those regulations and relates them to the inner workings of the new covenant is that the new covenant also has regulations. In other words, since the first covenant and its accompanying tabernacle were a shadow or copy of the eternal covenant and heavenly tabernacle, the obligations in the heavenly realm would be reflected back as regulations of the first covenant. Hence, if the new covenant couldn’t be ratified without blood, it would be expected that the first covenant also required blood for it to come into effect. With a diligent perusal of the Old Testament, a person finds a virtual trail of blood every step along the path of the inauguration of the Sinaitic covenant. The first reading of the covenant is recorded in Exodus 24, from which the quotation for this passage of Hebrews is directly taken. The

Old Testament account clearly brings out the sprinkling of blood on the altar and on the people. The rest of the information spoken of in these verses of Hebrews seems to be a compression of the different times of consecration, whether on the Day of Atonement or otherwise. There are two main points of this passage of Hebrews. The first is communicated in Exodus 24 when Moses says, "Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." The words of the first covenant took effect at the time that the blood was first sprinkled. The second point is that almost everything under the first covenant had to be consecrated by blood. Sure, there was special anointing oil, there was consecration by water, and sometimes even by fire, but everything was in conjunction with the blood. The absolute statement that can be made is that under the first covenant, there could be no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. This concept was summarized in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." The New Testament reality of this principle was brought forth in Jesus institution of the Lord's Supper. In Matthew 26:28, Jesus, speaking of the cup of the Lord, says, "for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." The blood of Christ is definitely powerful enough to cleanse us from all our sins. Thanks be to God for this awesome plan of redemption and promise!

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 9:23-28**  
(The Consummation of the Ages)

**9:23** – “**Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.**” – In the previous verse, the point was made that under the Law nearly everything was cleansed with blood. Before the tabernacle, its furniture, or the priests of the Old Testament could be useful for service to God, they had to be cleansed. In the same way, the people also had to be sprinkled with blood before they could be a part of the covenant. Obviously all of the makings of the tabernacle, including the furniture and vessels didn’t have to be cleansed from their own sin, but had to be sanctified because of their contact with sinners. The priests and people, on the other hand, had to first have their own sins forgiven so that they could be set apart as God’s people. As verse 22 of Hebrews 9 stated, “... and without shedding of blood there is *no forgiveness*.” Thus it was necessary for Old Testament vessels and people to be cleansed with Old Testament animal sacrifices. The copies of the real system were made ceremonially clean by the copies of the true sacrifice. However, the true vessels and people, the heavenly things, would have to be cleansed with something better than the physical replica. Someone may ask the question, “Why did the heavens need cleansed?” The answer to that question is twofold. First of all, the heavens needed to be made clean from the sin-tainted presence of Satan. Remember that before Christ’s ascension, the devil had access to the throne of God – see Job 1:6. However, with the events of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension to the throne, Satan was cast out – see Luke 10:17-18, John 12:31, Revelation 12:7-9. Because of the sinful rebellion staged by Satan, the heavenly places would surely need to be cleansed. Secondly, since Christians are priests in the heavenly realm – see 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9; Philippians 3:20-21; Ephesians 2:4-7 – we had to be cleansed from our sins so we would be worthy to serve God. Christians are the primary articles making up the “heavenly things.” The Old Testament sacrifices were simply a shadow of the one true sacrifice, so they were insufficient to cleanse the true heavenly things. Only Christ, with His sacrifice, was able to purify not only the heavens, but also a people whose permanent residency is in heaven.

**9:24** – “**For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;**” – The point brought forth earlier in Hebrews 8:2 and 9:11 is reiterated here. Jesus did not enter a holy place made with hands (as a matter of fact, He couldn’t enter because He couldn’t be a priest on earth), but instead entered the true Holy of Holies. Just as the Old Testament high priest entered the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement on behalf of the people, so Jesus entered heaven as our High Priest to appear before God on our behalf. Under the old system the sacrifices were insufficient, the high priests were weak, and the appearance of the high priest was for a few minutes a year. However, under the New Covenant, Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, He is the perfect Son who is also High Priest, and His appearance on our behalf is continual and eternal. As High Priest, Jesus is our Advocate to intercede for us so that our sins will not be charged against us – see 1 John 2:1, Hebrews 7:25. Not only does He serve as our attorney to ensure that we receive mercy, but He also serves us as our counselor to supply the tools and the power



for us to overcome – see Hebrews 4:16. In other words, the intercession of Christ on our behalf isn't only for the purpose of us having our sins forgiven, but also so that we stand always in fellowship with the Father through Him and overcome through His power – see Romans 8:31-39.

**9:25-26 – “nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not His own. Otherwise He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” –**

Back in chapter 8, verse 3, the writer of Hebrews established that since every high priest offers both gifts and sacrifices for sins, Jesus would also have to offer something as High Priest. After inserting information concerning the benefits of the New Testament at the end of chapter 8, the writer then set the stage for speaking of Christ's offering by reviewing the shadow of the Day of Atonement under the old system. Finally, it is revealed that Jesus' offering was of Himself! The high priests of old had to take blood of animals because it was impossible for them to take their own blood. First of all, their blood couldn't be offered because it had been defiled by their own sins. Secondly, they could never offer their own blood, because the death of the sacrifice was first required. However, Jesus is a High Priest of another order! His blood is acceptable as an offering because during the days of His flesh He was tempted in all things as we are yet without sin. He is High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek because of the power of an *indestructible life*. Since Jesus rose from the dead, no more to return to decay, He is able to be both the sacrifice and the High Priest with the offering. This offering wouldn't be made continually, year after year, as under the Old Testament, but was a one-time offering. If it were to be offered more than once, Jesus would have had to have suffered continually from the foundation of the world. Yet in God's perfect timing, at the consummation of the ages, Jesus offered Himself in the true Holy of Holies. The greatest day in the history of the world wasn't the day that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and placed in the manger, although that was a great day. The most important day of all history wasn't the crucifixion of Christ, although that was an essential day. The greatest day wasn't even Christ's resurrection from the dead, although His bodily resurrection is a key to the Christian's hope. The greatest day isn't the onrushing Day of Judgment, although that day will be manifested to all. According to the Scriptures, the greatest day in the revelation of God's plan to man is the day that Jesus ascended to heaven and entered the Most Holy Place to sprinkle His blood on the spiritual mercy seat and forever put away our sins. The writer of Hebrews calls the day of Jesus' ascension “*the consummation of the ages*,” because that was the apex of the entire history of the world in the realm of time. Just as the high point of the O.T. Day of Atonement was the sprinkling of the goat's blood on the mercy seat so that propitiation was made for the sins of the people, so the climax of God's plan for all of mankind was reached at the offering of Jesus' blood in the heavenly Holy of Holies. The emphasis of the Scriptures on the ascension of Christ is clear: “Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, *rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us*” (Romans 8:34). The consummation of the ages can only be properly understood by spiritual people whose veil of flesh has been removed. God has put tremendous effort into the shadows of the Old Testament and the explanation of those in the New Testament that we might journey past

the physical death of Christ, past His bodily resurrection, and into the Holy of Holies with Christ's brilliant body of glory illuminating that place. Brethren, may the eyes of our heart be enlightened, may we courageously walk by faith, and may we draw near to the very presence of our holy God!

**9:27-28 – “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”** – The writer of Hebrews is on a subplot concerning the oneness of Christ's sacrifice and offering. While on this topic, He brings in the related point of God's plan for all people to die not often, but once. A few exceptions to this rule would be Enoch and Elijah who were both taken up without ever tasting physical death (the same could be said of Christians when Christ returns), and the few people throughout time who have been temporarily resurrected, e.g. Lazarus. The act of physical death is one of the surest things in this physical existence, and even Jesus wasn't exempted from this experience. Everyone who believes in reincarnation, Purgatory, or some other “second-chance” opportunities have to deny the obvious implication of this verse. The reality is that there are no second chances, but after a person's one-time death, they will next give an account for everything done in the body, whether good or bad – see Ecclesiastes 12:14, 2 Corinthians 5:10. Consistent with God's plan for man, Jesus also died only once. He was bodily raised from the dead to prove God's power over death in the view of physical man. When He ascended to heaven, He was given a body of glory, and would never again return to the grave. The physical sacrifice made at Calvary was transported into a spiritual offering given one time. The removal of sin was accomplished through the sprinkling of the heavenly mercy seat, then Jesus sat down on His throne – see Hebrews 1:3, 10:12-13. At Jesus' second coming, He will appear where “every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him” (Revelation 1:7). At that point in time, Jesus is not coming to remove sins, because His first coming to the Holy of Holies had already accomplished that purpose. Anyone not saved from their sins at Christ's coming will face sure and certain eternal judgment; there will be no more chances – see 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10. For those who are in Christ, Jesus is coming back for the one salvation still needed by us – the salvation of our body. Philippians 3:20-21 states it best, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” Brethren, let us lay aside the old man, put on the new man, and gaze into the glory of God in the Holy of Holies that we may eagerly await Christ's return! As 1 John 3:2 says, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

**HEBREWS CHAPTER 10:1-18**  
(The Perfect Sacrifice)

**10:1 – “For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.”** – The writer of Hebrews continues with his closing point from chapter 9 – Jesus presented one sacrifice which was sufficient for all time. In contrast, the prescribed sacrifices under the Law were inadequate for true cleansing. This isn’t surprising when one remembers that the Law in its entirety was never God’s plan for bringing about perfection. As Hebrews 7:19 reminds us, “for the Law made *nothing* perfect.” It is not as if only certain aspects of the first covenant were lacking, rather, every aspect of it failed to bring God’s people to completion. The Law only held the shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of them. Briefly imagine the difference between seeing a shadow of a person or an actual image of that person. Because there is no reality in the shadow, there is no life expressed therein. On the other hand, an actual view of the person brings the reality of that person to life. Since the Law only has a shadow, it is impossible for it to impart life – see Galatians 3:21. Just as Hebrews chapter 7 brought out the imperfections of the Old Testament priesthood, so chapter 10 exposes the weaknesses of the Old Testament sacrifices. The yearly sacrifices offered by the high priest on the Day of Atonement could never bring perfection to the high priests (those who draw near). As the word perfection is mentioned, I would again refer everyone to the series that Walter Scott brought forth beginning in January of 1840. He began by arguing for “Christian perfection, whatever that may be.” In his studies, he distinguishes between perfection of the conscience and perfection of character. Somewhere along the way I have added a third distinguishing mark – perfection of the body. In my studies of Scripture I have found these 3 categories to be helpful in understanding this issue of perfection. In the reference of Hebrews 10 to the insufficiency of the Old Testament sacrifices to bring perfection, the perfection spoken of clearly refers to the conscience. Remember Hebrews 9:13-14, “For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 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?” Under the Law, when the high priest offered the bull for his own sins, he could not receive a perfect conscience. In the same manner, when he offered a goat for the people, they could never receive a perfect conscience either.

**10:2-4 – “Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers [those who serve], having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”** – The writer of Hebrews gives an amazing revelation as to what constitutes a clear conscience. A clear conscience means that there is no consciousness or remembrance of sins. The insufficiency of the Old Testament sacrifices is evidenced by their need to be continually offered. Look! If a sacrifice truly pays the price for sin, then sins would be remitted, and there would be no further need for sacrifices. If the high priest was truly cleansed from

his sins through the blood of the bull, he would have only had to offer it one time. In actuality, he had to continually year after year offer the same sacrifices which could never remove those sins. As a matter of fact, not only were those sacrifices inadequate for the removal of sins, but they actually compounded the problem by becoming an ongoing reminder of sins. The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins for a number of reasons. First, animals are not moral creatures, so they can neither be innocent or guilty. Obviously even a physically unblemished, yet amoral creature cannot pay the price for guilty human beings. Second, these animals were sacrificed against their will. There is something inherently lacking in coercively taking the life of someone else to redeem me. This would be akin to stealing money from my neighbor's cash box to pay the price of my dental work. The debt may be temporarily paid, but I don't have a clean conscience about it. In contrast, Jesus' sacrifice is able to grant a perfect conscience to those under the New Covenant. Jesus was the true unblemished sacrifice in that He was tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin. The life of a morally pure person is sufficient to pay the price for my sins. Also, the sacrifice that He made was given voluntarily. As He Himself said in John 10:17-18, "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." When someone volunteers to pay for my bills, not only are they paid, but I have a clean conscience about it. Hence, for Christians, since our consciences have been truly cleansed, we must forget what lies behind and press on to what lies ahead. The past has truly been removed, and our "life has been hidden with Christ in God." The book of Hebrews exposes those Christians who fall away as people who never truly understand what it means to have a clean conscience. These are people who "again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." Brethren, Jesus *died once* to pay the price for our sins; now He *lives forever* to always intercede for us. Those who go on sinning willfully are people who, among other things, "regard as *unclean* the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified." Brethren, let us truly grasp what Christ has done for us so that we may be perfected in conscience and move forward to serve God!

**10:5-7 – “Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.’ ” –**

When Jesus made His entrance into the view of man in this world, He had a clear mission. The Holy Spirit chooses to use the prophecy from a Davidic Psalm to communicate Christ's purpose in coming. First of all, Christ had to come because the Old Testament sacrifices could never accomplish God's purpose. Numerous times in the Old Testament, God clearly states that animal sacrifice was not His desire – see 1 Samuel 15:22, Isaiah 1:11-13, Micah 6:6-8. So in place of these inadequate animal sacrifices, Jesus said through David, "... a body You have prepared for Me." This quotation of Psalm 40:6 is taken by the writer of Hebrews from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. An attempt to compare this statement from Hebrews 10 with your Old Testament version of Psalm 40 results in a noticeable distinction. Our translation of the Hebrew version of the Old Testament has, "My ears You have opened [pierced]" in

place of "... a body You have prepared for me." There are three different passages of the Old Testament which help us understand that the Hebrew and Greek versions were making the same point although there was a difference in word usage. Exodus 21:5-6 and Deuteronomy 15:16-17 make the same point of a bond-servant who willingly chooses to serve his master for the rest of his life. This permanent, willing servitude was shown by his master taking an awl and piercing his ear into the door. In like manner, Jesus was a willing bond-servant of His Father all the days of His life. Another interesting passage comes from the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 50:4-7, where verses 4-5 state, "The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient nor did I turn back." Here the thought communicated is that of a faithful disciple who has chosen to listen and willingly obey the voice of the Lord. Certainly both the concept of bond-servant and disciple fittingly describe Jesus' willingness to give His whole body in service to His Heavenly Father. This concept of complete surrender to the will of the Father is emphasized in the Psalm quotation as Jesus says that He has come to do God's will. Also notice that Jesus understood that it had been recorded in the Scriptures (in the scroll of the book) for Him to fulfill God's desire. Jesus cried out on the cross, "It is finished!" only after fulfilling all that the Scriptures had spoken concerning Him – see John 19:28-30. The perfect living sacrifice of Jesus truly was the pleasure of the Father.

