

George Philip Bible Readings
THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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1:1-2

The opening verses are glorious in their sweep and we want to get to grips with their teaching with as little introduction as possible. We do not know who wrote this epistle although the names of Paul, Barnabas, Apollos and Luke have all been suggested. We are not sure to whom the letter was sent but its message is clearly addressed to professing Christians of Jewish background with a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament. The fundamental unity of the Old and New Testaments is made clear in the opening verses, the great link or key being the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is promise and preparation; the New Testament is fulfilment; and in the light of New Testament teaching about Christ we begin to see the glory of Old Testament teaching. The epistle was written about A.D. 64 at a time when there was a stirring of persecution. It is essentially a word of encouragement and exhortation to those who had begun the Christian way, urging them to go on (6:1; 13:22). They have heard, believed and made a good start in Christ in spite of persecution (10:32-39). But something has gone wrong. For some reason they have faltered, got stuck spiritually, lost their earlier enthusiasm and are in danger of losing themselves altogether, not least by being sidetracked by teachers who seemed spiritual but who were in fact narrowing down the glorious truth of Christ 13:7-9). This, says the epistle, is no light thing, for it may lead to a drifting into apostasy, and abandoning of Christ, a denying of the faith and an end of destruction. We must give earnest heed to what God is saying by His Spirit concerning Christ through the Word of truth (2:1-4).

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1:1-2

This is a practical epistle addressed to the reality of the struggle in the experience of believers. The danger arises from outward pressures and inner uncertainties because of a failure to grasp the glorious truth of Christ. Such failure causes us to be preoccupied with and to rely on subjective experience rather than on objective fact and reality. Into this situation God thrusts His Word which declares that Christ is everything (Col. 1:11-20; 2:2b-3, 8-10). Throughout Hebrews Christ is declared to be "better" (the adjective is used thirteen times but translated differently (cf.1:4; 6:9)). It is this glorious Christ who is the focus, fulfilment and executive agent of all the eternal purposes of God from beginning to end. It is Christ, first, last and all the time. This is the Gospel, the Word of God the Father, testified to by God the Holy Spirit. Hebrews insists that the entire Old Testament pointed forward authentically to Christ, which is something Jesus Himself insisted on (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-47; John 5:39-40). It is basic to the Christian gospel that God speaks. If He did not speak and so make Himself known, people would remain in dark ignorance or at best would fabricate imaginary and distorted ideas of God. Our verses declare that God spoke "at sundry times and in diverse manners" (AV), "in many and various ways of old to our fathers by the prophets" (RSV), or "in former times in fragmentary and varied fashion" (NEB). But we must not conclude that the Old Testament is in any way the "defective" speech of God "corrected" by the New Testament. The one is promise and the other is fulfilment but their message is one, namely Christ.

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1:1-2

God speaks and fulfils Himself in many ways and all His speaking, whether in "former times" or in "these last days" (note how Christ divides the entire course of time into two sections), is summed up in His Son. God speaks in nature (Rom. 1:19-20; Ps. 19:1-4 - then v,7ff which speak of God's Law), just as He speaks through conscience (an unreliable guide because human nature is fallen and conscience can be bribed and silenced), and also through law, history and providence. But all His preliminary and preparatory speaking is summed up, brought near, spelled out in human terms in His Son Jesus Christ. All the fullness of God is now manifest in flesh (1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:20) for people to see, to look upon without fear, and to be drawn to (John 14:8-12). The Word of God is made flesh to dwell among us so that we can see God's glory and be partakers of His grace and truth (John 1:14-18). Hebrews should thrill our hearts. Put the word "God" at the start of verse 1, where it belongs psychologically and theologically though not linguistically. God has His times and will not be hurried. God has His methods and brooks no interference. God speaks and His word stands for ever in its many-sided fullness. That Word is summed up in His Son..

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1:2-4

When the fullness of the time was come God sent forth His Son (Gal. 4:4), and the child born in Bethlehem is the king whose origin is from old, from ancient days; whose roots are far back in the past; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2 RSV; NEB; AV.). This Jesus has been given a name above every name (Phil. 2:5-11) and He is described in a way that spans the entire course of God's purposes from eternity to eternity. The Son is the heir of all things (Ps. 2:8; Acts 2:36; Eph. 1:21-22) and this thought sweeps us forward to the end of history. He is the agent of creation in respect of the entire universe and all orders of existence (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-18). This is the beginning of history. The Son reflects and is the full shining of the glory of God, and He is the exact image, the flawless expression of God, bearing the very stamp of His nature (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 1:14; 8:42, 58; 10:30; 17:5, 22, 24). That takes us back before history ever began (John 1:1-2). The Son of God upholds the entire order of the universe by the word of His power right down through the course of history until the world has served its purpose (Col. 1:17; 2 Pet. 3:3; Rev. 3:7; Rev. 5:1ff, which speaks of the perfect divine plan and its executor). When the Son had "by Himself" (AV), by the offering of Himself (9:14, 26), without assistance or co-operation from any other, made purification for sins at the very heart of history, He sat down in the royal seat at the right hand of the majesty on high. This is the Jesus who said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth". This is the Jesus who dwells in our hearts by faith. What a word of encouragement to believers under pressure. This is the message expounded throughout Hebrews.

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1:2-4

Christ is shown first in His glory (chap. 1), then in His humiliation (chap. 2). In the first three verses "the greatness of the Son of God receives sevenfold confirmation, and it appears, without being expressly emphasised, that He possesses in Himself all the qualifications to be the mediator between God and men. He is the Prophet through whom God has spoken His final word to men; He is the Priest who has accomplished a perfect work of cleansing for His people's sins; He is the King who sits enthroned in the place of chief honour alongside the Majesty on high." (Bruce) Christ is King, pre-incarnate, incarnate, glorified, and never for a moment, not even on the Cross, is He less than King of Kings and Lord of Lords; Lord of creation, providence, redemption, the world, the church and the individual. He has no competitors and there is never any doubt as to the issue of His work (1:3; 10:12-14). The Shorter Catechism says: "Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies." What a Saviour! He is able to save to the uttermost (7:25AV) and only He is able to save. There is no other name given by which sinners can be saved (Acts 4:12). And He is able to save regardless of all the powers of the world, be they human, demonic or angelic. Christ is greater (John 16:33; 1 John 4:4), His is the name high over all. Whatever angel powers there be, fallen or un fallen, Christ is better. They are at best servants. He is the Son.

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1:4-6

From this point to the end of the chapter we have a sequence of Old Testament passages quoted to demonstrate in various ways the superiority and the uniqueness of Christ over against all angelic beings. It may be asked, "What have angels to do with twentieth century life?" We know that the activity of angels featured significantly in the life of the Jews; in the giving of the Law (Acts 7:53), Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:12), chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:17), and the angel Gabriel at the Nativity (Luke 1:19), to name but a very few illustrations. This alone is a message warning us not to be miserable rationalists believing only what we can prove by touch, sight and scientific computation. That reduces the world and God to our puny size. But in our technological age we are learning of the operation of powers we neither understand nor can control. What then of angels? In Scripture the idea of spiritual beings having been entrusted with the rule of the world is implicit, e.g. Prince of Persia and of Greece (Dan. 10:21) and the angel Michael whose charge is Israel (Dan. 12:1). But there are angels who did not keep to their first allocated sphere of service under God but rebelled with Lucifer (Isa. 14:12ff; Jude 6). This resulted in a grim tyranny of evil in the world of men cf. 1 John 5:19; Eph. 6:12ff; Col. 2:8. Satan himself operates as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) by his deceiving words and works adding to the confusion

and fears of men. Now to a world that is aware of and susceptible to the "voices" and influences of "angels", what do we say? We proclaim the superiority of Christ.

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1:4-6

There are many angels with many functions but there is only one Son and He stands in a unique position. He is not one among many "servants" to bring men to God, nor is He one of a hierarchy of "saviours". He is no servant. He is the Son. Read John 17 to sense the wonder of the unity of the Father and the Son. The first scripture quoted here is Psalm 2:7 which, according to Acts 13:33, refers to Christ's resurrection. cf. Col. 1:18 and Rev. 1:5. In His resurrection Christ is the firstborn of a new order of life. The second quotation is from 2 Sam. 7:13-14a and seems to speak of the perfect harmony of relationship between Father and Son. Think of how Jesus delighted in the Father's will. But in Samuel reference is made to the seed of David who is the son to be blessed so richly. Down through the Old Testament the prophets kept on speaking of the One to come and we have a wonderful summing up of the fulfilment in Rom. 1:2-4. The third quotation in v.6 is difficult. It may be quoted from some version of Ps. 89:27 or Ps. 97:7, reading "all angels" instead of "all gods". Possibly the quote is from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the O.T.) rendering of Deut. 32:43 (not found in our Bibles), "Let the sons of god (angels) worship him." There may be a tradition that the angels of God were summoned to worship the Son when He was manifested on earth. Certainly the angels sang at Bethlehem. Think of the hymn, "Ye servants of God Let all cry aloud and honour the Son ... The praises of Jesus the angels proclaim, Fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb." (Wesley)

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1:7-9

The theme of these verses is Christ the King who rules the angels and causes them to do His will. In Psalm 104:4 it is the natural elements which are the servants of the Lord. The rushing wind, fire and water all serve the Lord as the hymn, "All creatures of our God and King," (St. Francis of Assisi) suggests. But the coming and going of angels, and perhaps even the temporary existence of angels, is contrasted with the eternity of the Son. The next quotation is from Psalm 45:6-7 taking the reading as in Hebrews, not as the RSV has it, "Your divine throne is for ever..." The king is no earthly king but the Son, whose name is Jesus. This is the staggering claim of the Christian gospel. Jesus is God. He said so Himself and this claim was ultimately the reason why He was rejected and crucified. Men would not believe, in spite of prophecy and historical evidence, that this man Jesus was God. Had they consented to His claim they would have had to yield Him obedience. The Son rules from the everlasting throne. This is the joy and assurance of the believer in all changing circumstances. How often these truths are expressed in the hymns we sing. "Jesus we know, and He is on the throne." He rules in righteousness and is anointed with the joy of the Lord. Does this refer to the joy of Heb. 12:3? It is joy supremely His and yet it is shared with His "fellows" who are in the fellowship of faith and obedience with Him.