**10:8-10 – "After saying above, 'Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will.' He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."** –

After summarizing the poetic quotation found in Psalm 40, the writer of Hebrews reiterates that God took no pleasure in the whole Old Testament system of sacrifice. Certainly the Law required them, but again that was simply in order to have a physical shadow of the spiritual reality. Under the Old Covenant God definitely accepted sacrifices that were made with a faithful heart, such as the offering made by Abel – see Genesis 4:3-5, Hebrews 11:4. However, out of all of the faithful men and women of the Old Testament, there was not one who could give God an unblemished sacrifice of their life. As Isaiah 59:16 says, "And He [God] saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede ...". Hence there was a need for Jesus to come and do the will of the Father. (Notice that the word for "will" is different than the word for "covenant" or "will" spoken of in chapter 9. The Greek word "diaqhkh" is used in chapter 9 to speak of a covenant or will whereby someone passes on their property to another. The Greek word "qelhma" is used in chapter 10 to speak of desire.) The complete offering of Jesus' body as a sacrifice to the Father truly fulfilled the desire of the Father. Remember that in Jesus' greatest agony while in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Culminating in His offering of blood on the mercy seat of the true Holy of Holies, Jesus proved that He would do the will of His Father in all things. In so doing, He removed the Levitical system, and replaced it with a

new system. “He takes away the first in order to establish the second.” The result of God’s desire as fulfilled in Christ is that Christians are made holy. We have been sanctified through the offering of Jesus’ body. In other words, through Jesus’ giving completely of His physical life as demonstrated in His physical death, He set us apart to do the same thing. The offering of Jesus’ body was “once for all.” Through all that Jesus did, we have been set free from the power of sin, and sanctified so that we may present to God each individual body as a living and holy sacrifice that is pleasing to Him – see Romans 12:1. The middle part of Hebrews 13 emphasizes that Christians get both to bear the reproach of Christ as well as offer up sacrifices that are pleasing to God. It is only because of Christ being “He who sanctifies” that we have got to be “those who are sanctified.” As those who have been set apart, we are now privileged to render service to the Heavenly Father.

**10:11-14 – “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who have been sanctified.”** – In verse 1 of this chapter, the emphasis was upon the imperfection of the yearly sacrifices. Here it is upon the daily sacrifices of the priests. Since those great sacrifices offered by the high priest on the Day of Atonement couldn’t cleanse the conscience of the high priest, it is obvious that all other sacrifices would also be imperfect. The Old Testament system was one of continual sacrifice, and yet sins could never truly be remitted. All of the rivers of blood that flowed couldn’t offer a clean conscience to anyone. In contrast, Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins for all time. Jesus’ offering in the Most Holy Place of heaven paid the price for all sins committed throughout history – past, present, and future. The Old Testament priest could never rest from his duties (notice that Hebrews speaks of him as standing) because they could never accomplish God’s desire. On the other hand, after Jesus had made purification for sins at the consummation of the ages, His work was done. He now sits at the right hand of God, waiting for His enemies to be made a footstool. While the outcome of the spiritual war has not yet been manifested to all, it has definitely been decided. 1 Corinthians 15:26 reminds us that “the last enemy that will be abolished is death.” Through Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, He has proven His power over death and has removed any fear of death for the Christian. The deciding battle in the spiritual war resulted in Christ’s complete victory over Satan, whereby the rulers and authorities were disarmed, bound in chains, and marched through the streets in view of all citizens of the heavenly kingdom – see Colossians 2:15. Satan was booted from heaven, and now God will soon crush Satan under the feet of His church – see Romans 16:20. An extra confidence for the Christian is that in this process Jesus perfected for all time those who are sanctified. The Christian can stand today before God with a perfectly clean conscience, and assuredly serve Him. While much of the rest of Scripture exhorts the Christian to do His part to be holy in all his behavior, the thrust of Hebrews is that we have been made holy because of what Christ has already done for us. This perfection of the conscience for the Christian is a prerequisite for true change of character. Praise God that the Christian’s sins have truly been taken away!

**10:15-18 – “And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them,’ He then says, ‘And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.”** – Consistently throughout the book of Hebrews, the writer attributes Old Testament Scriptures to the words of God. In chapter 1, for example, all of the Old Testament quotations are ascribed directly to God the Father. The quotations at the end of chapter 2 are credited to Christ. Here in chapter 10, as in other places within the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit is referenced as the speaker. The point is that the writer of Hebrews fully recognized that the Old Testament in its entirety was inspired by God. A related corollary is that the means by which the Holy Spirit speaks is through the proven Scriptures. Although many today claim that God speaks to them within their heart, the only testifying of the Holy Spirit in these last days is the message of Christ as revealed in the New Testament. In reference to the theme of the Christian’s clear conscience given through Christ, the writer of Hebrews reiterates a couple of points brought forth in chapter 8. First, there is a new covenant which God makes with the joint house of Israel, that is, the church. This covenant is far superior to the old covenant because of its difference in results. The Old Testament inscribed on stones could never truly change the desires of the heart. As Romans 7 points out, sin actually uses the Law against a person to arouse sinful passions within him. Then the judgment of the Law holds the individual as a prisoner of a failure mentality. Apart from Christ there is no way to break free from that ministry of death. In contrast, the new covenant actually imparts life through the Holy Spirit. The new creature gets to behold in the pages of the New Testament the glory of God in the face of Christ. As God’s glory transforms the Christian into His likeness, the Christian’s desires of the heart and mind are changed to meet God’s holy desires. Connected with this transformation is the complete freedom from sin because of Christ’s sacrifice and offering. The Christian’s sins and lawless deeds are forgiven and forgotten by God so that the Christian can come to the point where he has no consciousness of those sins. When the Christian understands the true meaning of God’s forgiveness, he recognizes that there is no longer any price for him to pay in reference to his sins. Instead of trying to sacrifice himself in payment or attempting to recrucify Jesus, the Christian can now move forward to serve God with the complete freedom of a clear conscience.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 10:19-25**

(Exhortation to Enter)

**10:19-20 – “Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,”** – The word “therefore” lets us know that the following information is applicable because of the points made previously. The fact that God has given the Christian a pure conscience through the sacrifice and offering of Christ empowers the Christian to come into the presence of God with confidence. Remember that under the Old Covenant only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement. In order to enter, he had to bring with him the blood of bulls and goats to sprinkle on the mercy seat. Once propitiation had been made, the back room of the tabernacle or temple was again off limits for a full year. However, when Christ entered into the true Holy of Holies and offered His blood on the real mercy seat, the price for sins was forever paid. From that point forward, the way was opened for all Christians to come into the Holy of Holies and draw near to God. This entrance into the presence of God is here called “a new and living way.” It is clear that prior to Christ’s coming there was no true access into the presence of God for fleshly man. Even Moses, whom the Old Testament speaks of as a man who had found favor in God’s sight, could not behold God’s face and live. Moses was only allowed to see the trailing edge of God’s glory; he couldn’t see it in full or he would surely die. When Jesus brought in a new covenant, though, He went as a forerunner before us. Through the giving of His body as a living sacrifice, He pleased God and opened up the way for us to stand in the very presence of God. At Jesus’ death on the cross, the physical curtain separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies in Herod’s Temple was torn in two from top to bottom, signifying that through Jesus man could once again be in direct fellowship with God. Thus, the third chapter of 2 Corinthians makes the point that the veil of man’s flesh separating man from beholding God’s glory is removed whenever a person turns to the Lord in immersion. The end result of Christ’s opening of this new way is that the new creature can now behold the full glory of God in the face of Christ. Let us enter with confidence!

**10:21-22 – “and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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.”** – Not only has Christ performed the role of “trailblazer” in making a new path that enters all the way into God’s presence, but He continues to do the work of the High Priest on our behalf. In other words, Jesus first of all opened the door to the throne room of the Sovereign of the entire universe, and now He continually extends the golden scepter of righteousness out to all Christians so that we may enter without fear. The exhortation for the Christian is twofold – 1) draw near, and 2) do it with the right motives. God wants us to be in close fellowship with Him; He longs for us to worship Him. However, for worship to be pleasing to the Father, it must be in Spirit and in truth. God doesn’t want a sacred/secular split in the lives of Christians, where a Christian “puts on his Sunday best” spiritually to “enter” into God’s presence and then departs and promptly puts back on the old man. The obvious thrust of “draw near” in the book of Hebrews is that the Christian can and



should be in continual fellowship with and prostration before the Father. The Christian never leaves the holy place; rather, the sanctuary of refuge accompanies him everywhere. The reason that this is possible is because our hearts are always clean. As the Holy Spirit said earlier in this chapter, Jesus “has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” In God’s perfect plan, this clean conscience was imparted at the time of our immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ – see Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21. When a person in obedience from the heart is externally washed in immersion, he is internally given a new, clean heart. Because of this new and clean life, the Christian can confidently draw near without any doubts. As Ephesians 5:25-27 remind us, “... as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

**10:23 – “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;”** – The good confession which is a prerequisite for Christianity and ongoing requirement for all Christians is no minor stand. From the time of Christ until now hundreds of thousands, possibly millions have been put to death for making the uncompromising statement that “Jesus is Lord.” This confession of Jesus concerning Himself made before the authorities ultimately sealed His physical death on the cross. When He confirmed that He was the Son of God before the Sanhedrin, the high priest tore his robes and the consensus of the Council was that He was worthy of death – see Matthew 26:59-66. Although Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, wanted to acquit Jesus, it was Jesus’ acknowledgement that He was the King that forced Pilate to play his hand and turn Jesus over for crucifixion. In like manner, when a Christian openly maintains the truth that Jesus is the Christ, it raises the ire of all non-Christians. Worldly people who hold positions of authority are threatened by the fact that they do not have the final say, and common men simply don’t want to answer to God for every deed. A true Christian’s confession with his lips and his life threaten the complacency of people in the world, and often results in open persecution of Christians. Under the weight of persecution, there is temptation for the Christian to compromise or waver in his stand. The writer of Hebrews exhorts Christians to hold fast to our position, remembering that our hope is grounded in the fact that Jesus is Lord. Since there is a resurrection from the dead, we can bear up under persecution even unto death, knowing that this world is not our home. The very one who raised Christ from the dead is faithful about His promises (remember the two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie), and will also raise us as well.

**10:24-25 – “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”** – Faith brings us into the presence of God, hope for the reward of an eternal home with God keeps us pressing on, and love for God and for the brethren motivates us to encourage each other along the way. Certainly faith is an individual attribute (we can’t hold it on behalf of someone else’s salvation), and God expects us to believe Him regardless of the unfaithful behavior of anyone else. However, in God’s perfect plan, the new creation is more than just faith –

it is actually characterized as “faith working through love” – see Galatians 5:6. “God is love,” the Scripture says, and that love is demonstrated through God’s sacrifice for the world – see John 3:16, 1 John 4:8-9. In like manner, God desires for His children to have love for the lost and for each other. God has ordained the assembly of the saints on the first day of the week for, among other things, the purpose of building love among the brethren. The assembly provides opportunity for Christians to grow in fellowship – a true oneness of mind. One of the names for the Lord’s Supper is “communion” which means a common sharing. Both 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and chapter 11 communicate the oneness developed through rightfully partaking in the Lord’s Supper. When a person commits himself to the Lord’s Supper, he puts himself in position to consistently build unity within the body. The mindset that a Christian should always have in assembling is to encourage those around him. We are to stimulate each other to more love and greater deeds. It is also important to remember that people in general need encouragement so that they won’t be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. If a person isn’t at the assembly, he certainly cannot contribute to the growth of the body. A person who habitually neglects the assembly actually demonstrates a lack of love for his brethren. This neglecting of the assembly is a warning sign that a person is in spiritual trouble and may be caving under the pressure of the world. Judgment day is definitely on the way, so let us encourage the brethren first of all to assemble together, and secondly, to be givers not takers. In the process of giving, a person actually receives the most, and ultimately is prepared for that final day.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 10:26-31**

(Judgment to Insulters)

**10:26-27 – “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.”** – The whole context of the tenth chapter of Hebrews thus far has been to communicate the completely clean conscience available to the Christian because of the sacrifice and offering of Christ. The exhortation has been to draw near to God with confidence, and to stand firm in our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. The natural response of such confidence and faith is to assemble with the saints for the purpose of proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes again. In the process of assembling, Christians stimulate each other to love and good deeds. This God-ordained encouragement is essential for Christians to be able to overcome the evil forces of this world. However, when a person neglects the assembly as a matter of habit, it is certain that a backward slide is taking place. The following warning in Hebrews specifically is in connection with neglecting the assembly of the saints, but also has a more general application. Without mincing words, the Holy Spirit communicates the dire outcome of those who continue to sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth. This passage is not talking about those who sin from lack of strength, but those who set their mind to rebel against God and His plan to purify His people. There is no mistaking that all sin is a choice – see Hebrews 11:24-26. However, there is a huge difference between those who earnestly desire to be like Christ but do not yet win all of the battles with Satan, and those who have no intent of overcoming sin but instead are determined to go on sinning. Even in the Old Testament there was no opportunity for forgiveness for those who intentionally sinned against God – see Numbers 15:29-30. God supplied the sacrifice of goats for atonement for His people in the Old Testament who had sinned in weakness, but cut off those who blasphemed the Lord. In a much superior manner in the New Testament, God, through Christ, gives continual cleansing to the honest and humble Christian whose mind is set on the things of the Spirit. However, God’s purpose in granting a clean conscience to Christians is so that they can render service to Him. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus has perfected for all time those who are *sanctified*. God doesn’t want Christians to continue in sin that grace might increase, but instead desires that we would offer our bodies to Him for the purpose of righteousness. People who refuse to grasp the reality of the clean conscience available through Christ are no longer perfected through Christ’s sacrifice. Instead of the hope of eternal life in Christ, the only outcome awaiting such a backslider is a terrifying expectation of judgment. The Spirit-led Christian eagerly awaits Christ’s return with confidence, but the once-regenerated Christian who has again allowed himself to become a willful sinner can only cower in fear at the onrushing judgment. Let’s assemble together, brethren, and encourage each other to make it to heaven!

**10:28-29 – “Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the**

**Spirit of grace?”** – In a clear, physical way the Old Testament established God’s justice. Anyone who deliberately rejected God’s law was put to death without mercy. One example of this is found in Numbers 15:32-36, wherein a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. After getting specific instructions from God to put the man to death, Moses had the congregation stone him to death. Why was keeping the Sabbath so important that a man who intentionally ignored God’s command about it would be put to death? The Sabbath was primarily a commemoration of the people of Israel concerning the work of God’s physical creation of the world in six days and His resting on the seventh day – see Exodus 20:8-11. It also was a reminder to them that although they had been slaves in Egypt, God had rescued them and set them free – see Deuteronomy 5:12-15. It was essential for every Israelite to remember God’s power and love for His people. Anyone who refused to acknowledge God in obedience of the Sabbath was to be permanently cut off from the nation. Under the New Testament, Christians are not commanded to keep the Sabbath holy to the Lord, but are instead told to partake of the Lord’s Supper in *remembrance* of Christ. Christians are to participate in the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week – see combination of 1 Corinthians 16:2 with 1 Corinthians 11:17-32, as well as Acts 20:7. Obviously the commemoration on the first day of the week in place of the seventh day of the week is because the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the new creations brought about through that resurrection are a greater display of God’s power than that of the physical creation and rescue from Egypt. If physical death resulted from breaking the Sabbath under the Old Testament, how much more will spiritual death be the outcome of those who refuse the table of the Lord! Since the Lord’s Supper is an all-encompassing meal communicating Christ from multiple aspects, intentional rejection of this meal brings about certain judgment from God. The communion meal truly symbolizes the absolute need of a Christian for Christ – see John 6:35, 48, 53-58. Hence the deliberate forsaking of the Lord’s Supper communicates a rejection of Christ in the mind of the person who had been in covenant with God. The mentality of a willful sinner is demonstrated in abandoning the table of the Lord. This abandonment is described as 1) trampling under foot the Son of God, 2) regarding as unclean the blood of the covenant, and 3) insulting the Spirit of grace. In his mind, the one-time Christian who has fallen away through willful sinning takes the exalted Christ off the throne and tramples Him under his foot. He regards the blood of the covenant (remember when Christ implemented the Lord’s Supper, He called it “my blood of the covenant”) as *unclean*; that is, he refuses to believe that Christ’s sacrifice and offering are able to cleanse his conscience from dead works. Finally this same blasphemer is guilty of the eternal sin by insulting the Holy Spirit – see Matthew 12:31-32. When a person who has been made a partaker of the Holy Spirit chooses to continue in sin rather than taking the victory available through Christ, he is severed from grace and can no longer be renewed to repentance. Disdainfully sniffing at the table of the Lord is not a trifling issue, but represents a soul that is in serious danger of going past the point of no return. Such willful disobedience deserves the just recompense of God’s righteous judgment!