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1:10-14

The quotation (10-12) is from Ps. 102:25-27, and the final reference (13) which serves to clinch the argument is from Ps. 110:1. The throne of God and of the Lamb is for ever. Creation is full of wonder and majesty and declares the glory of God. But it will all pass away. The Son, by whom and for whom the world was made, abides the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13:8) The final quotation refers to the king's enthronement and carries with it the assurance of victory over all his enemies. There is only one person to whom God says, "Sit at my right hand." Our hearts must learn to centre down on Him. "The highest place that heaven affords is His, is His by right." (Kelly) Jesus takes the highest station: O what joy the sight affords.... King of Kings and Lord of Lords." (Kelly) What then are angels and what is their place and function? They are worshipping (liturgical) spirits who stand and serve in the presence of God (cf. Isa. 6:1-4) But they do not remain there. They are sent forth to minister to and to serve the heirs of salvation. Little wonder we described Hebrews as a message of encouragement to believers in time of battle.

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2:1-4

This is the first of seven warning passages running right through the epistle. It is addressed with equal potency to those who are merely nominal believers; those newly converted; those tottering and wandering; and those who are of a mind to go on with Christ into Christian maturity. Especially when we are receiving such ministry as the first chapter gives, we need to be counselled as to the danger of allowing familiarity with holy things to make us careless. The voice of this mighty Christ must be listened to intently and answered with an ever greater commitment of obedience, the obedience of faith. Whatever may assail us, circumstances, our own complicated personalities and besetting sins, the power and fascination of the world, the flesh and the Devil, we are not left helpless victims. How could we ever plead that if we have a glorious all-sufficient Saviour such as has been shown us in the gospel? But we must be in earnest. It is easy to drift, like a boat carried on a strong current with increasing momentum, past the landing stage and out to the open sea to founder in the storm. There is no escape. If we miss salvation, then we perish indeed. Associating with the people of God and being influenced by the good things of God's grace is not a pastime nor an "extra" activity to be taken up or laid down. It is life or death.

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2:1-4

The Law of God was given to Moses through the instrumentality of angels (Acts 7:51-53) and the warnings given in respect of it were real (Deut. 28:1ff, 15ff, and 58ff; 2 Chron. 36:15-16). God's Spirit will not always strive with men who persist in unbelief (Gen. 6:3 AV). The great salvation which is the theme of the gospel was brought to men, not by angels but by the Son of God Himself, attested by the powerful sign of the resurrection. It carried in the preaching of the message the confirming power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:22, 43). There is never any justification for unbelief. There may be some excuse for the foolish person who rejects the message of the gospel out of hand. He is blind indeed. But there is no excuse for those who say they believe it but deal with it casually and carelessly. Not only is there the danger of drifting away and being lost for ever, there is the possibility that the glorious truths of Christ become something of the familiar but ignored background noises of life. When that happens a man can go through life supremely confident, totally indifferent and spiritually complacent. It is virtually impossible, as we shall see later in the epistle, to waken up that person to spiritual vitality.

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2:5-9

The close reasoning of the first two chapters of Hebrews is difficult to follow, especially for us who are not so aware of the function and activity of angels as the people to whom the epistle was written. Two things will help. The message already declared is that Christ is greater than all that has ever been or can ever yet be. He, and He alone, is the gloriously sufficient Saviour of God's people. Secondly, in the Bible two men are recognised, the First Adam and the Last Adam (Christ) (1 Cor. 15:22, 45). The first man brought everything down into the bondage of sin and death, but the last man, as a man, redeemed man from the curse and set him free. Because of the death and resurrection of God's man, Jesus, a new order of existence has been instituted in which, at the name of Jesus every knee must bow in heaven, earth and under the earth (Phil. 2:9-10). This new order, or world to come (2:5), which is our theme is not some "far off divine event," nor "pie in the sky when you die." It is *now*, and the entire jurisdiction of all things *now* is in the hand of Jesus not angels nor any other "powers". We spoke of this in a previous reading. It is this thought of the lordship of Christ that leads on now to the consideration of the destiny of man and the blessing he can be led into by Christ. In Christ, he can begin, to live in the power of the world to come (6:5), and in this way God's original plan for man can be fulfilled. It is a plan for dignity, rule and fellowship (Gen. 1: 26-31), the very things lost in the disaster of the fall (Gen. 3:8-13, 22-24).

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2:5-9

We do not yet see man as God first planned but we see God's "Man", who is our "Man", opening up possibilities for us to become true people in life and destiny. Even though God's Man, Jesus, is invested with all rule, authority and power, we do not yet see every knee bowing to Him. There is this "not yet" element in the

whole situation, but this does not cancel or even limit the Christian message. We are saved in hope, as Paul says in Rom. 8:19ff. and it is sure and certain hope. There is no doubt at all about the issue, because we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour in consequence of His death. Now, this is something He did *for us*, opening up the way for us to follow Him. He did not have to die in order to claim glory. From all eternity glory was His by right and He left that glory when He was born in Bethlehem. On the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-5) we see Him again crowned with glory (2 Pet. 1:16-18). He could at any time, as a perfect man without sin, have claimed entrance to heaven as His right but, by the grace of God, He turned His back on glory and tasted death for every man. He stood in for us and experienced death in a way that no man has ever yet tasted it in all the full and terrible significance of separation from God, exclusion from His presence and the terrible darkness and desolation testified to in the cry from the Cross, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But death could not hold Him (Acts 2:24). It had neither claim nor power, and for us the gates of death were burst asunder in the resurrection (not mentioned here in Hebrews). This triumphant Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father and this is our guarantee of victory (Acts 2:32-36; Rom. 8:33ff.).

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2:10-18

This magnificent passage tells us in dramatic language the things Jesus accomplished when He tasted death for man. It was not a tragic death but a triumphant one and in it we must see the deliberate activity of God the Father Almighty (Acts 2:23; 2 Cor, 5:19). The writer says (10) that it was a right and fitting thing for God to do, in His plan to fill heaven with "sons", to make the pioneer or trail-blazer of salvation perfect through sufferings. There is much in this whole epistle about the attainment of perfection or maturity in spiritual life and. this is accomplished in the "many sons" by means of suffering, trial and conflict. But we are not left to "go it alone", for the pioneer of our salvation took "upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin," (Westminster Confession) and as a man He walked the way of holiness and victory for us. Having now entered God's presence He has secured our entry (by faith in His name), and in v.11-13 we are introduced to the idea of "brotherhood", fellowship or one-ness between Christ and His ransomed people. He is not ashamed of us. Why should He be, for He has taken away all our sins and made us new creatures, perfect in the sight of God (2 Cor. 5:17)? It is all very wonderful, not least in the fact of experience that the closer we draw to this blessed Jesus the more we sense and feel our own unworthiness. This in turn makes us wonder at His amazing love and this is the beginning of worship. (The references in v.12-13 are from Ps. 22:22; Isa. 8:17b; Isa. 8:18).

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2:10-18

The children God has given to Christ are men and women of flesh and blood, and if He was going to be one with them then He had to partake of "flesh and blood" experience just like them. It would not have been a real salvation if God as God dealt with the human predicament of sin and its consequences. We could then have said, "It is easy for God," and so we would have excused our sins and sinning. That "escape" was closed when God became man. In v.11 there is reference (to be expounded more fully later in the epistle) to the consecrating priest in Israel who, by His ministrations, set apart the people for God, dealing with God on their behalf. The priest had to be "one of themselves". An outsider could not fulfil the role. So Jesus became one of us with a flesh and blood birth, life and death. Not one aspect of human experience was by-passed. By His life and death something tremendous was accomplished (14-15). Satan was robbed of his power and dominion by a man, lost his initiative in the world, and had his victims wrenched from his grasp. Think of Jesus' victory in the Temptation, when all circumstances were against Him (Lk 4: 1-13). Think of how from then on Jesus spoke with power and authority to the demons that afflicted men. Think of the significance of His death and resurrection as expressed in Col. 1:13-14; 2:13-15. Think of it this way: with normal current a light bulb "holds" the power but massive voltage blows the bulb to bits, This is what Jesus did. He blasted open the prison house and set men free to live. "0 death where is thy sting; 0 grave where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15: 54-58 AV). It is gone for ever.

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2:10-18

The particular aspect of our Lord's identification with men which this epistle seeks to expound is His high-priestly ministry on their behalf. As we have already said the priest must be one with those he represents before God, and therefore Jesus was made like us in every respect. Having suffered Himself He is able to sympathise and be merciful, and having Himself endured to the end He can be counted on to be faithful and to see His people right through to victory. His work as high priest was in respect of "things pertaining to God" (AV), not simply in "the service of God" (17). The most vital issue is that of sin. Men can come to God only if their sin has been dealt with, and that is exactly what Jesus did. He made atonement for sins, meeting their judgment, covering them completely and wiping them away. That solves the problem from man's side. But sins are committed against God, breaking the relationship with Him and creating in Him a disposition of anger or wrath. This also must be dealt with in any work of atonement that is to be effective. This is why the word "propitiation" should be used here and elsewhere to signify the turning away or the satisfaction of Divine anger. No mere man can deal with such a mighty and eternal transaction and yet it must be done from man's side. The God-man, who stood in our place, lived for us and died for us, sealed our pardon with His blood and made full atonement. God as man grappled with the full mystery and power of iniquity and dealt with it once for all. This is the theme we will study again and again throughout the epistle. With a Saviour like this do we need to fear? Read Rom. 8:31-39.