**10:30-31** – “**For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**” – God is most certainly love as is borne out in God’s sending His Son into the world to redeem sinful man. He has pulled out all of the stops in helping us

get to heaven. Not only has Jesus paid the price for our sins as the perfect sacrifice, but He has also offered His blood in the heavenly Holy of Holies as the perfect High Priest. In addition to rendering the devil powerless by means of His resurrection from the dead, Jesus also continues to intercede for us so that we may draw near to God with complete confidence. This same God who so intensely communicates the love that He has for us also is a holy God who will not be mocked. If there is no judgment for sinners, then Christ's sacrifice and offering are meaningless. However, the reality of the coming Judgment Day helps us assign the proper value to the blood of Christ. Former Christians who have abandoned their confession of Jesus for the sake of willful sin will not escape God's condemnation. God will repay with vengeance those who have trampled under foot His Son. "For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them." (2 Peter 2:21) There is no doubt that the righteous Judge of all the earth will deal justly. Everyone will stand before the judgment seat and give an account to God. Christians can stand confidently before the throne knowing that the Judge is also our Counselor (attorney), and that we are given the verdict of "righteous." However, the person who has chosen to deny Christ after once confessing Him will find that Christ will deny him before the Father. The dreadful outcome for such a person is the furious fire of hell. This person who has fallen away from the living God will certainly fall into the hands of the living God. Consider the outcome, and draw near to God!

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 10:32-39**

(Reward of Confidence)

**10:32-34 – “But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.”** – Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer of Hebrews has found a beautiful way to exhort the brethren to encourage each other in this race of life. After explaining at great length how the Christian can stand blameless before God on account of Christ’s sacrifice and offering, the writer then warns what happens if a person falls away from that good standing with God. Following such a strong warning, the writer delves into the positive past of these Hebrew Christians to remind them of the good things they had already done by keeping the right focus. Just as in chapter 6 he followed up the warning against falling away with the positive remarks that God wouldn’t forget their work and love for the saints, so he does here. In the early days of the church in the first century, when a person made the good confession and was immersed into Christ, persecution was almost sure to follow. The Jews regarded it blasphemy for their former “brethren” to claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead and truly was the Son of God. A quick perusal of the book of Acts gives a glimmer into the persecution the church faced from the days of Christ’s ascension in A.D. 30 until Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome in about A.D. 60. From the trials of the apostles, the death of Stephen, and the seizure and imprisonment of men and women, as well as the open hostility, threats, and beatings of Paul at the hand of the Jews, there is no doubt that these early Christians had their faith tested. As brought out here by the writer of Hebrews, these early Christians successfully passed the test of persecution, and stood firm in their faith. Christians were regarded as the outcasts of Jewish society as they were expelled from synagogues and suffered accompanying economic hardships. Christians who didn’t experience these sufferings first-hand still chose to be involved by sharing with their suffering brethren. It is easy to conjecture from the book of Acts that this sharing was both physical (money and other goods) and emotional. Just as Jesus’ followers watched over His body after His death, giving Him a decent burial, and bringing spices, etc., so Christians continued to support each other in their prison sentences. It seems that many Christians also lost their homes and other possessions simply for wearing the name of Christ. The most astonishing historical fact about the Christians of the first century was their joyful attitude in the midst of such tremendous persecution. The writer reminds them that the reason they had been able to keep such joy was because of their eternal, heavenly mindset. When a person recognizes that this world is just a temporal location that is going to go up in smoke some day, then there is no reason to get upset when some of those things are taken away today. Let us all remember, brethren, that this world is not our home!

**10:35-36 – “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”** – True confidence is not something that is

easily gained. Calm assurance in the midst of trying circumstances can only be acquired through faith in God's Word and the proven character resulting from success in previous tests. The Hebrew Christians had successfully passed the tests of persecution in the earlier days of the Church, and the writer wanted them to hang on to the confidence they had gained. It appears that the outside worldly pressure had somewhat lapsed, and a casual attitude was developing among these first-century Christians. The Holy Spirit reminded them and us that true confidence has a great reward. As previously mentioned, Christ will greatly reward the person who confesses His name before men. The letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation picture magnificent blessings that will be given to those who overcome. However, to run through the finish line in this spiritual race is no minor feat, hence the need for endurance. Whether it be withstanding tremendous physical persecution, warding off the constant fleshly pull of the world, or warring against the false doctrine that flows rampantly throughout the religious world, the Christian needs perseverance. What the Christian now beholds by faith, he will receive in sight only after finishing his course and overcoming in his good fight. After the Christian faithfully cries out, "It is finished!" then he will receive the final reward of eternal glory with Christ. Let's persevere and hang on to our confidence, no matter how fierce the struggle!

**10:37-39 – “ ‘For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.’ ”** – The Holy Spirit takes a great Old Testament passage and applies it directly to Jesus Christ and a person's response to Him. This quotation comes from Habakkuk 2:3-4, and is taken from the Septuagint with minor changes. The direct meaning of Habakkuk 2 is in reference to the prophet Habakkuk waiting for an answer from God. God's response is that the vision is coming soon, so to wait and be ready for it. God doesn't merely tell the prophet that that he must live by his faith, but He supplies the picture of deliverance in which Habakkuk was to believe. The proud Babylonians and apostate members of Judah would end up shrinking back before the revelation of God, and God would not be pleased with them. On the other hand, the righteous remnant, including Habakkuk, would live by their faith. The New Testament application is that God's final revelation will come to pass at Christ's return. Though the Christian may begin to wonder when Jesus will come back, there is absolute certainty that He is coming, and will come soon. The exhortation is for the Christian to live by faith; in other words, to grasp the picture of deliverance through Christ's sacrifice, offering, and continuing intercession, as well as the guarantee of the final inheritance granted through Christ's return. Christ is the One who does the work, but we must believe in that which He performs. Any immersed individual who doesn't continue to live by faith will shrink back in shame at Jesus' coming, and will be destroyed. However, the Christian who eagerly awaits Christ's return is righteous because of Christ, and will live eternally. The writer of Hebrews encourages the brethren with a great faith picture. He is confident that they will be faithful to the end, and as a result of their ferocious finish will have their souls preserved forever. Let's FINISH HARD!

## HEBREWS CHAPTER 11:1-7

(Definition of Faith; Examples of Abel, Enoch, and Noah)

**11:1 – “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”** – Before the writer of Hebrews displays examples of faith in the Old Testament greats, he first gives a brief definition of faith. The common person’s use of the word “faith” is generally far removed from the Scriptural definition of faith. Many people misuse the word “faith” when they are actually speaking of a “wish.” As an example, “I have faith that things are going to get better in my life.” What the person really is saying is that I wish and hope that things will get better, and I won’t give up on that wish. Sometimes we hear people speak of faith that they will overcome particular illnesses. Again they really don’t have Scriptural faith, but only hopeful wishes. True Scriptural faith does not exist in the absence of evidence, and definitely is not a hope in spite of the evidence. The late Francis Schaefer in his book, “He Is There and He Is Not Silent” put forth an excellent example contrasting the incorrect, common use of the word “faith” and true faith. The following is a major portion from the second appendix of that book.

Suppose we are climbing in the Alps and are very high on the bare rock and suddenly the fog shuts down. The guide turns to us and says that the ice is forming and that there is no hope; before morning we will all freeze to death here on the shoulder of the mountain. Simply to keep warm, the guide keeps us moving in the dense fog further out on the shoulder until none of us have any idea where we are. After an hour or so, someone says to the guide: “Suppose I dropped and hit a ledge ten feet down in the fog. What would happen then?” The guide would say that you might make it till the morning and thus live. So, with absolutely no knowledge or any reason to support his action, one of the group hangs and drops into the fog. This would be one kind of faith, a leap of faith.

Suppose, however, after we have worked out on the shoulder in the midst of the fog and the growing ice on the rock, we had stopped and we heard a voice which said: “You cannot see me, but I know exactly where you are from your voices. I am on another ridge. I have lived in these mountains, man and boy, for over sixty years and I know every foot of them. I assure you that ten feet below you there is a ledge. If you hang and drop, you can make it through the night and I will get you in the morning.”

I would not hang and drop at once, but would ask questions to try to ascertain if the man knew what he was talking about and if he was not my enemy. In the Alps, for example, I would ask him his name. If the name he gave me was the name of a family from that part of the mountains, it would mean a great deal to me. In the Swiss Alps there are certain family names that indicate mountain families of that area. For example, in the area of the Alps where I live, Avanthey would be such a name. In my desperate situation, even though time would be running out, I would ask him sufficient questions, and when I became convinced by his answers, then I would hang and drop.

This is faith, but obviously it has no relationship to the first instance. As a matter of fact, if one of these is called faith, the other should not be designated by the same word symbol. The historic Christian faith is not a leap of faith in the post-Kierkegaardian sense because, “he [God] is not silent,” and I am invited to ask sufficient questions in regard to details but also in regard to the existence of man.

Obviously Scriptural faith is in line with the second part of Schaefer’s example. This verse in Hebrews is clear: Faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for. From where does this absolute confidence or 100% certainty come? Complete assurance is available because God has demonstrated His faithfulness throughout the millennia. Through a series of pictures which He has presented, one building upon the other, God has proven that His word is always true. The Old Testament greats didn’t have as much past experience upon which to base their faith, but they too were allowed to ask sufficient questions of God that they might believe. For example, when the Scripture says that Abraham believed God that his descendants would be numerous, he first had dialogue



with God, asking about his heir. Abram believed God's response, for God had already taken care of him in his travels, including granting him protection from Pharaoh. For Christians under the New Covenant, it is even easier to have faith. While it is impossible to have direct, personal revelation from God, communication with Him is available through prayer and the Scriptures, and there is absolute proof that the words of the Bible have been spoken by the true, eternal God. Hence, the faith pictures presented for Christians throughout Old Testament prophecies and New Testament declarations should be tightly grasped by the saints. Faith truly is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the *conviction* of things not seen.

**11:2 – “For by it the men of old gained approval.”** – Faith has always been the only means of justification for God's people. Certainly the option of keeping the law is and always has been available: “He who practices them shall live by them” – see Leviticus 18:5, Galatians 3:12. The problem with this course is that the Scriptural record is clear: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) The only hope of life for anyone throughout history has been to acknowledge the one, true, living God, and to wholly believe His words. As the following examples of chapter 11 will show, the Old Testament greats were pleasing to God, not because of their keeping of the Law, but because they took hold of the specific pictures put in front of them by God.

**11:3 – “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”** – Since no person currently living on earth was present at the beginning, it is impossible to scientifically prove the origins of earth and the universe. The scientific method consists of the four steps of 1) observation, 2) formulation of a hypothesis, 3) testing of that hypothesis, and 4) postulating a theory. Since there can be no observation of the beginning, the scientific method cannot be used to establish how the world came to be. However, our worldview of the present will dictate the way that we take events of history and project into the past to explain our origins. As has been recently established in great clarity by Jerod Schaefer in his adult Bible school class, belief in a Creator doesn't make a person unscientific. Rather, when scientifically testing the creation model and the evolutionary model as well as possible, the creation model fits the evidence much better than does evolution. However, it takes faith to understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, because it cannot be seen with the physical eye. The Genesis account of the Creation clearly claims that this world was brought into existence by God's words as evidenced by the phrase, “Then God *said* ...” In simple terms, faith is believing the truth and power of God's word. Since our physical eyes didn't behold the physical creation, the eyes of our heart must test the words of the Scriptures throughout history to see that the Creation account is indeed true. When we ask the tough questions, and are honestly skeptical in our search for the truth, we find that the complete binding unit of the Old and New Testaments proves the existence of a Designer with a mind far greater than that of any human being or group of humans. After examining the historical record and reading the prophecies deliberately scattered throughout the Old Testament, we gain absolute assurance that there is a God (though we have not seen Him), and that He has spoken in the Scriptures. By faith, then, we understand that the visible world was created through

the invisible attributes of an eternal God. The power of God's *word* was able to bring into existence this whole world of wonder.

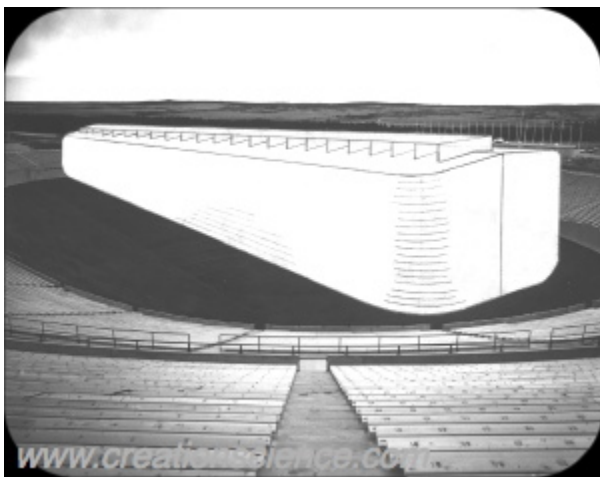
**11:4 – “By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.”** – Although there isn't any conclusive information in the Old Testament concerning God's expectations for sacrifice prior to that of Cain and Abel, it is apparent that God had revealed to Adam's family some specific instructions. It seems safe to assume that just as God communicated directly with Cain following His rejection of Cain's sacrifice, so God had directly given instructions to them previous to the sacrifice. Whether it was that Cain should have offered animal sacrifice instead of fruits from the ground, or whether it was simply an improper attitude in his offering (personally, I lean toward this position – in the Septuagint, Genesis 4:7 reads, “Did you not sin when you offered correctly, but did not divide it correctly?”), it is clear that Abel was accepted, and Cain was not. The inspired reason given for the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice is that he offered it in faith. He took the information given to him by God, thought about it, understood it, and offered his sacrifice in the right manner with the right motives. By acting from faith (as a side note, faith *always* produces action), Abel obtained the testimony that he was righteous. Jesus Himself declared that Abel was a righteous prophet – see Matthew 23:35, Luke 11:50-51. It was Abel's faith that resulted in his favor with God and the resulting declaration of his righteousness. Since God has chosen to bear witness to Abel's faithful giving, even though Abel is dead, his example continues to speak to us today. Just as Abel's blood cried out from the ground to God, so his faith proclaims to honest people everywhere that God's words must be obeyed.