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3:1-6

The first word here signifies the close connection with what has gone before. In the light of what has been declared, we are to get our eyes fixed on Jesus because, just as He is greater than angels, so He is greater than and superior to all men, Moses included. The context of the exhortation is God's "house" (2), His work or kingdom which is one "house", clear in purpose and perfect in outworking from beginning to end. The executor of all God's glorious "business" is none other than the Son who has been expounded, in the first two chapters, in His glory and His humiliation for the salvation of men. But we also, in Christ, are called to be part of God's "house" (6). This is something far too glorious to take any risks with, and by the Holy Spirit the writer is urging these wavering believers to consider these things. He addresses the believers in their true identity in Christ, as "holy brethren". Whatever people may say, or they themselves may feel, this is what they are, brothers together in the family of God. This is a great word for those dogged by a sense of sin, failure, unworthiness or inferiority. God took us to Himself in Christ, just as we were, cf. Rom. 5: 6-11; 8:31-33; Eph. 2:4-10, 18-22. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but there is no doubt as to the issue (1 John 3:1-3). We share in a heavenly calling. There is no place for pride, but plenty place for thrill, for we are "born free" in Christ (John 8:32, 35-36; Gal. 5:1; Lk. 4:18-19), free from the limitation of circumstances and the inhibitions of personality. These things may no longer dominate us. We are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37-39).

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3:1-6

It is Jesus who brings about this glorious salvation and we must get our hearts fixed on Him, the Apostle and High Priest, God's envoy and the people's representative and intercessor. Now this is what Moses had been to Israel and he had been faithful in his God-appointed task, speaking the Word to men and standing in God's presence on their behalf. He was raised up to lead the people out of the land of bondage and, glorious as his work was, he was in fact a pointer to the greater leader and deliverer who was to come (Deut. 18:15-19). There is no devaluing of Moses. How could there be when God spoke with him face to face (Num. 12:6-8)? But when all is said, Moses is still a servant, whereas Christ is the Son. Nothing can call His Sonship in question, as the first two chapters have made clear, and it is this Jesus who presides over the "house" of God, which house we are, if we hold fast and go on. We read in Ex. 32:11ff., 31ff., and in Num. 14:13ff. of Moses' prevailing advocacy for the people, but we have a greater Advocate with the Father, the Son Himself (1 John 1:5-2:2). The "house" of God comprises all believers and spans the ages of history gathering into one people all who have been justified by faith. But note in v.6b the conditional statement (repeated so often in this epistle) that it is those who continue who are marked out as truly belonging. We need to consider carefully Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23.

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3:7-11

These verses introduce the second great warning passage of the epistle. The argument which goes on to 4:13 is detailed and needs careful consideration. The first warning (2:1-4) was against neglect, and highlighted the importance of answering the Word of the Lord with the decision of faith. This second warning is concerned with the practical obedience of faith. It is not enough to consent to the truth intellectually or emotionally; we must act in obedience to God. This is particularly important when we remember that the situation in which we are involved is never static. God is moving on with glorious resolution, and this means there is the danger of being left behind if we allow ourselves to be paralysed by unbelief. Now unbelief is not weakness. It is sin (Rom. 14:23). To emphasise the seriousness of this situation the epistle quotes from Psalm 95:8-11 where it speaks of God being angry. The reference is to the story of how a whole generation of Israel was laid aside, disqualified and put under the discipline of judgment because of their persistent unbelief (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-27). The "rebellion" and the "day of testing" are identified by place names in the Psalm and refer to incidents in Ex. 17:1-7 (at the beginning of Israel's journeys and in Num. 14:1-4, 7-11, 20-24, 30 (at the end of the journeys). Throughout the forty years (3:9), time and time again (Num. 14:22), these people criticised, mistreated and slandered God who had saved them and blessed them all along the way. Ponder Acts 7:51.

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3:12-15

There is a solemn tenderness in the words, "Take care, brethren," (v.3RSV) for the writer of the epistle can see the emerging of a situation which is virtually beyond remedy. It is like being left on the pier when the boat you wanted and needed has drawn away and the gap is increasing with desolating inevitability. This is a very personal word, for it speaks of an unbelieving heart "in any one of you," (RSV) causing you to slip away from God. But it is also a word to the company of believers, the whole fellowship, because sin is powerfully infectious and contagious. It affects others as one rotten apple in a barrel can corrupt the lot. The appeal here is not only for personal realism and dedication, but for exercise of responsibility as our brother's keeper in view of the subtle and powerful operations of the wiles of the Devil. The passage speaks of the deceitfulness of sin and volumes could be written on that theme. Satan beguiles us in order to rob us of our inheritance in God (Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3) and when we slide spiritually we are in danger of undermining another's faith and devotion to God. We are called to "exhort" or encourage one another, not in the sense of forever preaching at, dealing with, or correcting each other, but with mutuality of care encouraging each other to hold fast to Christ. In v.14 we have again the emphasis that it is those who endure to the end who are saved (Matt. 10:22). Read Nehemiah 9:6-38. It concerns a people who slid far away but who were restored by a long and painful route.

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3:16-19

Three specific questions are asked and answered in these verses and the theme is still that of Christian perseverance. It is not enough to begin well (Gal. 1:6-7; 5:7-8). We must hold fast. But we must also recognise that those who start going after God in the way of obedience are inevitably the targets of the Devil's attentions, for he is determined, by any means, to prevent God's people marching straight forward into the rich blessing of salvation. The journey from Egypt to Canaan could have been accomplished in a very short time but for the disinclination of heart among the people. Who were these rebellious people (16)? Had they a legitimate grievance against God? No. They were the people delivered from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and destined for glorious blessing and service. They were a people blessed in receiving the Word of the Lord and yet they provoked God by their stubborn disobedience. And in consequence they spent their lives going round in circles in the wilderness, God having refused them entrance to the land. Only two of that whole generation, Joshua and Caleb, entered the promised land. Even Moses fell short and never set foot in Canaan (until the story of the Transfiguration in Matt. 17:3). This giant of faith and meekness, under whose influence Israel had rested safely and by whose leadership they had been led safely, lapsed towards the end by allowing the flaring up of old sins of impatience and impetuosity (Num. 20:10-13; Deut. 32:48-52). There are solemn consequences resulting from unbelief. To refuse to go forward into God's will and blessing is to go back, and to forfeit that blessing, particularly the blessing of service.

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4:1-2

The story of Israel is being used to apply spiritual principles to these New Testament believers. The "Hebrews" have confessed Christ and have begun to follow Him but are beginning to waver, and the writer is urging on them, by the Holy Spirit, the importance of the obedience of faith. If, under Moses, the disobedient lost out so totally, how much more will those lose out who go back from Christ. Speaking in these terms it is clear that the primary issue here is in terms of service, blessing and reward, rather than in the salvation of our souls. But the only real proof of salvation is that believers go on to the end. These exhortations must be set into the context of the teaching already given. Chapter 1 spoke of salvation in terms of a new world order under the Lordship of Christ. Chapter 2 declared salvation in terms of deliverance and glorious freedom from all that we call sin, death, hell and Satan (Col. 1:11-14; 2:14-15). It is a salvation brought down to us by a gloriously human Jesus to whom we can come with confidence. Chapter 3 urges seriousness in evaluating spiritual privileges and responsibilities, taking the story of Israel as a warning against unbelief. Chapter 4 begins with an emphasis on fear, promise and unbelief (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-13). Of course there is already present, although not specific until later in the epistle, the element of hope. Fear is an authentic moral constraint and is healthy provided it is not the only factor (Ps. 19:9; 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10). But all the potential of God's gracious speaking will not be realised simply by hearing the Word. It must be answered with faith which, if genuine, will be persistent and lead to obedience.

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4:3-10

This difficult passage introduces us to the thought of salvation in terms of "rest", illustrated from the story of Joshua, and emphasising that Christ is greater than Joshua, just as He has been demonstrated as being greater than angels and Moses. Rest is a word full of relief, for it signifies the end of struggling, battling and uncertainty and yet it is not indolence for it calls for effort, labour and striving (11). And there is more to rest than just end of work. It is an entering into and an enjoyment of completeness. When God rested from His labours in creation He was not tired, but satisfied. It was the rest of enjoyment, fulfilment and confidence. It was a work perfectly done, and in like manner the work of salvation is complete, perfect and satisfying in every way. It is neither defective nor uncertain. It can be rested in. Indeed to do otherwise is to refuse rest and this is the sin of unbelief which brought God's displeasure on Israel. On the one hand there is the obedience of faith and on the other the disobedience of unbelief. We have to learn to rejoice in the God of our salvation as Psalm 95, from which the quotations in this passage are taken, calls us to do. But if creation-rest is a type of salvation, so is Canaan-rest. The land and the life of rest were *given* to Israel (Josh. 23:1) but what was given had to be taken and appropriated. It had to be fought for in the fight of faith, and all the alien powers of evil had to be cast out in the name of the God of salvation who had *in fact* given them the land (Josh 1:1-10). There is rest *now*, today, for the people of God through Jesus Christ who Himself said, "Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28-30). Why anyone should refuse this and choose aimless restlessness is beyond explanation.

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4:11-13

The rest being spoken of is not just the rest God gives but the rest God Himself enjoys in the completeness of all His labours. It is a present rest, to be entered into by faith, and it is a future heavenly rest still to come. But the future is not any more "real" or secure than the present, because for all time and eternity the rest is in God. Of course it is realistic rest, neither imaginative nor escapist, and to be entered into and enjoyed here and now. This is salvation and it is the essence of peace which passes understanding (Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15). It is peace which is given to us in the presence of our enemies (Ps. 23:5) and we must enter into it. This is the fight of faith. It is the fight to believe God and rest in Him in spite of and in defiance of all our feelings. It is not a thing to be proud of when we say we cannot rest. We drive ourselves on and it is simply pride which insists that salvation is a matter of our working and striving. But we have to cease from labours, just as a drowning man must stop his struggling and commit himself to his rescuer. His flailing around in vain effort is simply a hindrance and the rescuer must sometimes knock a man out in order to help him and save him. Now, it is the function of the living word of God to diagnose and to expose unbelief in all its varied disguises: human, emotional and spiritual. This striving to enter into rest is in fact a "dying to self", an abandoning of proud "self-

effort" and a yielding to God in the obedience of faith. Anything else is simply unbelief. The Marthas of this world always justify their restlessness and criticise the Marys who rest at Jesus' feet (Lk. 10:38-40).

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4:14-16

Immediately after such a searching passage of warning there come words of immense encouragement which direct the thoughts of the heart to Jesus. He has already been presented in 2: 17-18 as the faithful and merciful High Priest who is equipped and appointed to lead us right into the presence of God. He is the one who encourages His people and gives them the strength to face the battles and to refuse to go back from their commitment. In 3:1 we were exhorted to consider Jesus as the Apostle and High Priest. So far we have concentrated on the Apostle who comes to men with God's word of final authority declaring His great salvation. Now we begin to be concerned with Jesus the High Priest who goes into the presence of God on our behalf, representing us and pleading our cause at the throne of God. It is this glorious High Priest "touched with the feeling of our infirmities"(AV) who has known the fierce sting of every possible temptation without sinning and without turning back, who leads us into the presence of God to find all the grace and help we need. The Gospel is indeed a wonderful message. It tells of acceptance with God, access right into the presence of God, fellowship with an understanding, feeling God, and power in God and from God to face and conquer all the temptations and powers that beset us. The capacity of Jesus to understand, soothe and sympathise is beyond all measurement and this theme of the High Priest that we have is now to be developed in subsequent chapters.

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5:1-6

To grasp the full significance and thrill of Christ as our High Priest we need some understanding of the sacrificial system of worship in the Old Testament, all of which in some way foreshadowed Christ. The tribes of Israel camped round the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting which was built in detailed proportion according to all the instructions in the Book of Exodus. There was a big rectangular courtyard within which was the actual "Tent". This was divided into two sections, the innermost part, shut off by a veil or curtain, signified the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God. In the outer shrine were placed the Table of Shewbread (AV), the bread of the Presence (NIV), and the seven-branched Candlestick, one on either side, with the Altar of Incense in the centre, almost against the veil. In the Holiest of All, there was the Ark of the Covenant containing the Law of God. This box, overlaid with gold and overshadowed by two golden cherubim, was the Mercy Seat. Into the innermost shrine the High Priest went once each year with the blood of the sacrificial lamb which he sprinkled on the Mercy Seat, symbolising the judgment of God upon sin and the price being paid. While in the shrine, out of sight of all men, small bells on the hem of the High Priest's robe would tinkle as he moved about, and this reassured the people that their "man", their representative, was still alive "in God's presence". But it was only when the High Priest reappeared that the people were assured that the work of atonement had been done and had been accepted on their behalf. We see the pattern of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ but with this difference: the earthly High Priest had to do this each year. This reminded the people that sin was still a barrier and a judgment, whereas Jesus once for all made atonement and the veil of the temple was torn in two. The way was opened for ever. Jesus is our High Priest and we see the wonder of His person and work in this epistle.

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5:1-6

The qualifications of the high priest are twofold. He is chosen from among men, one of us, and he is appointed by God to act on our behalf in relation to God. His work is here spoken of in respect of both gifts and sacrifices. These two terms may signify "offerings" for sins or they may speak first of the giving by God of the gifts of perfect love, loyalty, devotion and service which He desires and in which He delights, and secondly the paying of the price of sin in the sacrifice of that perfect life of love. In this way we see that Jesus lives for us as well as dies for us. But another qualification is compassion, an inward feeling of care for and sharing in the weakness and brokenness of those He represents. This is the Jesus we have, for He knew what it was to be compassed about with weakness though He Himself was not weak. There is an ignorance that is dealt with with exceeding tenderness by God and no-one in all the world knows more than Jesus about tending the wayward.

"There is no place where earth's sorrows

Are more felt than up in heaven.
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given." (Faber)

Jesus knows what it is like to be human and to be tempted and He is the one high priest who does not need to sacrifice for His own sins. He had none (2 Cor. 5:21). Sympathy does not depend on knowledge and experience of sin but of temptation. We do not really know the power of sin because we yield too soon. Jesus resisted sin until it had spent itself (12:4; Luke 4:1-13). After both the Temptation and Gethsemane we see Jesus, not exhausted, but moving forward in resolute confidence of victory (Luke 4:14; 22:53). It is not temptation that exhausts but sin.

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5:1-6

No man can take to himself the right to act for others in things pertaining to God, and those truly called will manifest these graces spoken of here. An "unfeeling" high priest is a contradiction. God's appointment of Jesus to be the High Priest is confirmed here in terms of Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 which have already been commented on in chapter 1. Throughout our Lord's life there is testimony to the fact that He knew Himself to have been sent by the Father with authority to act for men (John 5:22, 27; 17:2). Also throughout His earthly life there is abundant evidence of how Jesus did "deal gently" with men and women. He not only got right alongside people in their need; He held the perfect balance between being too harsh and being too weak and sentimental. Jesus did not excuse or condone sin. Neither did He just write off sinners. We know from experience that when we sin grievously we are instinctively aware of the danger of letting it be known to certain people who will condemn without even wondering if there were extenuating circumstances. On the other hand we will not go to those who are sentimental about sin and righteousness for they would heal our hurt superficially and leave us more vulnerable than ever. Those who are most realistic with Jesus are the safe people to go to. They may speak and deal sternly, if necessary, but they will also carry us on their hearts to God. It is of great importance that those who feel called to the service of God should allow Him to fashion and prepare them for Christlike service which calls for:

"A heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathise." (A.L.Waring)

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5:7-10

Here is an example of how the preparation spoken of yesterday is in fact accomplished. The references to Melchisedek (6, 10) will be dealt with in chapter 10. We concentrate on the fitness of Jesus to be the High Priest. The expression "the days of Jesus' life on earth" speaks of the conditions of human weakness our Lord partook of during His earthly life. It was not in any sense "easy" for Him and, committed to the will of the Father as He most certainly was, He knew the agony, tension and uncertainty of the outworking of obedience to that will. Mark 14:32-36 tells of the depth of His feelings when "horror and dismay came over Him," (NEB). We can only speculate on the ferocity of Satan's pressure on Him at that crisis. But He drank the cup of His sufferings alone and His trust in God never wavered. He was not in fact spared death, yet He was heard and answered in the way Luke 22:43 suggests. We have already commented on the sureness and serenity that marked Jesus after Gethsemane right through the trial and execution. In this context our Lord, Son of God though He was, learned what human obedience to the will of God cost by going through with it. This was indeed a word to the Hebrews who were tempted to resolve the suffering and cost of their experience by contracting out, that is, by the way of disobedience rather than by willing submission. Through His suffering obedience Jesus was perfectly fitted to be God's man to represent us and act for us. He took man's place, lived man's life, died man's death. All of these He did triumphantly ("It is finished!") and became the source of eternal salvation for time and for eternity. There is no other name by which men can be saved (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

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5:11-14

Just when you expect the writer to go on to expound the significance of eternal salvation and the limitless, perfect High Priesthood of Christ in the pattern of Melchisedek, he pauses to urge upon his readers this third, and very searching warning (5:11-6:12). There is reason for this. So far the epistle has expounded "full salvation" from the powers of sin, death and the world of men and spirits: It has declared "full access" into the presence of God Himself, led in by the Jesus who is fully and personally acquainted with our every intimate need. Such thoughts should fire the mind, soul and life as indeed they did in the Acts of the Apostles when men who believed turned the world upside down. But it was not so with those Hebrew Christians now, although it had been earlier in their experience (10:32ff; Gal. 5:7). They had become dull and drowsy. Lethargy and dullness were the marks of their lives and they seemed, indifferent to and unresponsive to spiritual issues in the sense that they could not be bothered making the effort to grapple with spiritual truth and practical discipleship. It was not that they lacked capacity, intellectual or otherwise. They lacked willingness. They were making heavy weather of their Christian lives because they had refused to grow up spiritually. They had in fact gone back spiritually and were in danger of losing their capacity to go on. Spiritual faculties atrophy, they grow feeble, wither and die if they are not exercised. This is a serious business and it is the theme Paul deals with in the whole of chapters 2 and 3 of First Corinthians.

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5:11-14

It is important to note the development in the warning passages of Hebrews. The first warning (2:1-4) is against neglect, and at the heart of this is contempt, because what you value you defend and preserve. (Why do we lose friends, for example?) Neglect leads to an imperceptible but fatal drifting away from God, though not necessarily from Christian activity. We must be careful if we find ourselves sometimes keen and sometimes casual. Remember Samson (Judges 16:20). The second warning (3:7-4:13) deals with disobedience and concerns people who are at cross purposes with God because basically they are discontented. Things have not worked out as they had hoped (they had put little effort into it) and they blamed Moses their leader. This third warning (5:11-6:12) is concerned with complacency and laziness manifested in lack of effort, drive, enthusiasm, spontaneity and appetite. Of course those suffering from lack of appetite very often blame the food or the cook even when others are enjoying and thriving on same diet! Note how these people had to be told that they had gone back from their former spiritual vitality. They were not aware of it (Hosea 7:9). Why was this so? Circumstances and suffering seldom demoralise the spiritually healthy. Could it have been wrong relationships, activities, loyalties, attitudes or reactions? Had they failed to exercise their spiritual faculties and to discern how the enemy, Satan himself, was using these things to suck away their spiritual life? We need to go again and again to Eph. 6:10ff; 1Cor. 3:1-15; Eph. 4:12-16; 1 Cor. 14:20; Jude 17-25. Here in Hebrews the reason for going back spiritually is stated quite simply. They had failed to go on and to grow humanly and spiritually.

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5:11-14

These Christians had failed to grow up in three respects. They had not matured in understanding. In spite of all they had known of spiritual teaching they were still dabbling in the A B C of spiritual truth and service. They should have been teachers by now. It does not say preachers: it is easy to preach, especially in places where you are not really known. They should have been making their contribution to the work, carrying their fair share of the load of responsibility, but instead they were a source of worry and a distraction. Further, in behaviour, attitude and character they were still like children, wanting attention and being more interested in pleasurable satisfaction than in duty, service and prayer. We make allowance for spiritual infancy and must never expect immediate maturity from new converts. At the same time, Adam was created a grown man, and Jesus was raised from the dead a grown man so that we, in Christ, having been born again are "born crucified". Of course to realise this potential needs discipline. We must put away childishness (1 Cor. 13:11). The third realm of this warning concerns spiritual appetite regarding the milk and meat of the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:22-2:3). It is possible to be for ever learning and yet never coming to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:5-9). The problem seems to lie in the sluggishness of spirit that is a contradiction of both truth and grace and results in incapacity to distinguish things that differ in both the spiritual and ethical dimensions.