**11:5 – “By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.”** – As Abel's sacrifice demonstrated his faith in God, so Enoch's life on earth spoke of his unwavering belief in the Lord. The Genesis account of Enoch is limited to a short discussion in the midst of genealogical information. Counting generations in Genesis 5, we conclude that Enoch was from the line of Seth, and was the seventh generation from Adam (Jude 14 also bears this out). In that genealogy, all of the other people are described as those who “lived” and “died.” However, Enoch is spoken of, not as one who merely lived, but as one who “walked with God.” Genesis never speaks of his death, but the term “died” is replaced with the phrase “and he was not, for God took him.” Enoch clearly didn't just exist, have a family, and die. Instead, he lived a spiritual life of communication with God, and he “walked with God” just as Noah did a few generations later. Because of his great faith, God rescued him from this earth and he was taken up to glory without having to experience physical death. Obviously, God was pleased with Enoch's faith.

**11:6 – “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”** – In one concise verse, the Holy Spirit brings forth one of the most important points of all Scripture. For a person to please God, he must walk with Him in faith. All of the

feigned, external obedience in the world will not substitute for a heart that is prostrated before God's throne as a result of faith. True, consistent, extended obedience can come only through true faith. As previously established in verse 1, true faith means a reasoned belief in the words of God. Whenever a person willingly adopts the picture given by God through the Scriptures, he becomes a partner in God's eternal plan. The prerequisites listed in this verse for a partnership with God are twofold. First, the Holy Spirit says that a person must believe that God is. In other words, we must understand that God is Yahweh, the One who is, always has been, and always will be. This is not some blind acknowledgement of a "higher power," but is a well thought-out response to the evidence which God has given of His existence through His creation, the conscience, the historical record, and the revelation of the Scriptures. The second requirement for coming to God is belief that He rewards those who seek Him. If the eternal reward is not beheld through the eyes of faith, there is not sufficient motivation to bypass the glories of the world in order to do the right thing. If, on the other hand, the glorious riches of the eternal Kingdom are seen by faith, then the Christian will joyfully endure whatever cross he must carry in order to enter into glory. Let's build our faith so that we may be pleasing partners with our Lord!

**11:7 – “By faith, Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”** – Noah was a man who demonstrated his belief in God in the midst of an overwhelmingly unbelieving world. When considering the immense size of the ark, there is no doubt that to Noah the construction would have been a monumental task. God's directions for the ark were for the length to be 300 cubits (450 feet), its width fifty cubits (75 feet), and its height thirty cubits (45 feet). In other words, its length would have been about 1 ½ times the length of a football field, its width about ½ the width of a football field, and its height about ¼ the width of a football field. The following is a sketch of what Noah's ark would have looked like in a football stadium; this sketch was taken from Walt Brown's book, "In the Beginning" from his website: [www.creation-science.com](http://www.creation-science.com).



From the time that Noah was given instructions to build the ark until the coming of the flood, there seems to have been a period of about 100 years – compare Genesis 5:32 with Genesis 7:6; also look at Genesis 6:3. How much of that time was spent building and how much was spent preaching to the people is impossible to say, but it is evident that Noah put much effort into both construction of the ark and warning the people. One can only imagine the ridicule of the godless world directed toward Noah and his immediate family. Even though the coming worldwide deluge couldn't be seen by Noah physically, he foresaw it prophetically through the words of God. As a result of his faith in God's words, he diligently built the ark and proclaimed warnings to the people. God warned him about things not seen, and his faith in the words of God produced a reverent attitude within him as he prepared the ark. As we know from the Old Testament account, the ark ended up being the salvation of his household, and the only continuance of the human race. When Noah, a "preacher of righteousness," gave warning to the people, his intended message of salvation ended up as a message of judgment upon those who rejected his words. In the same way, the words that Jesus preached are intended to save mankind from the wrath to come, but will judge those who refuse to listen – see John 3:17-21, 12:46-48. The same holds true for Christians today; the message which we preach is salvation for those who obey, but judgment for those who disbelieve. Since Noah faithfully believed God's words, preached to the people, and prepared the ark, he received the righteousness which God grants to all who have true faith. The application for us today is to believe God's words about oncoming judgment, about the sacrifice of Christ, and about God's plan for salvation. As 1 Peter 3:21-22 states in the context of Noah's family being brought safely through the water by means of the ark, "Corresponding to that, immersion now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." Let us hold fast to belief in Christ's resurrection and the role of immersion in salvation, and let us proclaim this to a dying world, that they might also become heirs of the righteousness which is according to faith.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 11:8-19**

(The faith of Abraham and Sarah)

**11:8-10 – “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** – The writer of Hebrews now turns to Abraham as an example of a man who lived by true faith. More so than any other person in the Scriptures, Abraham is upheld as a model of a faithful man. In Romans 4:16, he is called “the father of us all [the faithful].” Though Abraham’s life of faith has many important points which we will soon get to, his journey of belief actually began when God called him to leave his homeland. If a person were simply to read Genesis chapters 11 and 12, he would likely conclude that God called him out of Haran. However, a comparison of Stephen’s account in Acts 7:2 with Genesis 15:7 makes it clear that the initial call was while he was still in Ur of the Chaldeans. God further explained the mission after Abraham’s family had journeyed as far as Haran and settled there. Not much information was given to Abraham about his final destination, but he apparently knew that he was to continue on to the land of Canaan. Abraham couldn’t consult a travel atlas or check out Google maps, but had to set out in the right direction trusting that God would bring him to the Promised Land. Later in Genesis chapter 15, God said that he would give Abraham the land from the river of Egypt as far as the Euphrates River. He further promised in Genesis 17 that his descendants would hold all of the land of Canaan. It is clear from the Scriptural record that Abraham’s time in the Land of Promise was lived as a sojourner, for the only land that he ever owned therein was the burial plot purchased for his deceased wife. The fact that he lived in tents instead of a palace fit for a king shows that he never desired to gain the physical land as his inheritance. The pre-millennialists insist that God is still under obligation to fulfill his promise to Abraham, and therefore must at some point in the future give all of that land to the control of Abraham’s physical offspring. However, the Holy Spirit clearly establishes here in Hebrews 11 that Abraham wasn’t looking for a physical land, but gazed into the spiritual realm and desired the heavenly kingdom. It was his faith in the unseen eternal city that motivated him to obey God and leave his earthly homeland behind.

**11:11-12 – “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.”** – In the midst of the discussion of Abraham’s great faith, the writer of Hebrews brings in Sarah’s belief as well. There is uncertainty among translators as to the exact way to bring the Greek words into English. The literal phrase is that Sarah received “power for the laying down of seed.” This Greek phrase is always used in reference to a male and never to a female. Thus, the New International Version translates verse 11, “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.” The NIV puts the emphasis on Abraham’s faith and brings in Sarah as an aside, while the NASB and most other major translations emphasize Sarah as the subject of this sentence. Although difficult to nail down which is correct, one thing is certain: faith was required in both Abraham and Sarah for Isaac to be brought into existence. A marriage is a partnership, and for this relationship to be completely effective for God, the two must truly become one. Sometimes even Christian women may not understand their value in carrying forth God’s plan, but as evidenced by this passage, God needs faithful women also. Not only would the physical nation of Israel never have come into existence without Sarah’s faithful participation, but the promised Holy Spirit could not have come to the Gentiles either. When God promised that Abraham’s descendants would be as the stars of heaven in number, there was a physical as well as spiritual fulfillment. Isaac’s physical descendants went on to become the nation of Israel, which numbered in the millions by the time of their exodus from Egypt. However, the thrust of this prophecy is in reference to Abraham’s spiritual descendants, which are comprised of all those who have the indwelling Holy Spirit. The third chapter of Galatians makes it clear that the true blessing of Abraham is that even the Gentiles could receive the promised Spirit by faith. Each person who has been immersed into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and to receive the Holy Spirit belongs to Christ, is the offspring of Abraham, and is an heir according to promise. Let us all learn from Abraham and Sarah, and do our part to carry out the prophecies God has made concerning the church. Remember that by God’s design, faithful women are an integral part of His eternal plan.

**11:13 – “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.”** – Two very important promises are spoken of throughout the book of Hebrews. Both of them were initially made to Abraham, and later confirmed to other patriarchs. One of those promises was the Promised Land spoken of in verse 8 of this chapter. The other promise was the blessing of multiple descendants through the chosen seed. This promise was first mentioned in chapter 6 and again referred to in verse 12 of this chapter. As mentioned earlier, both of these promises had a physical, initial fulfillment, but would only be fully realized in the spiritual sense by the heirs living under the New Covenant. Thus all of the Old Testament greats died in faith without ever getting to receive either the heavenly kingdom or the Holy Spirit. However, all those who were justified by faith looked ahead and glimpsed the future blessings of the Spirit and the Church. These Old Testament faithful abandoned pursuit of earthly dreams, and sold out for a reward which they never got to receive in full this side of death. Their legacy, however, is clear; they were willing to lose earth in order to gain heaven.

**11:14-16 – “For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.”** – All of the faithful patriarchs recognized that the glory of this world is fleeting. Every one of them had traded worldly goals for a heavenly vision. Do not misunderstand people of faith; they haven’t become

discouraged and given up all hope, rather, they have fixed their hope on eternity instead of the temporal. In other words, although they lived as strangers and exiles on the earth, they were not mere wanderers. Faithful people are men and women of vision; they view with spiritual clarity that which cannot be seen with the physical eye. The quest of these Old Testament greats was a country of their own. It certainly would have been possible for them to turn back and again stake their original claim in Ur of the Chaldees. However, faithful souls do not turn their back on their God-given dreams. These believing men and women knew that the Promised Land was far superior to their homeland, and so they pressed on. Once they had viewed by faith the glorious kingdom, they wouldn't trade it for an easier day in the physical body. They had strong desire for a better country, a heavenly one. Because of their persistent pursuit of a heavenly land, God was proud of them, and He called them His own. He truly has prepared a city for them – a dwelling place of fellowship with Him and other believers forever. Brethren, let us imitate the faith of these spiritual examples, and press on to glory. Let's turn our back on the sirens of this temporal existence, and give up everything for the reward of Heaven. Let's be spiritual enough to recognize the pearl of great price, and committed enough to sell all that we have that we may buy it!

**11:17-19 – “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.”** – Genesis chapter 22 details the test which God gave Abraham concerning his son Isaac. After Isaac had probably become a teenager or young adult, God told Abraham to take his son and offer him as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. Early the next morning Abraham arose and departed for the place of offering. After 3 days journey, they arrived at the site which God had commanded. Abraham built the altar, arranged the wood, bound up Isaac, and laid him out on the altar. When Abraham took his knife to kill Isaac, God stopped him and provided a ram for a burnt offering in place of Isaac. However, it is obvious that Abraham had faith to offer his son even unto death. Again we see that faith is a reasoned response to the words of God. Abraham knew that God had previously delivered in regard to the miraculous birth of Isaac. After God had promised that one who came forth from Abraham's body would be his heir, He disqualified Ishmael (Abraham's human effort to bring about God's promise) and promised that through Isaac his descendants would be called – see Genesis 21:12. These verses of Hebrews tell us that Abraham didn't just blindly offer his son, but considered how this would work. True faith contemplates and considers; it asks the tough questions and searches to find the answers. Honest questions don't imply doubt; rather, they build strong faith. Abraham reflected on God's promise that Isaac would be his heir. He knew that although God had the capability to give him another child through miraculous birth, He couldn't do that and still be true to His word. The only logical conclusion that Abraham could arrive at was God's ability to raise the dead. Although God stopped Abraham's hand before he could slay Isaac, it was Abraham's faith in the resurrection that gave him back his son. In like manner, it is the Christian's faith in the resurrection of Christ that gives us complete certainty of our first resurrection in immersion and consequently our final resurrection to live in our glorified bodies forever with Christ. Brethren, have the courage to ask the

tough questions and pursue answers! Contemplation and consideration are not indicative of doubt, but are essential in the process of developing the faith that is reckoned as righteousness.



## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 11:20-31**

(The faith of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the Israelites, and Rahab)

**11:20-22 – “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.”** – The writer of Hebrews continues to pull from the examples of Old Testament greats to paint for us a vivid picture of faith. In the examples of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, the description of their faith is given in only a few short lines. If you quickly consider Old Testament history, a common theme appears with these first three generational descendants of Abraham. Not one of them – Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph – was the first-born son according to the flesh, and yet they each received the blessing of the firstborn. Isaac was blessed by Abraham because he was the child of promise; he was the heir in accordance with God’s miraculous work. Jacob wasn’t the first-born of Isaac, but he received the first-born rights and blessing from Isaac because of his tenacious desire for them in conjunction with Esau’s scorn of his birthright. Although Joseph was the eleventh son, he was the favored first-born of Rachel and hence received the double portion from Jacob. Each of these men understood their place in God’s continuing plan with the nation of Israel, and faithfully did what was asked of them. Isaac knew that he had God’s favor, for God had directly repeated to him the original promise made to Abraham. After initially being deceived into giving the blessing to Jacob, Isaac recognized that God’s will was being done. He then took the promise of God given first to Abraham and passed it on to Jacob upon Jacob’s departure for Paddan Aram. He also gave a little blessing to Esau, but not much was left for him because of his selling of the birthright to Jacob. Jacob continued in the faith of his father and grandfather, and had the covenant affirmed with him from God. After a hard life, he received the opportunity in the land of Egypt to bless his grandsons. The further blessing of each of his sons as recorded in Genesis 49 is one of the great prophecies of the Old Testament. Another of Jacob’s distinguishing acts of faith was the request for his body to be buried in the same cave which Abraham had purchased in the land of Canaan, and in which Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were all buried. In the fulfillment of this request, Jacob served as an encouragement for his descendants to come back and receive the Promised Land. Joseph followed in the faith of his fathers, and truly longed for his promised inheritance. He prophesied of Israel’s future slavery, and of their deliverance. He had conviction that God would take care of them, and lead them to the land which was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By requesting that they take his bones with them upon their departure, he instilled in generations to come the picture of the Promised Land, and left a great legacy of faith.

**11:23 – “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”** – While Abraham is upheld as the father of all believers and the father of the nation of Israel, Moses is also highly regarded as a deliverer of the Israelite nation. Moses was the man whom God chose to set Israel free from bondage to the Egyptians, and was the one through whom the first covenant was given. It is interesting to note,

however, that the story of Moses' faith doesn't begin with himself, but with his parents. Amram and Jochebed, both Levites, gave birth to Moses during the time in which Pharaoh had commanded the Israelites to throw their newborn sons into the Nile River. When Moses was born, they saw his beauty, and chose to disobey the law of Pharaoh. Together they chose to keep Moses alive and hide him from the authorities. They were able to do this effectively for three months, but then had to try an alternative means of saving him. Rather than casting him into the Nile to drown, Jochebed got a wicker basket, waterproofed it, put Moses in it, and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. Acting in obedience to God because of their faith, Amram and Jochebed put their own lives in danger by directly disobeying the commands of Pharaoh. God rewarded their faithfulness, and allowed Pharaoh's daughter to find Moses and take him as her own son. Rewarding Jochebed for her faith and careful planning, God allowed Moses to be nursed by his own mother, and even to get paid for it. Thus, Amram and Jochebed had opportunity to spend time with Moses and train him during his formative years. Without the faith of Moses' parents, the ensuing deliverance of Israel through him would have never taken place. Faith motivates us to do the little things right even to our own hurt, trusting that God will reward us in the long term. In this process, God does the big things, and works all things for our good and His glory.

**11:24-26 – “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.”** – It seems that in the few short years in which Moses' mother had direct influence over Moses, she must have built within him a strong identity as a Hebrew child of God. The faith so clearly demonstrated in Moses' parents impacted Moses in a very dramatic way. When Moses reached the age of forty, he made the choice to forsake his easy way of life as an elite Egyptian to be counted among the slaves of Israel. There are some well-founded theories that Moses may well have been a co-regent of Egypt, training to take full command at some future date. Certainly there were many worldly benefits to his position as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and nothing worldly to be gained by throwing in his lot with the Hebrews. It seems that it would have been easy to justify carrying out his life as an Egyptian, attempting political means to ease the burdens of the Israelites. However, Moses chose to take the difficult path, and he traded the easy, secure life for a life of hardship and danger. By faith Moses realized that he could only be effective for God by openly identifying himself with the people of God. Herein lies a great lesson; God cannot positively use us while we are ashamed to be named with Him. From the world's standpoint, Moses made a foolish choice. He gave up power, fame, and riches to be regarded as a slave, and to wander in obscurity and poverty. In reality, though, by faith Moses chose short-term pain and long-term gain, rather than passing pleasures with painful, eternal consequences. As Jim Elliot well said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Truly Moses was able to see with clarity through the eyes of faith the eternal reward, and therefore was able to accurately weigh the costs of sin and the benefits of righteousness. He recognized that the reproach of Christ was worth more than all of the treasures of Egypt. He realized that a person must be “rejected by men” in order to be “choice and precious in the sight of God” – see 1

Peter 2:4. Brethren, the choice made by Moses must be made by each of us – we must lose earth in order to gain heaven. Make the right choice!

**11:27-29 – “By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land, and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.”**

– When Moses first fled Egypt, he was afraid after being rejected by his fellow Hebrews and found out by the powers of Egypt. Though Moses initially had the right picture of himself as a deliverer of the Israelites, he didn't have the correct vision of the means by which this would be accomplished. However, after a training period of forty years in the wilderness, God was able to get Moses' attention and get him to revisit the idea that he was to be a deliverer. God removed Moses' excuses and motivated him to go back to Egypt with the purpose of telling Pharaoh, “Let My [the LORD's] people go!” Through the first nine plagues, Pharaoh continued to harden his heart, but he finally broke with the death of his first-born son. Following these numerous face-to-face encounters with Pharaoh, Moses knew that God was with him and led the people out of Egypt with no fear. Moses endured the loneliness of the wilderness and then the trials and pressures of taking on the greatest power in the world because of his faith – his ability to see with his spiritual eyes the One who is unseen. As a result of his faith, he personally related to the Israelites God's plan for the Passover and stirred them to act in accordance with God's plan. The individual faith of Moses became a beacon for the people so that they too began to believe that God would truly set them free. Just as God had promised, the firstborn of those who had sprinkled the blood of the unblemished lamb on their doorposts were kept safe. Not only were the firstborn of all the obedient sons of Israel saved from certain death, but the entire nation of Israel was set free through the events of the first Passover. Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron to take the people and go worship the LORD, just as they had asked. After enduring all ten plagues, the Egyptians were so excited to see the Israelites go that they gave them many articles of silver, gold, and clothing. However, shortly after the departure of the Israelites, Pharaoh reconsidered his loss of forced labor and set out in hot pursuit of the Hebrews. As the Egyptian pursuers drew near to the Israelites, God's people were pinned between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. At first the Israelites were greatly afraid, and thought they would surely die. However, the faith of Moses as he stretched out his hand over the water inspired them to walk across the now dry land. After the Egyptian army had entered into the sea, God caused their driving to become difficult and then had the waters drown the whole army. Thus the faith of Moses was passed on to the Israelite nation, resulting in their deliverance and the destruction of the greatest military force on the face of the earth.

**11:30-31 – “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”** – Of course the forty years of wandering in the wilderness are not mentioned here, because that was covered in chapter 3 as an example of lack of faith. It is interesting that although Moses in all of his faith couldn't stimulate the majority of the Israelites to believe, he did tremendously impact

Joshua who would lead the younger generation into the Promised Land. The first city that the Israelites had to overpower in their conquest of Canaan was Jericho. Rather than an amazing military strategy, God simply had the people walk around the city once a day for six days. On the seventh day, they were to march around Jericho seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets. At the completion of their march, the priests were to sound a long blast with the ram's horn, the people were to shout with a great shout, and the walls were to come down. The people did their part in accordance with faith, and God was true to His word – the walls fell down flat! Everyone in the city was destroyed except for Rahab the harlot and her family. Rahab was a woman who would not make most people's list of hot prospects for the faithful. Although she was a pagan Canaanite and a harlot, she was a truth-seeker. She had heard the news of their miraculous journey through the Red Sea, and of the destruction of the Amorite kings at the hands of the Israelites. In accordance with the information she had, she believed that the LORD had given the land of Canaan into the hands of the Hebrews. Thus she welcomed the spies and hid them from the king of Jericho. In obedience to the words of the Israelite spies, she hung the scarlet thread from her window and gathered her family members into her house when the Israelites came through. By her faith, she not only saved herself and her family, but became a part of the genealogical line through which Jesus was born. Brethren, let us never underestimate the power that our faith may have in the future events of others, nor let us ever prejudge who will believe the message of truth. Like Moses, our faith will spur on men like Joshua, and our message will reach women like Rahab. Let us live by faith!

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 11:32-40**

(Other Old Testament Heroes of Faith, and Superiority of New Testament Faithful)

**11:32 -- “And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,”** -- The writer of Hebrews knows that he could go on for an extended period of time in giving examples of faith from the Old Testament. With a limited window to communicate his point, he quickly mentions the names of a few other Old Testament greats. We will quickly highlight each of these people, and then move on also. Gideon was a judge of Israel, whom God used to bring about a great victory over the Midianites. Although Gideon initially suffered from fear and low self-esteem, God made him a leader of the Israelites after he had the faith to crush the altar of Baal that belonged to his father. With only 300 men and the supernatural help of God, Gideon rescued the Israelites from the bondage of the Midianites. Barak was another judge who initially lacked the courage to take on the Canaanites, but then went after he was accompanied by Deborah. After this victory, the land of Israel had peace for forty years. Samson was another judge who is as often remembered for his weakness toward Philistine women as he is for his supernatural strength. Yet God's eternal record of Samson is a man who finished faithfully as he destroyed even more enemies of God in his death than he did in his life. Jephthah is yet another judge of Israel remembered for a vow made to God in exchange for victory over the Ammonites. Jephthah promised that if God would help him defeat the sons of Ammon, then he would offer to God as a burnt offering whatever first met him upon his return home. When Jephthah's daughter came out to meet him, he was greatly troubled, but in faith fulfilled his vow. Of course, the history of David's great deeds and his righteous reign as king is given in detail throughout the Old Testament. Although David himself committed the atrocious sins of adultery and murder, God's recognition of him is as a man after his own heart. From a young age, David loved God and believed in His power, as evidenced by his courage in the defeat of Goliath, the champion of the Philistines. Because of David's faith, God set him up as king over Israel, and upheld him as a foreshadow of Jesus our King. Finally, Samuel is mentioned by name as another faithful man of the Old Testament. Although Samuel acquired some negative characteristics from his mentor, Eli, in that he didn't manage his own household, there is no doubt that he loved God and believed in God's plan for his people. Samuel was a voice of righteousness within the nation of Israel both prior to and during the reign of King Saul. Lastly, the prophets of Israel are mentioned as men of faith who proclaimed the truth, even though they were largely rejected by their own countrymen. Brethren, let us recognize that there is application here for us, for God has forgotten all of our sins, whatever they may have been, and is raising us up to fulfill His purpose under this dispensation.

**11:33-34 -- “who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.”** -- While the writer of Hebrews mentioned some specific names in the previous verse without giving specific details, he now mentions some general deeds accomplished by faithful people of the Old Testament. As we examine this

list, consider where we fit as servants of the new covenant. Some of the Old Testament greats conquered kingdoms. Remember that Joshua did this when leading the people into the Promised Land. So also did David, when he established the nation of Israel as one of the great kingdoms of the world in his day. Brethren, what kind of spiritual kingdoms will you conquer as you bring truth into a world held captive by lies? Others of the faithful are described as those who performed acts of righteousness or justice. Remember Solomon, the wise king who administered justice. Remember the Godly king Jehoshaphat, who appointed judges and exhorted them to judge righteously because the Lord is impartial. Who among us will take a stand in the world against the injustices of abortion, preemptive war, and legalized robbery of the poor? Who will become elders who rule well in the church? Other Old Testament greats are described as those who obtained promises. While we know that those under the Old Covenant couldn't receive the great spiritual promises, certainly men such as Abraham and Joshua were greatly blessed with partial fulfillment as they received physical rewards for their faith. Isn't it true that every faithful Christian under the New Testament has received the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit? Other faithful examples include those who shut the mouths of lions. A few people who come to mind are Samson, David, and Daniel. Samson and David both shut the lion's mouth by killing them with their own hands, while Daniel shut the lions' mouths with God's supernatural aid after he had chosen to obey God rather than men. Which ones of us because of our faithful stand will have the opportunity to be rescued by the hand of God from the punishment of evil rulers? Some of the greats of old quenched the power of fire. Remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace, but were delivered by One who walked in the furnace with them. Who among us will have the confidence that God will deliver us from the fiery furnace, and the courage that we will not bow down before the image of the beast even if God chooses not to rescue our physical lives? Others, like Elijah, escaped the edge of the sword. He was delivered from the sword of Ahab and Jezebel after he had chosen to defy their idolatrous rule. Which of us will be rescued even though we challenge the idolatry of the ruling elite of our day? Some under the Old Covenant were made strong from weakness. Take the example of Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, and others involved with the rebuilding of the temple. Seemingly they were only a weak remnant of the captivity of Judah, but God made them strong to accomplish the task. Who will rebuild and restore the Church of Jesus Christ in such a manner that the glory of the twenty-first century church far exceeds the glory of the first-century church? If not us, who? If not now, when? Other faithful men became mighty in war, such as David about whom the song was penned, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Which of us will put thousands to flight, as God trains both our right and left spiritual hands for war? Some were like Hezekiah who put foreign armies to flight when he petitioned the Lord, and God answered by smiting 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. Which of us will be prayer warriors whom God will answer by causing huge philosophies such as evolution to be exposed as false overnight? Brethren, remember that the Old Testament was a shadow of the real New Testament. In the same way, the faithful men and women of old are a shadow of the New Covenant faithful, who are fellow partakers with God in His eternal plan. What they accomplished in the realm of the physical, we truly complete in the spiritual realm.

**11:35-36 – “Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.** – The writer of Hebrews continues to bring forth positive examples of faith from those living before Christ inaugurated the New Covenant. He reminds us of women who had received back the dead by resurrection. Remember the Gentile widows in the days of Elijah and Elisha for whom God brought their sons back to life in reward for their faith in Him. Which faithful women will persevere in their walk with God and be rewarded as they see their children brought back to life in Christ? Other greats chose to be tortured, and wouldn't accept release because they knew there would be a day of much greater resurrection. Which moms will impart faith to their sons and strengthen them to be martyrs for the cause of Christ, knowing that God will grant eternal fellowship to them? Who is willing to have the streets run with their blood for the furthering of the spiritual revolution? Others experienced mockings and scourgings, chains and imprisonment. Consider how many prophets were punished simply for caring enough about the people to tell them the truth. Which of us will get to wear on our body the brandmarks of Jesus? Who will be imprisoned because of spiritual wounds imparted to the dragon?

**11:37-38 – “They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.”** – The list of persecutions of the faithful continues. Some were stoned – remember Zechariah who was put to death between the temple and the altar. Some were sawn in two – tradition says that this happened to Isaiah the prophet during the reign of Manasseh. Others were tempted and tested – men like Joseph and Daniel who were placed in high command, yet remembered that they were servants of God. Some were put to death with the sword – remember Elijah's fellow prophets who had been put to death with the sword at the hands of Jezebel. Many of the prophets went about in poverty, bearing shame and rejection from the people of the world. Jesus speaks of the world shedding the blood of the prophets from Abel to Zechariah. Although people of the world look down on the righteous, the Scripture tells the true story; it's not that these people aren't worthy of the world, but rather, that the world isn't worthy of them. Though many have been murdered and all have been intentionally forgotten by the world, the faithful men and women mentioned here are true heroes. In the only record that will last forever, the true heroes are remembered and honored because of their faith. What does God's eternal history book say about you?

**11:39-40 – “And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.”** – When we examine the lasting effects of the faithful of the Old Testament, we should be encouraged and strengthened to imitate their faith. Because of the seemingly small stands that they took, God accomplished enormous and amazing things through them. However, even though their faith is unquestioned, the Scripture is clear that the greats of the Old Covenant never got

to receive “the promise.” On the other hand, this verse clearly implies that New Covenant saints do receive it now. It shouldn’t be surprising that since the New Covenant is superior to the Old in every way, so it will produce a superior people to those who lived under the Old Testament. It appears that there are two specific promises received by the New Testament faithful that the men and women of old never got to hold – the promised Holy Spirit and the heavenly kingdom. It is because of the Holy Spirit living inside of us that our faith will produce even greater deeds than those mentioned throughout this chapter. Jesus says in Matthew 11:11, “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Immerser! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” All of the greats of the Old Testament were never truly “born of God” and hence could not receive the Holy Spirit or enter into the heavenly kingdom. The Scriptures make the case that the Holy Spirit couldn’t be given until after Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and ascension – see John 7:37-39. Corresponding to that, no one can enter the kingdom without the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave the requirements for entrance into the kingdom in John 3:5, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” As a result of all of the events associated with Jesus’ ascension to the throne as described in the earlier chapters of Hebrews, the promised Holy Spirit has now been sent to all Christians, and we are members of the kingdom of heaven. Because of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, the least Christian is superior to the greatest of the Old Testament greats. Therefore we would expect that the deeds performed by Christians serving under the New Covenant will outshine those great feats of old. This same thrust was communicated again by Jesus when He was telling the apostles of the soon coming Helper, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.” (John 14:12) Brethren, by God’s own choosing, we live under the far superior New Covenant with much greater promises which we have received. Let us supply the faith required, and let God perform amazing acts through us! What does the final, heavenly version of Hebrews 11 say about you?



**HEBREWS CHAPTER 12:1-3**  
(Exhortation to fix our eyes on Jesus)

**12:1 – “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also 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,”** – Chapter 11 was filled with examples of the faithful under the Old Testament, and closed by communicating that Christians are even greater because we have received the promises. The writer of Hebrews now brings forth a sports analogy to spur us on to a great performance for Christ. In the first century, athletic games were very popular, much like they are today. Our modern day track-and-field events draw heavily from the Greeks and Romans. Like today, the athletes competed in the stadium while the crowds filled the seats of the arena. The writer compares our spiritual life to an endurance race. In his analogy he portrays the Old Testament faithful as those spectators cheering on the competitors. There seems to be a dual meaning with usage of the word “witnesses.” Not only are the already-departed men and women of faith witnesses in the sense that they are observing us, but they are also witnesses in the sense that they speak of their previous participation and victory. The huge crowd cheering us on is made up of former contestants who have already received the crown. Their voices are intended to encourage us that the glorious reward is worth whatever painful price must now be paid. The message that they shout to us is that we need to abandon the world that we may gain heaven. Particularly the writer of Hebrews challenges us to lay aside all encumbrances and sin. It is interesting that in a mile race, replacing regular running shoes with track spikes can save a person four seconds. In the world of competition, four seconds in the mile can easily be the difference between first place and twentieth place. In the spiritual realm there can be multiple distractions that hinder our kingdom mindset. The exhortation is to eliminate those distractions that we may run this race faster. The problem is that sin not only slows us down but also trips us up. Wearing a robe while racing (or baggy sweats in our day) could entangle us and cause us to fall and be disqualified. Overcoming sin in this life is essential if we desire to experience eternal victory. In a similar example used by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:25, the Scripture tells us, “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in *all things*.” The fact that this is an endurance event requires the competitors to be diligent and perseverant. In this spiritual race, the most important quality for victory is consistent training and long-suffering of pain. Each of us needs to get even more serious about the importance of this spiritual race, and make whatever personal sacrifices are necessary for victory.