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6:1-3

Whether you look at Christian life as a birth, life, journey, race, warfare, building or love affair there must be progress, growth and development. If spiritual life is there, there will be growth manifest. But the fact remains that there are those who profess to be Christians who, over a long spell of time neither progress nor show any advance into maturity. (We are not dealing with the natural fluctuations and phases of growth). In yesterday's passage we were taught that this is a highly unsatisfactory and suspicious situation. Now we are to be taught that it is highly dangerous. For this reason we are urged to leave certain things and preoccupations (that is the challenge) and to go on to full growth, allowing and encouraging "natural" spiritual development to take place. "This we will do if God permits." Is there some reference there to the Old Testament story of Israel being forbidden to enter the land? They refused to go on, being preoccupied with their sins and fears, and the time came when God said they had missed their opportunity. There is an urgency here and we need to read such passages as Phil. 2:7-16 and Heb. 10:32-39; 12:1-3.

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6:1-3

Note carefully the things enumerated here as belonging to the ABC of spiritual life and growth. Sins are not mentioned. We have no right to hold on to them at all and if we do our spiritual life-stream will be clogged and poisoned. We must flee from those things that war against the soul (1 Pet.2:11). The things mentioned here are all things that Christian people get a fixation about, things which become "hobby-horses" and which are magnified (by the craft of the Devil) out of all proportion. These things, reckoned by some to be marks of spiritual grace and advancement, are in fact preoccupations which signify spiritual infancy. We are to leave these rudimentary things, not in the sense of despising them or regarding them as unimportant, but in going on from them into the greater grace of Christ. For those who are truly in Christ these things have become secondary issues, accepted and consented to, but no longer dominant or determinative factors in spiritual experience. If we choose to "fix on" secondary things (these mentioned and others) we may well deny ourselves the opportunity and possibility of Christian growth. Note that the first thing mentioned is "repentance" from dead or deadly works (Jas. 1:13-15; 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 15-25). But there is such a thing as overmuch sorrow for sin (2 Cor. 2:7) and there are some who are obsessed with sin and repentance to the point that the grace of God in Jesus Christ is forgotten. If sins are forgiven they are put away, behind God's back, into the depth of the sea, made white as snow, so that there is now no condemnation (Rom. 8:1; Isa. 1:18; Jer. 31.34; Mic. 7:19). That is gospel indeed! To go on from there is Christian. To stay with repentance from dead works is really a form of pride. It is certainly unbelief.

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6:1-3

In what sense do we leave and go on from "faith in God", which is of the very essence of the Gospel (Mk. 1:15; Acts 20:21)? In Hebrews we have been warned comprehensively about the danger of unbelief and how it paralyses, not the purposes of God, but our participation in them. The emphasis here then seems to be on the obedience of faith. On the basis of our faith in God, we get on with the business of doing His will, believing most assuredly that He is leading and will lead us on into ever greater reaches of life and blessing. This is the element of determination and perseverance that marks authentic spirituality. The reference to baptisms, cleansing rites (not baptisms of various kinds), again seems to concern the Old Testament teaching, in all its ritual, about how God puts away sin, clearing it out so that He and His people can live in happy concord (Isa.1:18; Ezek. 36:25). The laying on of hands, whether it refers to the outward sign of acceptance, initiation, the receiving of the Spirit, ordination to service, the Father's blessing or even to the transfer of guilt to the sacrifice, again points to something accomplished and given as foundational for the rest of life. The resurrection from the dead, whether Christ's resurrection, our rising with Him, or the final resurrection, is part of what is most surely believed, as is the fact of eternal judgment. We have to be rid of our doubts and, standing on the sureness of God, we must go on in spiritual growth and in effective obedience. This is maturity.

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6:4-8

This difficult passage worries many and we must hold the balance between easy indifference to its message and the tendency to compulsive fears and doubts. Let it be said at once that you cannot be truly saved and subsequently lost. Once born of God (John 1: 12-13), once declared righteous by God (Rom. 5:1; 8:33), once made a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17), nothing can reverse it. It is God's work. It is eternal life. No power human or devilish can pluck us from Christ's hand (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:38-39). But a person can *seem* to have been saved and *think* that he has been saved and yet be lost (cf. Acts 8:9-13, 18-24). Again, a person can be truly saved and yet backslide from spiritual life, integrity and service so as to lose his reward but not his salvation (1 Cor. 3:11-15). We may hold to all the fundamentals of the faith as spoken of in the first three verses of the chapter and yet, under pressure or temptation, yield ground more and more without ever making a clear break from Christian profession or from the activities of the church. Such comments can cause deep concern to sensitive souls and we therefore say to those dogged by the fear that they may have unwittingly committed the "unpardonable sin" that the very fact of their fear signifies that they are the least likely to have done so.

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6:4-8

Unbelief and backsliding can be evident among professing Christians. This is a fact of experience. There are fluctuations in our awareness of the presence of the Lord, His peace, joy and blessing. Just as in human growth, there can at times be surges of progress and times of no apparent change, so it can be in spiritual experience. But if the static spells are prolonged and over-frequent, and if over a spell. of years there is no sign of growth, then there must be doubt if life is there at all. This is solemn and disturbing in view of the word "impossible". We are dealing here with some who, in the context of the ongoing work of the Gospel, are influenced in some significant way (as tomorrow's reading will indicate) but in whose hearts no real work of grace is done. Something real happened to them, but it was perhaps like an inoculation, a small dose introduced to the system so that the person is immune to the real thing. This is one of the constant dangers of young people's evangelism, of the mass-evangelism technique, and of being associated with a church with an ongoing spiritual ministry where fellowship can be enjoyed. We are dealing here with people who know the truth, see clearly spiritual issues, conform to the pattern of spiritual life, share and enjoy the work and its activities, pray in the prayer meeting, sing in groups, preach the gospel, speak in tongues and even work miracles. Now, consider carefully Matt. 7:15-23; 13:1-9, 18-23.

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6:4-8

Consider the description of those who in time may fall away into hopeless spiritual apostasy and who cannot be recalled. It is a fact of experience that backsliders tend to be the most cynical and most difficult to counsel, except where, as in the case of the prodigal, there is the grace of repentance worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and this can be a costly thing (2 Cor. 7:8-11; cf. 1 Cor. 5:3-5 and 2 Cor. 2:5-11). The terms used in v.4-5 indicate how difficult it is at the beginning to distinguish between those who are not authentic converts and those who will stay the course to the end. The Word speaks of those who were "enlightened", because the light of the gospel broke into their experience. This is how conversion is described in 2 Cor. 4:4, 6. It seems these people went on to be baptised by church leaders who considered there was sufficient evidence for so doing. They "tasted the heavenly gift", the new food of heaven and all the satisfying thrill of finding the Bible a living book. It seems they went on from baptism to partake at the Lord's Table with joy and gladness of heart. They "shared" in the Holy Spirit (cf. 2:4) and this may signify the enlivening, the fellowship and even the gifts of the Spirit. How this can be so without the person being "born again" may be indicated by the phrase "having tasted the goodness of the Word of God" making a difference to life and home and being persuaded of the realities of the world to come, which give new dimension and power to daily life. Now it is such people who are spoken of as committing apostasy, turning away from Christ, deliberately withdrawing from Him in rejection of the very love of God. Such become "wasteland" (cf. Isa. 5:1-6) and their fruit testifies to what they are at heart (Matt. 12:33).

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6:4-8

So that we will be kept from making this passage totally desolating we continue to distinguish between those who backslide and those in whose souls no real work of grace has been done. In both cases there is hope in the gospel, except where there has been a. continuing response and reaction as has been described in earlier readings. But in experience (which is always limited; God is greater than our knowledge of Him) we know that some who have been spiritually unsatisfactory over a long spell have in the end "come through" to real faith and commitment. But this hope is tempered by the "it is impossible" in these verses. The Bible gives immense hope to the backslider in such passages as Hos. 11; 7-9; 14:1-7; Joel 2:24-27. But we still need to apply these verses in Hebrews to apparent believers who fall away irrevocably, not from salvation but from their service and reward. They become disqualified, laid aside as of no further use as Paul states the matter in 1 Cor. 9:24-27, where in the AV the word "disqualified" is translated "castaway". This interpretation and application runs parallel to the earlier teaching in Hebrews which spoke of Israel's failure to enter into all God's promised blessing and service. They remained God's people but they were "fallen away". This is still a solemn word, for it means there can come a time when God is no longer prepared to trust us with the stewardship of His holy and precious work. This would be loss indeed.(Matt. 21:43 Consider 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10. Therefore, let us go on!

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6:9-12

The writer says to these Hebrew believers that there are good grounds and evidences for believing that they are truly converted, committed to Christ, and will weather these storms of difficulty. This may indicate that these Christians were young in years and spiritual experience, for mistakes and wrong turnings taken early in life are more easily rectified than those made in the senior stages of life. Demas walked with Paul for a long time before going back (2 Tim. 4: 10) and in Pilgrim's Progress Christian discovered there was a road leading to Hell from near the gates of the Celestial City. Note the words "dear friends", for they signify how much care there was in the strong words being spoken. The believers are reminded that God is not harsh nor is He forgetful of all they had been and done and were still being and doing. There is an immense loyalty in God. Once He gives Himself He sticks to His commitment. The spirit of fear which had laid hold on these Christians was not from God but from the Devil (2 Tim. 1:7) and we need to remember that it is the Devil who is intent on demoralising us, not God. In the midst of the battle, the sheer demand of daily life was keeping these people from being as aware of the Lord's presence, blessing, promises and assurance as they had once been. Manipulated by the Devil's suggestions they were beginning to feel it was not worth while battling on. This is indeed a lie and has to be exposed and refuted. There is every reason to go on and we are urged to go on, to let God have His way with us, and to prove to ourselves, to others and to the Devil by the fruit of life and the development of character that we are in fact the Lord's ransomed people (2 Pet. 1:3-11).