**12:2 – “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** – The ultimate example in the race of life is Jesus Christ. He willingly entered this race that He might be a forerunner for us. Jesus left His place as the Judge in order to enter the competition. His outstanding victory shows us that it is possible to win, and He teaches us how to win. So many have tried so hard to win and yet have failed because their program was based on law. Jesus won through the method of faith; He is the source and leader as well as the finisher of faith. Jesus really taught us

to fix our eyes on the prize – to run through the finish line. The reward on which we focus is the glorified Christ, just as Jesus was looking ahead to that glory as He endured the cross – see John 17:5. This glory can only be made full when it is shared with many Christians – see John 15:8, Hebrews 2:10, Ephesians 1:18,23. As Kevin Simpson has well stated, “the joy set before Jesus was the *throne and the throng*.” Anyone who plans on enduring their cross must look to the same reward; we must desire eternal fellowship with the Father and with other Christians. Any other desires will not be strong enough to pull us through the long race. Remember that the imperishable crown is promised to the victors, not to all who enter the race. The book of Revelation reminds us that “he who *overcomes*” will receive the reward. Brethren, Jesus has promised that those who follow Him will be where He is – let’s follow Him all the way to glory!

**12:3 – “For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”** – There are periods in this endurance event called life that are particularly grueling. During those times, Satan unleashes all of his wiles to trip us up and to leave us discouraged. The devil engages sinners, those who are held captive by him to do his will, to turn their aggression against us. It seems like the whole world is in opposition to us, and the truth of the matter is that it is so. At those periods of the race, the doubts can arise in our mind, and we can think about giving up. When facing the temptation of quitting, we need to refocus on Christ. The writer of Hebrews exhorts us to consider our High Priest, the author and perfecter of faith. Jesus understands all that we encounter, for He had to traverse the same course of suffering in order to enter glory. Jesus endured more at the hands of sinners than anyone else ever will. Not only was Jesus persecuted in the body, but He also had to bear the sins of the whole world in His body while He was upon the cross. Some of us may get to experience similar bodily anguish, and we will certainly get to sacrifice our own lives for the sake of helping others make it to heaven, but we will not have to endure the separation from the Father. Since Jesus was able to complete His mission, we can too. Just as He looked forward to the throne and the throng, so we too must look ahead to the reward of eternal glory and eternal life with Christ and the rest of our brethren. In moments of increasing weariness, let’s fix our eyes on the prize, push through the pain, and prove ourselves to be more than conquerors!

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 12:4-11**

(Discipline of Sons)

**12:4-6 – “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.’”** – The analogy of the race is over; now the writer of Hebrews is speaking in literal language with Jesus Christ as the standard of comparison. Jesus lived about 33 years on this earth before He was put to death at the hands of godless men. Jesus’ crucifixion was a direct result of His complete obedience to the Father. In like manner, eleven of the twelve apostles were martyred for their outspoken faith in Christ. The writer of Hebrews is reminding his audience that they had not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in their striving against sin. The point is that which Paul made to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Everyone who chooses to take on the dragon in his lair will experience persecution in one form or another from Satan’s agents. The greater the work that is done, the greater the size and ferocity of the opposition mounted against that work. The other side of the coin is that God uses persecution and other painful experiences to purify us from sin. As Peter said in 1 Peter 4:1-2, “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” Jesus Himself, the Scriptures say, “learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” (Hebrews 5:8) It is important that Christians not attempt to avoid suffering for the sake of Christ; otherwise they will be severed from Christ just like some from the churches of Galatia – see Galatians 6:12, 5:4. As sons of God, it is important that we remember the exhortation given from our Father – the Lord disciplines those He loves. There are two inappropriate responses to the discipline of the Lord. One improper reaction to God’s discipline is to regard it lightly; in other words, to attempt to minimize it. Trying to minimize the serious nature of discipline is a not-so-subtle attempt to remove personal accountability, and thus is a refusal to learn the lesson being taught by the Lord. This minimization of discipline is a pattern of the criminal population. When caught, criminals often try to downplay their criminal behavior, or they claim to have been setup for someone else’s fall. With this refusal to admit any wrongdoing, it is almost certain that there will be no future change of behavior for the criminal even after he has served his punishment. This same pattern shows up in disobedient sons of the Lord. Often Christians attempt to shirk responsibility for their actions by blaming others for their problems. At other times, wayward sons ignore God’s discipline by aligning themselves with Job, claiming that a series of unforeseen, catastrophic events have left them in their predicament. Generally, people are reaping what they have sown; they are not a modern-day Job. Whatever the case may be, even if there are similar circumstances to Job, there is always a lesson to be learned from the Lord. Regarding lightly the discipline of the Lord is a sure way for a person to continue in ignorance, repeating the same mistakes, and impeding any forward progress. Another inappropriate response to the discipline of the Lord is to faint when reprovved by Him. Breaking under the Lord’s discipline is akin to a child crying, “I want my mommy”

when being severely reprov'd by Dad. When Christians are in such a fragile state that they cannot receive correction from the Lord, there again is no opportunity for growth. Such people are destined to continue to flounder in poor performance, wondering why nothing ever seems to work right. Brethren, let's remember the exhortation from the Lord – He disciplines those whom He loves. Let's willingly accept this discipline, knowing that it is for our good!

**12:7-8 – “It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”** – As mentioned in verse 1, there is no doubt that this race of life is an endurance event; it is like a spiritual ultramarathon or Ironman triathlon. The tough times in our lives aren't merely happenstance; rather, they are perfectly designed, grueling, spiritual workouts designed for us personally by our loving Father. God deals with us as sons; He knows what spiritual training we need in order to become like Him. Just as a good father is the best teacher of his own children because he knows their current abilities, so God knows both our present skills and where we need to improve so that we can win. Just as every good father trains his children that they may reach their potential, so God disciplines each of His children. Anyone who isn't disciplined by the Lord isn't a true son, but has been born from someone else. Everyone who takes pride in being born of God must also then willingly accept the discipline handed down from Him.

**12:9-10 – “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.”** – Children are born with an innate desire to please their fathers. Though ungodly, inconsistent fathers often destroy this desire, good fathers strengthen it, and cause it to grow. The best dads are those who truly *train* their children. Good fathers teach, coach, punish, and reward. Children greatly respect fathers who have high expectations of them and who teach them to succeed in meeting those standards. Our earthly fathers are the fathers of our bodies, but the Lord is the Father of our spirits. Just as we respected our physical dads, in a much greater way we should respect our Heavenly Father for training us. The Lord teaches, coaches, punishes, and rewards us, so that we learn how to live eternally. Our earthly fathers disciplined us for the temporal period we were under their tutelage, but the Lord disciplines us for a lifetime. Our physical dads taught us the best they could, but the Lord teaches us perfectly. The goal of our earthly dads is to teach us to imitate them and, if possible, to exceed them. The goal of the Lord is for us to imitate Him, and thus share His holiness. If we want to be holy, we will gladly accept the Lord's teaching, coaching, punishment, and rewards.

**12:11 – “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”** – No matter what aspect of discipline is being applied, it is always painful in the moment. Whether it be a spanking, a grueling workout, or a homework assignment, discipline is never easy. I've known many a child to cry tears over each of

the aforementioned examples of discipline. However, the results of such a disciplined rearing are extremely positive. Successful people often look back and thank their parents, teachers, or coaches for the training which prepared them for life. Certainly the final reward makes all of the pain of previous discipline worthwhile. In the same way, the eternal reward of righteousness is worth every bit of suffering encountered on the journey. As it is recorded in Psalm 119:67, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.” The peace with God and men that accompanies righteousness is more valuable than any afflictions that we must undergo. Thus we need to “consider it all joy when we encounter various trials” knowing that they are part of our training for victory in the race of life. Brethren, whatever trials or temptations you are currently faced with, recognize them as training from the Lord that is necessary for your eternal victory. Cheer up, consider it all joy, learn the lesson, and win the race!

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 12:12-17**

(The danger of falling away)

**12:12-13 – “Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.”** – As fully communicated in the previous verses, the point of God’s discipline is for His sons to become partakers of His holiness. God truly desires for His children to enjoy the peaceful fruits of righteousness. For this to happen, the Christian must respond appropriately to the Lord’s discipline. There is no trivialization of it, nor is there any fainting when confronted by the Father. Rather, the son of God who longs for righteousness willingly receives the training of the Lord, and learns from it. Instead of being useless on the spiritual battlefield due to weak hands, the Christian readily adopts the spiritual training regimen designed by the Lord. The Christian strengthens his hands that he can be like the mighty men of David who were able to use both their right hands and their left in battle – see 1 Chronicles 12:1-2. Every obedient child of God desires to be effective spiritually, thus developing the ability to use “the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left” – see 2 Corinthians 6:7. Every true son of God is “diligent to present [himself] to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” – see 2 Timothy 2:15. It takes strong hands to be able to hold the spiritual sword and use it all day long, where they have to pry it from your hands at the end of the day as they return to strip the slain – see 2 Samuel 23:8-10. Since we desire to fight mightily for the Lord, we joyfully accept His discipline. In the same way, each Christian must strengthen the knees that are feeble. In other words, Christians must overcome their fainting that they may be strengthened in the Lord. The phrase “hands that are weak and knees that are feeble” is a reference to Isaiah 35:3, wherein God’s people are encouraged to have the courage to behold the glory of God and to walk on the Highway of Holiness. All true children of God are to make straight paths for their feet, to walk on that righteous roadway, and to stay off the alternative paths surrounding it. It is imperative that we encourage our fellow Christians to stay on the level path, that none would fall away, but that all would be healed and able to run this race to the finish.

**12:14 – “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”** – The Holy Spirit through the writer of Hebrews lists a couple of proactive steps to be taken to continually walk on the Highway of Holiness. First, He commands Christians to pursue peace with all men. When peace permeates our personal relationship with God, our interpersonal relationships within the body of Christ, and our general interaction with unbelievers, we can effectively reach the lost. Remember that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9) Peace is a characteristic common to those who truly desire to see all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The third chapter of James closes the discussion of God’s wisdom, “And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:18) All who are interested in actually rescuing the soul from Hell (not just winning an argument) have their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. As messengers of the gospel, Christians cannot control the nonbeliever’s response to it, but we can choose to bring it

with the goal of producing peace. As Romans 12:18 exhorts us, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” In addition to the pursuit of peace, the writer of Hebrews also commands us to pursue sanctification or holiness. If anyone isn’t holy, they will not see the Lord. Again from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) How is this sanctification accomplished? A concise answer is recorded in 1 John 3:2-3, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” It is essential that Christians desire to share God’s holiness, and that they fix their eyes on the glorified Christ. As a Christian beholds the glory of God in the face of Christ, he is transformed from glory to glory. As John put it, he “purifies himself, just as [Christ] is pure.” In other words, if a person will not behold with His spiritual eyes the glory of God in the pages of the New Testament, he will not see the Lord for all eternity. Brethren, let’s be proactive; let’s pursue both peace and holiness.

**12:15-16 – “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.”**

The writer of Hebrews continues to make the same point made in verse 14, but from the other side of the coin. Since both the pursuit of peace and sanctification are essential for seeing the Lord, the obvious implication is that a lack of these pursuits will end with eternal separation from the Lord. The writer of Hebrews again brings forth the reality that it is possible for a Christian to fall away from the Lord. In chapters 3 and 4, he counseled against hardening due to the deceitfulness of sin and coming short of entering God’s rest. In chapter 6, the writer warned against Christians falling away. There was warning in chapter 10 against the consequences of continual willful sin. Now in this verse the Holy Spirit speaks of coming “short of the grace of God.” Anyone who is not pressing on in pursuit of peace and sanctification is in danger of being severed from grace. In contrast to the pursuit of peace is the root of bitterness. If a person doesn’t train his mind to dwell on the things of others that are worthy of praise, it is easy to first become critical and later become bitter. Bitterness always causes trouble; not only is the heart of the person harboring it ruined, but the result is that it poisons many. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to forgive their brother lest advantage be taken by Satan. The nature of bitterness is such that many others are negatively impacted, and many souls may be lost. In much the same way, it is imperative that Christians pursue sanctification; the alternative is immorality or godlessness. When a person doesn’t make a continual conscious effort to be holy as God is holy, the natural result is humanism. Typically where humanism prevails as a philosophy, immorality reigns in practicality. While the sin of immorality is spoken of as sin against one’s own body, it also has a devastating impact on the lives of countless others. Maybe more so than any other sin, the consequences of immorality are clearly carried out to the third and fourth generations. When the marriage covenant is broken, families are ripped to pieces, and numerous souls of countless generations may be forever lost. The God-ordained sanctity of the marriage relationship is for our good, and ignoring God’s boundaries for the sake of fleshly indulgence will quite possibly cost the eternal souls of many. Esau is portrayed as an

example of “if it feels good, do it; if it doesn’t feel good, don’t do it.” While the particular sin of immorality is difficult to ascertain in the case of Esau from Old Testament information, it is obvious that he was godless; he had no restraint over his own fleshly passions. Just from a monetary standpoint, trading the birthright for a single meal cost him dearly. In the process Esau not only lost the double portion of the inheritance, but also the blessing from his father, and the privilege of carrying on the family name. In a spiritual application, any Christian who chooses to allow the flesh to reign supreme over the Spirit will trade the glories of heaven and the reputation of Christ’s name for a temporal pleasure on earth and an eternal spot with Satan in the lake of fire. Brethren, let’s take seriously the warning by God to pursue both peace and sanctification lest we trade away our birthright as firstborn sons and daughters of God.

**12:17 – “For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.”** – When Esau first traded away his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of pottage, he didn’t foresee that it would cost him the actual blessing from his father. However, in accordance with God’s justice, that impetuous decision cost him his place in the lineage of the nation of Israel and his place in heaven. The Old Testament clearly spells out Esau’s desire to be blessed at the end of Isaac’s life. Though he cried to his father for *the* blessing, he was too late to receive it. It may seem that it was Jacob’s fault for deceiving Isaac into giving the blessing to him, but the Scripture squarely lays the blame at Esau’s feet for being so careless about his birthright. Because he didn’t care about the birthright, Esau lost all favor with God as is related in a part of Malachi 1:2-3, “Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau.” In the same way, a Christian who develops a casual attitude about wearing the name of Christ may fall away eternally. The steps of continually deadening the conscience to fulfill one’s own sinful desires may take a person down a path from which there is no turning back. As Proverbs 14:14 states, “The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways...” While the backsliding Christian rarely pauses to consider that his fleshly mindset will cost him the eternal blessing from the heavenly Father, such is the case. Romans 8:6-8 is clear; “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Thus the Scriptural exhortation is to choose today to set your mind on the things of the Spirit, recognizing the tremendous privilege of being called a son of God. Let’s each of us make sure that we have caught the entrance ramp to the Highway of Holiness, and let’s encourage each other to press forward on this one-way street to glory.



## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 12:18-24**

(The Real Mount Zion)

**12:18-21** – “For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 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. For they could not bear the command, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.’ And so terrible was the sight that Moses said, ‘I am full of fear and trembling.’” – The entire context of the book of Hebrews has been the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. In the second chapter, Christians were reminded that the words of God as revealed through the glorified Christ are even more serious than those spoken through angels. Chapter 10 recounted that under the Old Testament a person was punished for breaking the Law of Moses on the testimony of two or three witnesses. It further explained that there is a much greater punishment for those who would trample under foot the Son of God. Now in chapter 12, the Holy Spirit desires again to emphasize the tremendous weight of the New Covenant. While the covenant given on Sinai came with glory, the glory of the ministry of righteousness far exceeds it – see 2 Corinthians 3:7-11. To ensure that Christians fully comprehend the awesome power of the ministry of the Spirit, the writer takes us back to the administration of the first covenant. It is easy to remember that Moses received God’s words on the top of the mountain, as God wrote the Ten Commandments in stone. However, it is important to keep in mind that before the commandments were written down, God had already spoken them to the people. This first account of God’s commandments to the people is the reference to which the writer of Hebrews now communicates. Deuteronomy 5:22-27 gives a summary of what took place on Sinai. The first covenant was given in a clear physical manner. There was a visible mountain overshadowed with clouds, darkness, and a feeling of gloom. In the midst of that was a fire from which came the words of God Himself. The people of Israel were so terrified that they begged that God speak no more to them directly, but that He would speak to Moses and then Moses could relay His words to them. God seriously communicated that there was to be a separation between the people and Him, saying that, under the penalty of death, no man or beast should even touch the mountain – see Exodus 19:12-13. The serious nature of these words of God was further communicated with the consequences of the people’s idolatry with the golden calf. Upon hearing of the Lord’s serious displeasure with the people of Israel and after seeing His wrath, Moses himself was terrified. Remember that all of this awe was associated with the first covenant, the shadow of what is now here.

**12:22-24** – “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of 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 mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.” – When a person’s spiritual eyes have been enlightened, he can see that the Christian has been received into something far greater than that which the Israelites received on Sinai. As awesome as the circumstances were surrounding the giving of the Law, they pale in

comparison with the events associated with the giving of the eternal covenant. Time and time again in the gospels, Jesus communicated the superiority of the covenant which He was going to give. In Matthew 13, He reminded His disciples that “many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (Matthew 13:17) Of course His exhortation then was to “hear.” Another time Jesus reprimanded the cities in which He had performed His miracles, claiming that if they had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to His day. When discussing the issue of the Sabbath with the Pharisees, He reminded them that the priests break the Sabbath in order to fulfill their duties in the temple, and that “something greater than the temple is here.” Truly everything associated with the New Testament far outshines the Old. In these verses of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit reminds all Christians of this greatness. We are told that instead of coming to a physical mountain (Sinai), we have instead come to Mount Zion. Prophecies throughout the Old Testament consistently speak of Mount Zion as the dwelling place of God – see Psalm 74:2, Isaiah 8:18. How much greater to come to the true dwelling place of God instead of a physical mountain that He temporarily visited! We are also told that we have come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. While Jerusalem was a physical locale, the capital of Judah, in which the earthly temple was erected, there is a heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the spiritual tribe of Judah, in which the real temple forever stands. The physical city of Jerusalem now means nothing, but the spiritual city is everything – see Galatians 4:24-26. Truly our citizenship is in heaven – see Philippians 3:20. Christians have also come into the presence of ten thousands of angels. We have backing us supernatural beings whose primary ministry is to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation – see Hebrews 1:14. As Christians, we have come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. Not only are we members of the local body of Christ, but we are a part of the eternal kingdom which transcends any physical boundaries. Every Christian shares the rights of the firstborn; therefore we would never despise our birthright. When we were immersed into Christ, we were born again, and our names were added to the Lamb’s book of life. Truly at that time, we were enrolled as citizens of this heavenly city. We also have come into the very presence of God, the Judge of all. The One who is Judge of all the earth has tested our hearts, and has found us righteous by the offering of Christ. We stand before Him holy and blameless, eternally acquitted in His courtroom. We also stand in the presence of the spirits of righteous men made perfect. All of the Old Testament greats, as well as the New Testament saints who have passed on before us, along with all living Christians constitute the fellowship of the eternal body of Christ. We stand before Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant. Not only is Jesus the testator, but also the executor of the estate. He is the guarantor that the terms of the covenant will be fulfilled in our benefit. How awesome to stand in the presence of our heavenly benefactor! We also have come into the Holy of Holies where the sprinkled blood of Christ has been offered. Whereas Abel’s blood cried out of the ground, and continues to be a testimony of faithful obedience, Christ’s blood speaks from the throne room of the living God, and perfects forever those who have been sanctified. Mount Sinai, although awesome in its presence, cannot begin to compare with Mount Zion, the eternal dwelling of the Almighty God. How amazing this righteous mountain to which we have come forever!

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 12:25-29**

(The Eternal Kingdom)

**12:25** – “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.” – In the preceding verses, the Holy Spirit effectively communicated the superiority of the true Mount Zion over the physical mountain of Sinai. While there was fear and trembling associated with Sinai, everyone should be in awe of Zion. Thus everyone should listen to the voice of the One speaking from Zion. The entire thrust of the book of Hebrews has been to open the spiritual eyes of the brethren that they might see into the realm of the unseen. Thus, the Holy Spirit has brought into view the Heavenly High Priest who “if He were on earth would not be a priest at all.” The writer of Hebrews has asked us to behold the Mediator of the New Covenant, that is, the Living One who guarantees that the promises of the covenant will be fulfilled. Now again the writer of Hebrews takes us into the presence of the Prophet whose voice thunders from heaven. Moses himself had foretold of the true prophet who would speak in the future, saying in Deuteronomy 18:15, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countryman, you shall listen to him.” The apostle Peter, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explains in Acts 3 that this prophet first was “raised up” (His resurrection and ascension) and then sent (as the indwelling Holy Spirit) to bless us. As serious as the first covenant was, it was given under the circumstances surrounding Sinai as spelled out in earlier verses. Since the nature of heavenly Zion far exceeds that of Sinai, so the message given directly from the throne carries even greater weight than that written in stone. The Old Testament books are certainly important as they reveal many characteristics of the Heavenly Father, and ultimately are a tutor which leads us to Christ. The “red letters” communicating that which Jesus spoke from earth are even more revealing of God’s nature as He is veiled only by the flesh. However, the black letters from the book of Acts through the book of Revelation give the full revelation of God as He is revealed through the ascended Jesus sitting on the throne. The apostle Paul gives an eye-opening statement to King Agrippa in Acts 26:23 when he says, “that the Christ was to suffer, and that *by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light* both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” As this verse makes clear, it was after Jesus’ resurrection that He would proclaim light to both the Jews and Gentiles. This message of glory wasn’t proclaimed to Jews and Gentiles by Jesus in His forty earthly days following His resurrection, but was made known through the apostles and New Testament prophets. Thus all of the teachings of the New Testament letters, including the plan of salvation therein, are the true words of Jesus the Prophet. If the people living under the covenant given on Sinai were held accountable to heed those words, how much more are we responsible to listen to the words of the ascended Christ! The exhortation throughout the book of Hebrews is to “draw near” to the living Lord, and those who instead “turn away” will not escape their punishment.

**12:26-27** – “And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.’ This expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be

**shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.”** – As was related a few verses prior, when God’s voice spoke from Sinai, it shook the mountain, and caused the Israelite people to tremble in fear. However, since God’s visit to Sinai was only temporary, the effects of the shaking were also temporal. Now that Christ has spoken from the throne, the result of His words is continual and eternal. The New Testament was foretold in Haggai 2:6-7, with God saying, “Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory.” This was properly understood by the Jews to be a Messianic passage, and it was fulfilled with the first coming of Christ to His throne. The earth literally shook at Christ’s death and resurrection (Matthew 27:51, 28:2), and figuratively was shaken from top to bottom through the preaching of the gospel – see Acts 17:6. The heavens also were shaken through Christ’s resurrection and ascension as the devil and his angels were cast down out of heaven – Revelation 12:9. It is the exalted Prophet whose words have caused this tremendous upheaval, and they will do this again in finality at Christ’s return. As the writer of Hebrews explains his usage of the quotation from Haggai, he explains that everything which has been created will be shaken and removed. In other words, when Jesus comes again to judge the world, the “heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” – 2 Peter 3:10. The only things which will remain are those things which cannot be shaken; the eternal things. In the context of this passage, it is clear that physical Sinai will one day be burned up, but the true Mount Zion will never pass away. Everything associated with the Old Testament was simply a shadow; it wasn’t intended to last forever. However, the New Testament is the “eternal covenant” and the kingdom of Zion over which Christ reigns will last forever.

**12:28-29 – “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.”** – The writer of Hebrews has brought forth the superiority of Zion over Sinai for a specific purpose. Through him the Holy Spirit strongly exhorts Christians to express gratitude in return for the receipt of the kingdom. So often Christians don’t fully grasp the value of the kingdom given to us by God, but we really need to comprehend what we have. In His parables, Jesus continually emphasized the worth of the kingdom of heaven, comparing it to a treasure hidden in a field or to a pearl of great price. In Luke 12:31-32, Jesus challenged His followers to “seek His kingdom” and “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.” We truly are a part of the only kingdom which lasts forever. We should give thanks to God for being chosen to be a part of this holy nation, and we should express our gratitude by offering ourselves in service to God. We need to be like Abel, whose sacrifice was acceptable because he understood that God deserved his very best. We must offer up our bodies to God as a “living and holy sacrifice” with reverence and awe. Understanding that Christians serve in the true holy place, in the very presence of God, we recognize that we must give exactly what God desires, remembering the fiery example of Nadab and Abihu who ignored the glory of God. May we never be like physical Israel, who heard the voice of God upon the mountain, but turned to idolatry

because of their lack of faith! Let us daily hear the words of the Heavenly Prophet, and joyfully and reverently offer ourselves to Him.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 13:1-17**

(Heavenly Practices)

The following section of Scripture consists of bullet-points from the Holy Spirit reminding Christians of some specific practices of those who truly have their mind set on the things above. As was pointed out at the end of chapter 12, our citizenship is in heaven, and we should conduct ourselves as worthy citizens of this heavenly kingdom. The immediate audience of the book of Hebrews, Hebrew Christians, was about to face the greatest tribulation in the history of the world with the onrushing siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies, tremendous civil unrest within Jerusalem itself, and the final destruction of the temple. In order for the Jewish Christians to successfully withstand this tribulation, it was imperative for their eyes to be fixed completely on the heavenly realm. The particular practices mentioned at the end of this letter can be difficult to live by in times of persecution and civil unrest. With the current state of affairs in America and around the world, it seems fitting that all Christians would fix their hope entirely on the eternal kingdom, and be mentally prepared to live according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh.

**13:1-4 – “Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”** – In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” He went on to imply that it is relatively easy to “love those who love you” for even the tax collectors and Gentiles do that. In much the same light, it is relatively easy to love the brethren during good times. When the tree is green, when a person has abundance, it is fairly easy to show love to the brethren. When there is plenty, it isn’t too difficult to show hospitality. When resources are bountiful, it is fairly easy to visit the prisoners, and share with them. When life is good, it isn’t that tough to be content in marriage, and to be faithful to your spouse. However, when tribulation comes, when a person is under the barrage of persecution, when he feels the economic crunch, it is much more trying to be selfless and to show love to the brethren. When Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24, He said, “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.” Remember that the timing of this passage in Hebrews is shortly before the great tribulation of AD 70. With the looks of depressed economic activity and growing totalitarianism in the United States, there is clearly pertinence for us. The mindset and habits that we develop right now will successfully carry us through the tough times. Brethren, in our current thoughts and choices, we are either preparing to win or to fail. This exhortation is to get us, individually and as a body, to successfully withstand the street riots, the torture chambers, the jail terms, and the civil unrest that we are sure to encounter in the coming years. It is true that love is a decision, and it is a practice. The words “I love you” are meaningless if they are not backed with sacrifice. In the great love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, there is a list of things that love “does.” Thus, love of the brethren is expressed through sacrifices that we

make for each other. Consistent hospitality (without complaint, I might add) shows a great concern for others. The parable of the Good Samaritan told by Jesus really communicates what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Taking care of a person’s needs by giving them a home for an extended time presses a person’s love. Many times these attempts at hospitality expose selfishness and weakness within the hearts and homes of those who have chosen to give. It takes true love to practice consistent hospitality to the brethren without complaint. Not only does the Scripture exhort us to continue to show hospitality to those we know well within the church, but to extend it to strangers. Only full trust in the Lord will empower us to love completely in this manner. In a similar vein, Christians are told to remember the prisoners and those who are persecuted. When the tough times come, the Christian prisoners will be “enemies of the state” and by caring for such people, it will be clear that you also are in the same category. When your belt is tight, it is tough to share for others. During times of persecution, sharing with Christians will quite possibly dictate that you will encounter even tougher economic conditions. As tough as it may be, Jesus clearly communicates in Matthew 25 that such prison visits and care isn’t only given to the brother or sister, but is given to Christ Himself. For us to do these things in the dry tree, we had better practice when it is green. Sometimes it is toughest to truly love those who should be the closest to us. The Scripture gives a reminder that marriage is to be held in honor among all. The marriage relationship of “one man, one woman – one time” is a foundational relationship for all of society. When the family unit begins to erode, civilization is on the brink of disaster. As is evident in America today, this breakdown of the family unit perpetuates itself until there are no bonds left to hold society together. In times of civil unrest, the world has no honor whatsoever for the marriage relationship. In times of anarchy fornication and adultery will be far more common even than they are now, as evidenced by the widespread sexual diseases in third-world countries. It is imperative that Christians hold their own marriage as precious; we are the only example to the world of what a “normal” family is. If you think it is tough to get along now in your marriage, think what it may be like when your family has nothing to eat or no place to sleep. Imagine what it would be like if your spouse was carted off to prison for their unbending belief in Christ. What if some of your children were jerked away by the state? The temptation to look for “greener pastures” or “a passing pleasure” would be greatly heightened. On a practical side, it is important that a man’s habit is to “rejoice with the wife of your youth” (the corresponding thought for a woman) and that each “drink water from your own cistern and fresh water from you own well.” Christians should hold the marriage relationship as precious, and should be committed to making it great for the glory of the Lord. It is most important that both Christian men and women ultimately have their needs met by Christ and that they are not dependent upon their spouse for fulfillment. These habits of love need to be developed now in both thought and action that we can maintain our citizenship in the heavenly kingdom in the midst of the shaking which this culture is sure to undergo.