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6:13-20

In yesterday's passage the "things that belong to salvation" (9 AV) are specified in v. 12 as "faith", "patience" and the "promises" of God. This is now developed with reference to the story of Abraham who believed God (Gen. 15:6), held to the promise of God and because he was sure of the character of God was prepared to go on in defiance of circumstances, waiting patiently (not always without aberration, Gen. 16:1-6) for God to keep His word. It is the thought of the persistence of faith, dogged and defiant where necessary, that is the major emphasis here. But faith never anchors in itself nor in the feelings, but in God who cannot lie, the God who has promised, prepared and provided salvation for His people. It is because God has such glorious intentions in respect of the life and destiny of His people that the major element in Christian experience is hope, not the kind of hope that "hopes" it will all work out, but the sure and certain hope that anchors the soul in God's eternal trustworthiness. If the throne of God can be moved, then we have cause to doubt and fear, but since this is beyond all possibility we have every cause to believe, to hold fast, and to press on, continually laying hold on the hope set before us. Whatever the storms, the anchor holds us fast. Its hold is so secure that it can also pull us forward. The anchor is in eternity and since it is in fact a glorious person whom we know and who understands us and not merely an impersonal power, we will be pulled on, up and in by the gracious power of the unbreakable chain of God's gracious promise. This is encouragement indeed.

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6:13-20

The story of Abraham is so significantly illustrative of faith that we consider it again. The promise spoken of here refers to Gen. 22:15-19, after the willing yielding up of Isaac. It was a reaffirmation of the original promise in Gen. 12:1-4. When the first promise was made, Abraham was childless but the son of promise was born in due time, after long waiting, and when humanly speaking there was no hope. But Abraham believed God (Rom. 4:17-25) and still believed God when he was called on to sacrifice the one and only tangible evidence of the promise being kept. Since God cannot lie, and since His oath puts an end to all quibbling, then Abraham believed that God would keep His word even if it took a resurrection from the dead (Heb. 11: 17-19). In spite of every experience that seemed to give the lie to the hope he had in God, Abraham lived on in faith and hope and received the promise. In like manner we "who have fled for refuge" (18 AV) (a reference to the cities of refuge in Israel which would not be violated, Num. 35:13, 15) hold to our hope which is secured to the immovable throne of God. No matter the weight of difficulties and dangers facing us, the weight of the eternal throne is more than a balance. If God is for us, Christ for us; and the Holy Spirit for us and in us (Rom. 8: 27, 31-34), who can he against us? Everyone and everything may he against us but none has the power to pluck us from His Hand. What He has called us to and purposed for us will be brought to pass (Gen. 28:15-18; Rom. 8:24-31; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Col. 3:1-4). We can be sure of this because Jesus has indeed entered the eternal world to prepare a place for us and He sits now at the right hand of the majesty on high (1:3), our advocate and guarantor.

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7:1-3

The main argument and exposition of Christ is now taken up again, linked to the reference to Melchizedek in 5:10. Before coming to grips with the long, detailed argument of the chapter it is good to mark clearly where we are going. The objective of the exposition is in 7:25, where the statement concerning Christ's capacity to save to the uttermost is linked to v. 1-24 by the word, "therefore". Because Jesus is what He is, a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, He is able to be the Saviour people need for time, that is daily experience, and for eternity. In v. 4 there is the exultant cry, "Just think how great He is!" and this is proclaimed right through Hebrews by showing Christ to be greater than angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron; Abraham and now Melchizedek. This method is basic to the psychology of modern advertising which demonstrates a product to be bigger, better, more effective, more lasting than any other comparative or competitive brand. Hebrews sets forth Christ as the greatest. Think of Melchizedek who blessed Abraham (Gen. 14:18-20) in the context of the battles of life. His name means King of Righteousness and King of Peace. But we know the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6-7) who made peace by the blood of His Cross (Col. 1:20), "righteous peace, securely made" (Bonar). This wonderful priest who blessed Abraham is described as having neither beginning nor ending, he is endless, timeless, eternal. Before this Priest mighty Abraham bowed in worship. Think of Jesus' words in John 8:56 and let Jesus begin to fill our horizon.

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7:4-10

The greatness of Melchizedek which points to the greatness of Christ is emphasised by the fact that Abraham, recognised to be a Prince (Gen. 23:6) and confessed as a "Friend of God" (2 Chron.20:7) offered tithes to him without question. Now if Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, then his priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood which sprang from Abraham. As we shall see later, the offering made by Jesus, priest after the order of Melchizedek was greater than those many sacrifices offered by the Levitical priesthood, which sacrifices foreshadowed the coming of the Lamb of God Himself (John 1:29). The tithes of Israel were paid to Levites, men who died and handed on their office to others, but there is no mention in the biblical narrative of this Melchizedek ever dying (8). We are therefore dealing with a priest who lives for ever and there is only one, whose name is Jesus. Keep in mind that this argument, which may seem a bit artificial to us at first sight (although it helps to teach us how to read and study the Old Testament, looking for Christ everywhere as Luke 24:25-27 insists) would have powerful effect on these Christians steeped in Old Testament teaching who were beginning to wonder if the Jesus they had believed in was really all He had been proclaimed to be. The

argument is beginning to build up, showing that the old order of sacrificial worship in the Old. Testament was in fact not able to deal with the problem of sin. It needed someone greater.

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7:11-19

The Levitical priesthood, ordained and instituted by God, and glorious in its own way with its many and varied sacrifices and rituals, was able only to illustrate and foreshadow the way for men to come to God. Now these Jewish converts to Christ should have known full well that the Word of the Lord had promised "another" priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4). During the Aaronic priesthood the people had received the Law, but now something greater even than the Law had come into men's experience, the very Person to whom the Law was designed to bring us, Christ (Gal. 3:24). But a change in the priesthood, so integral to the whole system, means a change in the law or the constitution. A new order of things comes into being and this points us on to the idea of the new covenant, spoken of in v.22 and elaborated in chap. 8. The "new" priest who was promised is indeed different, because our Lord was of the tribe of Judah, (not Levi) David's royal line. And even more, His priesthood is exercised in heaven not earth. It is a priesthood belonging to the eternal order, not to the material world, and it is exercised in the power of a life that can never be destroyed. "He pleads our cause at God's right hand, omnipotent to save." (Scot. Para.48)

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7:20-25

In the long succession of Aaronic priests, as each one died his successor took office without any taking of an oath. But this Priest, Jesus the Son of God, was consecrated by the oath. of God Himself who will never change His mind. This Jesus is demonstrably "better" than any other and is the surety, guarantor and mediator of the better covenant, soon to be expounded in the epistle. Jesus stands pre-eminent (Col.1:18) on every level and in every aspect. What He does as our Priest representing us before God He does perfectly, without break in continuity, and He does it with power and tenderness. Think of the High Priest in the Old Testament, part of whose ritual clothing was the breastplate and ephod (Exod. 28:15-30). The straps of the breastplate were over his shoulders and lying on his heart were twelve precious stones symbolising the tribes of Israel. The people were carried with strength and tenderness into God's presence by the appointed High Priest. This is exactly how Jesus saves us to the uttermost. It is a personal ministry of love and care unto salvation. He is able. He saves; makes intercession; is our Advocate above and within; and keeps us from falling so that He can present us faultless and blameless (Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1; John 14:16-17; Jude 24; 1 Thess. 5:23-24). This is indeed full salvation.

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7:26-28

The High Priest we have been given is exactly fitted to our need. His appointment and ordination are on the highest possible authority, since God has spoken and given His oath as a guarantee (7:20-22). This High Priest is mightily able and His ability is available to us (7:23-25). He has tasted human experience to the full, having shared life and tasted death (2:9, 14, 17), endured temptation (4:15), cried in prayer (5:7), learned obedience (5:8) and made intercession (7:25). But He is not only qualified to stand in for us, He is qualified to stand before God without fear of being questioned or rejected, because of what He is. There is a tremendous portrayal of the character of Jesus in v. 26 and we see a man as God planned that man should be, free from any taint or defect. Time and again in the Gospels we hear the voice of God testifying that He is pleased with His Son. "Although He came to earth 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8:3), lived among sinners, received sinners, ate with sinners, was known as the friend of sinners, yet He is set apart from sinners, 'in a different class from sinful men', and is now exalted above all the heavens to share the throne of God." (Bruce) There was no need for such a High Priest to be constantly offering sacrifices for His own sins, nor even for the sins of the people. He dealt with this once for all when He offered up Himself the sacrifice for sins. "He presented a permanently valid sin-offering.... so perfect and efficacious that it needs no repetition." (Bruce). Under the old Law the High Priest was beset with weakness and therein lay the limitation. We are the same. When we set ourselves to pray we often have to spend too long getting right with God and getting rid of sin. It is not so with Jesus and when we come to God *in Him* we need not hesitate.

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8:1-5

The opening verse indicates a summing up of what has gone before and we take time to do the same. The epistle makes use of the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament and the historical experiences of the children of Israel in order to expound Christ. Already Christ has been demonstrated to be superior in every way to angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Abraham and the Law. He is greater in His total humanity and His absolute divinity. He stands alone and no one can take His place. He stands sufficient as the people's High Priest and Saviour and nothing needs to be added to Him. If we have this Jesus, we have all we need and all God has to give (Col. 1:19; 2:10). The development of the exhortation to "consider Jesus" (3:1), is to see how great He is (7:4), and to see that we *have* such a High Priest (8:1). The wonder of all this is to be brought home to our hearts by comparing the earthly Tabernacle, which was the focus of all Israel's worship, with the heavenly Tabernacle, the dwelling place of God. We all have the tendency to settle for things that are visible and tangible, and can become so taken up with "our church" which we love, as Israel loved its Tabernacle and Temple, that we forget the reality, God Himself, who is greater than the visible reminders of Him. For example, in a communion service we can be so taken up with white cloths on the pews, the particular form of words, kind of glasses, flavours of wine, that we have neither the time nor disposition to think about Jesus crucified and risen, given to us and ministering on our behalf,. Consider carefully 2 Cor. 4:1.6-18 and Heb. 11:27 before we go further.

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8:1-5

The subject is tents or tabernacles and the point is that the visible earthly Tabernacle is temporary, a shadowy replica or pointer to the heavenly one which is eternal. We cannot be too often pointed on to things that are heavenly because these are the realities of life and experience, whereas all that is earthly is temporary (Phil. 3:20; 2 Cor. 5:1-7; Jas. 4:13-15; 1 Cor. 15:51-58). We must indeed walk by faith, looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:2), making right use of every help God has provided for us to urge us on and to anchor us securely in the world to come (Heb. 6:19). The Jews had their Tabernacle, a sanctuary built to divine specification (Ex. 25:40, and everything about it and its ritual worship spoke of possibility. The pillar of cloud signified God's presence. The sacrifices spoke of the way into God's presence. The entire system emphasised the desire of God to dwell in the midst of His people and for them to come near Him, to live in the blessing of unhindered and unclouded fellowship. This is why there is so much emphasis on the putting away of sin. But all through the history of Israel there was a strange perversity in the hearts of the people, whereby they refused again and again to respond to the God who had so gloriously given Himself to them in a covenant of grace. Think of Jesus' words as He wept over Jerusalem. "I would but you would not" (Matt. 23:37-39). It was a new heart with a willing disposition and desire toward God that was needed and this was not brought to pass under the Old Covenant but under the *new* which is now the theme.

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8:6-13

The ministry of Jesus is far superior to any earthly ministry, because it is a heavenly one. Therefore the covenant that He mediates is far superior to that old covenant which was the basis of Israel's life and hope (7:22; 9:15; 12:24).The fact that a new covenant is made signifies that the old one was not perfect. The new covenant is better because there would be no point in simply having a similar one which would, like the first, prove "faulty" because of the weakness and defect of human nature (Rom. 8:1-3). This new covenant is enacted on the better promises foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-37, and is set in contrast to the covenant God made with Israel when He delivered them from Egypt (Jer. 7:23-26). Time and again the prophets spoke to Israel but always their word was resisted and refused in hardness of heart (Acts 7:51-53). When Israel first heard the covenant they responded with words of willing consent. (Ex. 24:7) but they had not the moral and spiritual power to match their intentions. The weakness was in the "flesh", not in the covenant. It was God who promised a new heart, and inward power (Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:22-28); a heart liberated from its bondage to sin, spontaneously disposed to love God and do His will, and. having the power to do so. This leads to a life of fellowship with and loving obedience to God (Ps 119:97-104).

"A heart, in every thought renewed,
And full of love divine,

Perfect and right and pure and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine

"Thy nature, gracious Lord impart;
Come quickly from above;
Write Thy new Name upon my heart,
Thy new, best Name of Love." (Wesley)

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8:6-13

Having regard to what has gone before in this epistle it is clear that the new covenant with all its blessings is founded in and undergirded by the perfect sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The new covenant, the new heart, the power and blessing which flow therefrom are not "extras" added to salvation but are the essence of that perfect salvation given to us in Christ. The old covenant is discarded, not because it was distorted or bad in itself (Rom. 7:12, 14), nor in the sense that we may now despise the Old Testament and its moral law, but in the sense that the new gathers up all the promise of the old and fulfils it through Christ by the indwelling Spirit. The "progress" in revelation is not from less true to more true but rather from promise and preparation to fulfilment. This is the basic link between the old and new covenants, both of which belong to the idea of the everlasting covenant of grace which God made with His Son with a view to the salvation of men. "The old covenant was restricted in its scope and intention in that it related; not to all mankind, but to the Jews. But it had an outward reference . Abraham and his seed were chosen, and God entered into covenant with them, in order that through them the *world* might be blessed." (J. Philip) From Abraham there was to come the Saviour who would turn people from their sin. Right through the Old Testament it becomes clearer and clearer that something more than this old covenant was needed to save sinners and in its way, even in its "defectiveness", the old covenant pointed to Christ. This does not mean that the Old Testament saints were left with a defective salvation .As Hebrews will later expound, these men and women lived and died in the faith of God's promise, and in the fulness of time the death of Christ on the Cross validated their faith unto salvation. The Cross, at the heart of history, avails in respect of both past and future (Rom. 3:25). This is seen in the story of the Transfiguration, when the representatives of the old economy, Moses and Elijah (law and prophets) discoursed with Jesus about the death (exodus) He was to accomplish. Everything depended on His seeing it through. He did! This is the Gospel.

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9:1-5

Throughout this epistle with all its glorious exposition of the Person and work of Christ, there is constant emphasis as to the fact that our visible, earthly life day by day is undergirded and guaranteed by the unseen, heavenly and eternal things here being laid before us. All the provision of God, portrayed in pictorial and symbolic form throughout the Old Testament, is summed up in Christ. He is everything, wisdom, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 3:1-3). It is to this we must hold fast and in this that we must grow in grace and press forward. The people to whom this epistle was addressed were well and truly taught in the Old Testament scriptures and in the symbols of worship centring on the Tabernacle and v.5 indicates that this is being assumed. However we need to pause here and, if possible, get a picture of the Tabernacle, not least to visualize the whole process of drawing near to God and pressing on into His presence. When you think of all the tribes of Israel set in their appointed places right round the Tabernacle, and of the Shekinah glory, the cloud signifying God's presence, you realise with a thrill in your heart that the picture is one of the God whose delight it is to dwell in the midst of His people. He wants to be in fellowship with us to save and to bless. Now if all this becomes evident in the old sanctuary, and if the "shadow" is so wonderful, how much more is the reality in Christ and how much more again will the wonder thrill us when we are with Christ in glory. It is better, better, better all along the line (Phil. 1:23; 1 Cor. 2:9 AV).

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9:6-10

Once a year the High Priest of Israel went into the innermost shrine, bearing the blood of the sacrifice for sins, and sprinkled that blood on the ark of the covenant, the chest of wood overlaid with gold, which contained the

tablets of the Law, the Ten Commandments. By virtue of the blood that was shed, the seat of God's judgment became a mercy-seat where sinful Israel found acceptance. The whole ritual signified first of all the seriousness of sin which excluded men from God and left them in a state of separation, alienation and fear. At the same time there is glorious emphasis on the provision God has made for dealing with sin and remedying this awful human predicament. But the repetition year by year of the ritual of the Tabernacle signified that the way to God was not yet finally opened up, and indeed would not be opened until Christ came and died and the veil of the Temple was torn open. In the days of the old covenant sin remained and so did the troubled conscience. It is a terrible thing to live with a conviction of sin (Ps. 32:1-4; Ps. 51), and when the conscience is worked upon by the Holy Spirit it is even worse (Rom. 7:7-11). This is why it is imperative to press on into full growth (6:1-3); we see this earnest desire in Paul's words in Philippians 3:7-10.

But what the epistle here urges on these Hebrew Christians is that the real barrier to access to God and fellowship with Him is not an outward, formal or circumstantial one, but has to do with conscience before God. An uneasy conscience demoralises and paralyses our spiritual life and this is why we must be open-hearted with God. To be otherwise is to draw back.

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9:11-14

There is a fundamental difference between regularising a situation so that it conforms to legal requirements, and renovating or recreating the heart so that a totally new situation and motivation are brought into being. This is the contrast being drawn to demonstrate the infinite superiority of Christ and His sacrificial death over the God-ordained pattern and foreshadowing of the Tabernacle. Christ accomplished not temporary ceremonial and bodily cleanness but the once for all inner cleansing of the conscience which brings the sinner peace and sets him free to serve God with a full and loving heart. Without detracting one whit from the historical reality of the death and resurrection of Christ, the emphasis is placed on the fact that the transaction He accomplished was in fact not earthly but heavenly, that is, in the very presence of God. What had been foreshadowed year after year in the ritual of the Tabernacle, Christ did Himself once for all when, by virtue of His own shed blood, He entered into the throne room of God the Father Almighty, the judge of all men. Having paid the full price of sin in perfect satisfaction of eternal righteousness, He obtained and secured eternal redemption for us. It is not merely pardon but freedom from the slavery of sin whose power is broken and whose kingdom is overturned. This is the good news of the good things which have come in Christ. Salvation of this dimension is a present reality not just a future hope.

"O sin, thou art vanquished,
Thy long reign is o'er;
Though still thou dust vex us,
We dread thee no more." (W.C. Plunket)

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9:11-14

We must not fail to see that the whole of our salvation from beginning to end is the work of God. The three Persons of the eternal Trinity are all engaged and are in perfect agreement in their action. There is no thought of the Son trying to get the Father to change His mind and be kind to sinners. It was the Father who spared not His own Son but gave Him up freely (Rom. 8:32) and by the eternal Spirit (the same Holy Spirit who indwells every true believer) the Son worked out the will of the Father for the benefit of sinners who, because of their sinful nature can produce only "dead works". The word "blood" speaks of life laid down in sacrifice, a life that was spotless in every way, pleasing and satisfying to God. There was nothing more God could desire. This was blood of infinite value and it was for us. "Only one who knew no sin could take any responsibility in regard to it which would create a new situation for sinners Christ's offering of Himself without spot to God had an absolute or ideal character. It was something beyond which nothing could be, or could be conceived to be, as a response to God's mind and requirements in relation to sin. It was the final response, a spiritual response, to the divine necessity of the situation..... His sacrifice was rational and voluntary, an intelligent and loving response to the holy and gracious will of God, and to the terrible situation of man." (Denney) There was indeed no other good enough to pay the price of sin or to offer a perfect human life pleasing to God.

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9:15-28

The main emphasis in v.24-28 is that of the finality of the work of Christ, its total sufficiency and its once for all nature. These points have been emphasised again and again in the notes on various passages but this was the very message these doubting and fearful Hebrew Christians needed to confirm them in their faith and to urge them on in the obedience of faith. Three times in these verses Christ is spoken of as "appearing". We speak rightly of "the finished work of Christ", for His salvation is not a defective thing. But in another sense His work is never finished for He appears right now in the presence of God on our behalf (Rom. 8:26-39). "He pleads our cause at God's right hand, omnipotent to save" (Heb. 7:25). This is our assurance. We have an Advocate with the Father whom we avail ourselves of whenever we sin (1 John 1:5-2:2) and, since it is God who justifies, who dare lay any charge against us? Christ appears in the presence of God not as an uncertain suppliant in an agony of intercession, but as one sitting at the Father's right hand, always acceptable, always answered, because they agree totally. This is no remote legal representative 17 but the Jesus who is touched with all our feelings. It is the understanding, sympathising Jesus who is so powerfully advocating our cause. This puts heart into us for the future, however difficult things may be.