**13:5-6 – “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,’ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?’ ”** – The Scriptures are clear that money is a

stewardship entrusted to us by God. Many of Christ's parables directly involved money with the emphasis on our faithfulness in "little things." Because of our necessity upon money in order to effectively function while on this earth, the love of money can be a great temptation. Money in and of itself is not evil, but "the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil" – see I Timothy 6:10. Money can be helpful or harmful; to steal half of a quote from George Washington, "like fire, it is a dangerous servant or a fearful master." While Washington was speaking of the dangers of government to individual liberties, the principle applies to the dangers of money to a person's eternal soul. Either money serves a Christian in doing the Lord's work, or the Christian serves money instead of the Lord. The words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are clear, "You cannot serve God and mammon." As brought forth in the previous notes, many of these traps aren't so difficult to avoid when things are easy. It isn't that tough to be content with what you have when there is plenty to eat, two vehicles for transportation, a cell phone for instant communication, and clothes for every occasion. It is certainly tougher to be committed to "storing up treasures in heaven" when you don't know from where your next meal is coming. While most Christians can quote Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," most of us haven't got to experience the circumstances under which the apostle Paul penned these words. Paul said that he had learned to be content no matter the circumstances. Philippians 4:12 says, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." In order to be free from the love of money, it is necessary to have complete trust in the Lord. The Lord never breaks His covenant, nor does He ever come short on His end of a bargain. Jesus promised us that if we "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" that all of our needs would be met – see Matthew 6:33. If we are confident of our standing with the Lord, then we have absolutely nothing to fear. If the Lord is our helper, then the size or power of the enemy is irrelevant. It has been well said, "The Lord and I make a majority." Brethren, let not our hope be in riches or in the strength of man, but let us trust in the Lord with all of heart, realizing that we have nothing to fear.

**13:7-8 – "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** – Every Christian gets the real opportunity to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone on before us. The great cloud of witnesses made up of the Old Testament faithful has left us a great legacy of faith. Those faithful men and women who sought a heavenly kingdom over earthly pleasures or treasures now encourage us from the other side of the grave. Their firm position in the eternal kingdom provides ample reason for us to imitate their faith. The undying stand of the martyrs of the first century church challenges us to pattern ourselves after them, as we view their present position of triumph in Paradise. Even the words and lives of those who have faithfully taught us the gospel in our generation should motivate us to do the same for others. One of the great characteristics of truth is that it is always true; difficult circumstances don't create exceptions to the rule of truth. Ultimately this truth is bound up in Jesus Christ who is the standard of consistency. The statements made by Christ while on earth are consistent with His message that He finished proclaiming from the



throne. Jesus' words have been forever settled in heaven; they are eternal words of life. The faithful of the Old Testament looked forward to Christ, many of the first century martyrs were eye-witnesses of His resurrection, and the faithful messengers of the gospel today proclaim the gospel of His eternal glory. The word of God, as it is locked into our mind, empowers us to stand no matter the circumstances of the world. Brethren, the sad state of current affairs in this world doesn't change truth, nor does it change our mission. Let us imitate those who have carried this message, that we too may receive the reward reserved for faithful heralds of the gospel.

**13:9 – “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, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.”** – There are always those who peddle false teaching for some sort of earthly profit. The law of supply and demand dictates that when there are those who desire to have their ears tickled, false teachers are pleased to provide that “service.” As lawlessness increases, the authority of the Scriptures is abandoned, and the religious marketplace is filled with all sorts of “winds of doctrine.” If a person's hope is still fixed in this world, he is susceptible to such winds, and will be carried away. In hopes of a better life here in this world, many turn to all sorts of strange teachings. There would have been a natural tendency for a Christian of Jewish background to get sucked back into the laws of “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” Some of the ceremonial laws regarding food or drink would possibly appeal to those who had not replaced the elementary principles of the world with the new creation teachings of the New Covenant. Similar tendencies could trap the unsuspecting Christian today. Much of the self-help teachings sprinkled with religious flavor promise a quick fix to those who aren't willing to diligently renew their minds. Whether it be eastern mysticism, religious rituals, or law, these false teachings are of no spiritual value whatsoever. In the midst of earthly turmoil, the only way a person will be able to endure to the end is to have his heart strengthened through the grace of God. As our faith has given us the introduction into this grace (see Romans 5:2), so we can grow in God's grace as our faith increases. Brethren, let us not be carried away by the false teachings of our day, but let us receive the word implanted and gain the eternal benefit of God's grace.

**13:10-11 – “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. 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.”** – God's great wisdom is apparent in His setting the table of the Lord on the first day of every week. The Lord's Supper is truly a “sharing in the altar.” As I Corinthians 10:16 reminds us, “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a *sharing* in the body of Christ?” While the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were sin offerings, the bodily sacrifice of Christ doubles as both a sin offering and a peace offering. There is no doubt that Jesus offered Himself as a guilt offering when He laid down His life on the cross. The sin offerings made for atonement of the nation under the Old Testament were not to be eaten by either the priests or the people, but the bodies of those animals were burned outside the camp – see Leviticus 4:11-12. In contrast, under the New Covenant, God has given priests (all Christians) the right to share in the atonement sacrifice made by Christ on our behalf.

This communal meal on the first day of the week is a great communication of the peace that we now have with God because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and offering in the true holy place. The Lord's Supper is the one meal essential for the Christian's spiritual nutrition. As Jesus said in John 6:53, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves." Brethren, we have a great altar set before us. Let us never forsake it, but rather joyfully gather together for our sharing in the body and blood of our Lord.

**13:12-14 – "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come."**

– In the previous verses there was a contrast between the privilege of the Christian to partake of Christ's body under the New Covenant, and the forbidding of the priests to partake of the national atonement offerings under the Old Testament. However, now the writer of Hebrews brings forth a similarity between the burning of the flesh of those animals outside the camp, and the affliction endured by Christ on our behalf. Jesus Himself suffered outside the city of Jerusalem when He was crucified for our sins. The apostle John records for us in John 19:17, "They took Jesus, therefore, and He went *out*, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of the Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha." A few verses later, John tells us that "the place where Jesus was crucified was *near the city*." In order for Jesus to sanctify us through His blood, He had to be willing to endure the cross. The exhortation from the Holy Spirit is for us to go outside the world in order to meet Christ. Christians are destined to bear Christ's reproach on this earth, knowing that we will receive our reward in full on the other side of death. Romans 8:36 reminds us that, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." It is only when we are willing to suffer for Christ that we will get to be glorified with Him. In a similar vein, Paul said that he rejoiced in his sufferings for the brethren at Colossae, because he was trying to fill up what was lacking [on his part] of Christ's afflictions. The reality for us is that we will not effectively save the souls of others unless we are willing to bleed for the gospel. Our willingness to do so is dependent upon whether we are at home in the world or in the heavenly kingdom. Consistent with the thrust of this entire passage from Hebrews, it is imperative that our hope be fixed on the things above, and not be sucked in by the false hopes of this world. Every true disciple of Christ recognizes the wisdom of losing earth in order to gain heaven.

**13:15-16 – "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."**

– Because of the sacrifice made by Christ on our behalf, we have been cleansed and made holy. As Hebrews 9:14 brings out, the purpose of our cleansing by Christ's blood is so that we can *serve* God. The writer of Hebrews exhorts Christians to fulfill their duties as priests under the New Covenant, and to offer up sacrifices to God. These sacrifices clearly are not the animal sacrifices of old – see Hebrews 10:5-10, 14. The sacrifices which we offer are not for the purpose of our sanctification, but rather are given in gratitude for what has been done for us. Of all the people on the face of the earth, true Christians are the only ones who can

truly praise God in a way that He deserves. Christians should “in everything give thanks,” as we are commanded to do in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. When our hope is fixed on things above, the surrounding circumstances of this world don’t dictate our attitude, but our response can and should be one of continual praise and thanksgiving to God. Clearly our prayers and songs of praise express our thanks to the Lord for our redemption and sanctification. Even beyond the specifics of prayers and songs, our entire bodies should also proclaim praise to the Lord. The encouragement of Paul to the Roman Christians applies to us as well, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” (Romans 12:1) The writer of Hebrews reminds us not to “neglect doing good and sharing.” Christians should “do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” – see Galatians 6:10. We need to practice “pure and undefiled religion” by “visiting widows and orphans in their distress” – see James 1:27. There is an obvious link between our love for God and our love for people. Loving in deed and truth exacts a cost from us; that is why the Lord calls it sacrifice. Such sacrificial giving from pure motives is pleasing to the Lord, and the One who sees in secret will repay us.

**13:17 – “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”** – There is a statement uttered twice in the book of Judges which concisely describes the conditions of anarchy, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 17:6, 21:25) During periods of social unrest, the general population holds all authority in contempt. The selfish nature of sinful man comes to the fore, and he casts off any form of government. Unfortunately, the godless political winds of the world sometimes blow into the church, with the result that the wicked and ill-advised within the church decide that they don’t have to listen to anybody. However, the Scriptures clearly reveal the peaceful nature of God, who insists that His people be orderly – see 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40. God has established a social order for civilization in general, including moral laws, the family unit, and a clearly-defined limited role for government. This same God has set up a leadership structure within His church which He expects His people to follow. Thus the Lord first has given His kingdom the foundational government of the apostles and New Testament prophets as contained in the teachings of the New Testament. The Lord has also placed elders, preachers, teachers, and other leaders within the body of Christ. Certainly God has not asked for His people to blindly follow self-proclaimed leaders; that is why He has given us His word. However, the Lord knows that just as man tries to claim his love for God while harboring hatred toward His brother, so he claims to be in submission to God while refusing to follow the leadership of proven brethren. Therefore within the Scriptures there are multiple appeals to the new creature to be in subjection to others within the body of Christ. Every Christian is asked to be “subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” Specifically, children are commanded to obey their parents, wives are told to be submissive to their husbands, and younger men are to be subject to their elders. As a matter of fact, elders are spoken of as those who “rule” within the body of Christ – see I Timothy 5:17. Titus the evangelist was told, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” (Titus 2:15) In addition to these

specifics, Paul told the Thessalonians to “appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work” – see I Thessalonians 5:12-12. In a similar reminder to the Corinthians who had neither elders nor a resident evangelist, Paul said that those who devoted themselves for ministry to the saints should be obeyed. He told the Corinthians, “that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors” – see I Corinthians 16:15-16. For effective teamwork within the local body of Christ, it is essential that each Christian humble himself, and be obedient to leadership within the guidelines of Scripture. Leadership takes the progress of the local body personally, and they do give an account to God for the position of the congregation. The exhortation is for all Christians to be willing participants who gladly pull together to get the job done, rather than lone rangers, each doing what is right in his own eyes. Those who joyfully follow will be rewarded by Christ with, “Well done, good and faithful slave. Enter into the joy of your master.” However those who refuse to submit to God’s authority on earth will find themselves being shut out of the eternal kingdom where God forever reigns. Brethren, let us leave the anarchists to the world, and instead keep a righteous, submissive mindset in reference to Godly authority.

## **HEBREWS CHAPTER 13:18-25**

(Greetings)

**13:18-19 – “Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.”** – As the writer of Hebrews brings this book to a close, he emphasizes prayer among the brethren for the brethren. It is amazing how God uses our prayer lives to perfect us. Certainly prayer to God is designed to strengthen our relationship with Him as we learn to think deeply about His words, and then mold our thoughts to His – see John 5:19. Prayer also helps us to develop motives that are not selfish but Kingdom-driven – see James 4:3. God also develops perseverance within us as He teaches us to keep asking, seeking, and knocking – see Luke 11:8-10. One other benefit of prayer implied in this passage is the strengthening of unity. When we pray for one another in a positive way, our love and trust for each other grows. As the writer of Hebrews asks the recipients of his letter to pray for him, he reminds them that he has a good conscience, and that he desires to conduct himself honorably in all things. While earlier portions of the book of Hebrews really brought out the clear conscience given to the Christian through the sacrifice and offering of Christ, this verse communicates the need for the Christian to maintain a good conscience. Any person who continues to sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth is in danger of forever losing the clear conscience given to him by the work of Christ. In order for the Christian to keep a clean conscience, he must desire to live honorably in Christ Jesus. I Peter 3:14-16 reminds Christians to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts and to keep a good conscience. As we desire to please the Lord in everything, we will ensure that we understand the previous concepts brought out in this book in order that the imputed righteousness of Christ will be demonstrated in all of our daily actions. The writer then follows up these thoughts by urging his audience to pray all the more in order that he would be brought back into contact with them soon. When we legitimately desire the best for our brethren and pray for them in this manner, God will move mountains to ensure that the momentum of His Kingdom is strengthened.

**13:20-21 – “Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”** – After asking his audience to pray for him, now the writer of Hebrews offers up a prayer on their behalf. He addresses his prayer to the God of peace. Truly God is the only source of peace, and He has communicated His desire to bring peace to man through offering up His only begotten Son. A beautiful description of the lengths to which God has gone to bring man back into a peaceful relationship with Him is communicated in Ephesians 2:13-18. Since our Father is the God of peace, it is fitting that peacemakers would be called “sons of God” – see Matthew 5:9. It is also consistent for God to command us to pursue peace, as in Hebrews 12:14. Not only did the God of peace offer His Son on the cross, but He also brought Him back from death to life. Christ’s death brought about reconciliation; it removed the barriers between man and God. For us to experience full peace with God; however, we also must be brought out of death into life.

This has been accomplished through the work of Jesus our great High Priest. This is the thrust of Romans 5:9-10 which states, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” As those who have been brought out of death into life, we are partakers of the eternal covenant. Jesus, our great Shepherd (see John 10:11-18), has sealed the eternal covenant with the blood that He offered in the true Holy of Holies. In one short phrase of his prayer, the writer of Hebrews has summarized the two unchangeable things mentioned in chapter 6 – the eternal priesthood of Christ and the eternal covenant. The same God who has the power to bring the dead back to life is using His power to equip us to do His will. For every task that the Lord puts before us, He supplies the strength necessary for us to accomplish it. As the old saying goes, “The will of God can never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.” Always remember that it is “God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” – see Philippians 2:13. The writer of Hebrews closes His prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory forever and ever, amen.

**13:22 – “But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.”** – Although the letter to the Hebrews is a fairly short book in the Bible, it is packed with powerful, mature teaching. The writer urges the recipients of the letter (which would include us) to bear with his exhortation. In other words, read it, pay attention to it, understand it, and practice it. With such strong emphasis on a clear communication of the glorified Christ, the book of Hebrews is one of the most powerful books for producing real change within the Christian. It is essential for each of us to get a clear grasp of the teachings of this book that we may enjoy the beauty of the clear conscience which God has so freely given to us.

**13:23 – “Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.”** – Timothy obviously was well-known throughout the first-century brotherhood. Initially Paul had picked him up on his second missionary journey. From that time, Timothy had rightfully garnered the reputation of a kingdom man. Apart from the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy which Paul addressed directly to Timothy, Paul fondly mentions him in eight of his letters of the New Testament. He speaks of him as his “fellow worker,” as his “beloved and faithful child in the Lord,” and as one of “kindred spirit” with him. There is no doubt that Timothy’s commitment and “proven worth” were recognized and valued throughout the churches of the first century. The writer of Hebrews hoped to bring Timothy with him when he visited the Hebrew Christians, knowing that this would encourage them all.

**13:24-25 – “Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all.”** – In this last chapter, the leaders get special attention three times. They were to be remembered (vs. 7), they were to be obeyed (vs. 17), and finally, they received a special greeting. In addition to greeting the leaders, the writer of Hebrews greeted all of the saints. He also sent a special greeting to the Jewish Christians from the Christians in Italy. It is impossible to say whether the writer was in Italy at the time or was simply accompanied by some brethren from Italy who passed on their

greetings. The important thing to note is that there was a strong desire in the New Testament church to encourage each other in the cause of Christ, no matter of one's location. Finally, the writer asks that the grace of God be with all the Christians. This was a standard closing, but it wasn't empty words. Every Christian needs God's grace in order to fulfill God's purpose in his life. Let us all remember from the book of Hebrews that it is because of who Christ is that we can be perfected in Him for His glory!