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9:15-28

The second "appearance" refers us back to a point in history when a mighty work was done, never to be undone, a work that was to transform the human situation, to give light to those sitting in darkness and to set free the captive (Lk. 4:16-21). Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Sin was declared redundant, it was stripped of all its authority and power, and had no longer any status in the life of the believer (Col. 1:12-14; 2:13-15). Sin is expunged from the record. Its guilt, power, accusation, remembrance, frustration and inhibition are all put away. This is why we find the glorious statement of fact, "sin shall not have dominion over you," so full of practical hope. This was the very word the Hebrews needed and in their time of stress it pointed them forward in hope to the final appearing in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ when He will be manifested, not in relation to sin but in the glory of His perfect kingdom of which they and we are a part. "Men die once, by divine appointment, and in their case death is followed by judgment. Christ died once, by divine appointment, and His death is followed by salvation for all His people," (Bruce) because He bore their sins (Isa. 53). The final appearing of Jesus Christ our great High Priest confirms for ever salvation for His own who wait expectantly for His coming. Nothing can prevent this, therefore however hard the battle, even unto death, the people of God must persevere in patience and faith.

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10:1-4

The essential message of these verses, contrasting the repeated ritual sacrifices of the Old Testament with the once for all perfect sacrifice of Christ, has been the recurring theme of these notes and we must not be afraid of repetition (Phil.3:1). The subject of the whole Bible is Christ, who is the appointed Redeemer of God's people. All God's words, works and purposes are summed up in Him (Heb. 1:1-3; 2 Cor. 1:20) and right from the beginning of time the promise of Christ was given (Gen. 3:15). All along the line the promise was renewed until in the fulness of the time all the dynamic purpose of eternity broke into time (1 Pet. 1:10-12, 20-21). Now it is said rightly that coming events cast their shadow before them, and in the Old Testament law and ritual there is the shadow of the reality, genuine, valid and recognisable, but not the actuality. The Old Testament has, as it were, the artist's sketch but the New has the "ikon", the image or the true form. Now these Hebrew Christians were tending to look back to what they considered the "sureness" of the old form of worship when everything was marked out for them. But this is bad. After all, a photograph is good to have when the person is absent but when He is there you have something better. It is possession rather than anticipation. Gazing on the photograph rubs it in that the one you want is not there, and the repeated sacrifices of the old covenant reminded the people that sin was still a real problem. But the shadow pointed to the reality (Col. 2:17) which is Christ.

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10:5-10

Following on the impossibility stated in v.4 we now are shown the sacrifice which could take away sins; the passage quoted is Psalm 40: 6-8 which is being applied not to David but to "great David's greater Son". The emphasis is on our Lord's incarnation and perfect life and the body which was prepared is given back to God as a living sacrifice (cf. Rom. 12:1-2) to serve the will of God in a life of perfect obedience. The will of God is not satisfied by formal offerings but only in a human life freely and gladly given in obedience and fellowship. The most accurate sacrifice, conforming in all its detail to the prescriptions laid down by God, meant nothing at all to God, if it was done from an empty loveless, casual and hypocritical heart (cf. Isa. 1.10-20). Think of the testimony by God Himself concerning His Son, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." Think of our Lord's testimony in Gethsemane, "Thy will be done," and at Samara, "My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me," This was the perfect life of the Son of God when He came into the world. "His incarnation itself is viewed as an act of submission to God's will and, as such, an anticipation of His supreme submission to that will in death," (Bruce); cf. Phil. 2:1-11. By that will of God displayed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ we have been sanctified. The old order gives place to the new. "My Saviour's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view." (Toplady)

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10:11-18

We have here yet another emphasis on the contrast between the limited and repeated nature of the sacrifices under the old covenant and the perfection and once for all nature of Christ's sacrifice. In Christ the work is done, the victory is sure and. His people are sealed and complete in Him; cf. Col. 2:9-10; Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:30; 3:21-23. Again it is emphasised that the ultimate issues of the work of salvation are never for a moment in doubt, We need to think more about the ascension and exaltation of Christ. The one who died for us is enthroned in glory for us and this was one of the emphatic notes in apostolic preaching (Acts 2:22-24, 34-36; 4:8-12). He is indeed Lord, in every sense of the word and in His salvation His people are more than conquerors. His people are new people, new creations, with new hearts according to the promise in Jer. 31:33ff (2 Cor. 5:17). The new life that is ours in Christ, is not imposed from outside, for that would make life a business of conforming to rules. The law of God is written inwardly in our hearts, with power by the Holy Spirit to live it out in lives pleasing to God (Rom. 8:1-4, 9-11). Along with the implanting of the law of the Lord in our hearts and. the will and power to obey, there is also the assurance of full, free and absolute forgiveness of sins. They are put away, blotted out of the record, put behind God's back never- to be recalled. The only one who will ever bring them up again is the Devil. This is indeed full salvation and glorious freedom and at this point the epistle begins to elucidate the practical significance of all the theology of Christ's person and work that has been expounded.

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10:19-25

This passage is so full that we need a summary of its contents to guide our detailed study. It declares three things that we have in Christ: confidence to enter, a new and living way, and a great High Priest. Then, on the basis of what is possessed in Christ, there is a three-fold call: to draw near, to hold fast and to consider one another. This last exhortation to have a sense of responsibility for others, again divides in a three-fold way: to stir or provoke, not to neglect, and to be positively encouraging, especially in the light of the coming of the day of the Lord. The riches and glory of our position are wonderful to consider, and highlight the awful barrenness and emptiness of not being a Christian. We have boldness or confidence to enter right into the presence of God without hesitation, fear or inhibition, because we are accepted in Christ, the Beloved (Eph. 1:3-8). We do not enter *with* the blood of Jesus as if entrance had to be won and sealed every time of coming as the pattern was in the Old Testament. We come *by* the blood which has already secured the right of entry for ever. We enter confidently with freedom of speech because we are not in any sense intruders (Eph. 2:11-22). Wesley had the right words when he said,

"Bold I approach the' eternal throne,
And claim the crown through Christ my own."

To do otherwise is to doubt God's integrity and provision.

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10:19-25

If we have free and assured access (Rom. 5:1-2) we also have *the* new and living way which is Christ Himself, as John 14:1-6 makes plain. It is the way opened through the curtain, "the veil of the Temple," which was torn open from top to bottom (it was a divine not a human act) when Jesus died on the Cross (Matt. 27:51) it is also a living way because Christ is alive for evermore. We do not live our lives unto God on the basis of the commemoration of a dead Jesus but in the life-giving fellowship with the ever living Jesus. It is life not death that is the promise of the Gospel (John 10:10). What is more, when we do enter into the presence of the most high God, perfect in holiness and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, we are not over-awed by our surroundings nor are we paralysed in frightful loneliness. The Son of the Father Himself rises to meet us, to take us by the hand and to present us faultless at the Throne (Col. 1: 21-22; Jude 24-25). Our Great High Priest is not ashamed to confess us before His Father (Heb. 2:11; 11:16; Matt. 10:32-33). To think of such things is to strengthen the heart for whatever may come to us in our daily experience.

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10:19-25

Free access to God and the new and living way are the glorious facts undergirding the whole of life, and we may not and must not go on as if these things were not so. We must draw near. We must come close to God, no longer being "stand-offish" either in pride or sin. We must come with sincerity and earnestness of purpose because we want to do business with God. We must come with a whole or single heart and in faith, which takes precedence over our feelings. We excuse ourselves, our prayerlessness and our lack of evangelistic zeal by saying that our faith is weak. That may be so, although there is no reason why faith should be weak. There is no ground at all for doubting God or failing to trust Him. The remedy for weak faith is to get the thoughts of our hearts more engaged with and centred on the glorious truths concerning what we have, what we have been made and what we may consequently become in Christ. Our hearts are sprinkled clean and our bodies are washed clean. This inner and outward purification seems to indicate that the writer has baptism in mind, the outward sign of inward cleansing wrought by God. We draw near to God, letting go our sins and leaving them behind. We must hold fast in God, standing our ground and believing that God will do all He has promised to do. We have every ground for having our hope and trust in God, and every reason to shun the temptation to give up and go back to the profitless life of bondage to sin that was once ours (Rom. 6:20-23).

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11:1-3

Faith and feeling must always be differentiated and we must recognise that faith does not exist or operate in a vacuum. In Heb. 1:1-3 we were told that God had spoken finally and conclusively and in His Son had done something once for all whereby eternal salvation was secured. It is over against this fact that faith operates, and in two directions. Faith looks back to the realities of what God has done and it looks forward with the same assurance to the unseen and eternal realities which are to come, and which, to faith, are present actualities. Faith and hope go together and are concerned with things not yet seen (Rom. 8:24ff) but still real and capable of being the foundation for life. In this sense faith "gives substance" to things hoped for. Heaven is real; eternity is real; God is real, whether or not people believe, but faith recognises them as much facts of life as houses, salaries, health and sickness. Faith does not deal in fiction but facts, and faith is the assurance and conviction of these unseen facts, for no other reason than this, that God has spoken concerning them. It was for faith like this, which was the operative basis of their lives, that the people of old, to be spoken of in this chapter, received commendation from God. They believed, as we shall see, even when they did not in their lives see the actual outworking of what had been promised. They lived and died by faith.

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11:1-3

In our so-called scientific age unbelief is the respectable thing and faith is considered intellectually and emotionally suspect and therefore untenable. Everything has to be assessed by scientific methods of statistics and analysis in an attempt to understand the universe and our own lives in it. But Hebrews cuts right across this

defective method and declares that it is by faith that we understand and *not* by the increase of understanding that we come to faith. The secrets of creation are not grasped by speculation but by faith. In the beginning God created "out of nothing" all that now is and appears (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17; Ps. 33:6-9). The material world in which we live cannot be understood by mere examination and analysis. There is a hidden factor, God, and He is known by faith. There is an awareness of God which can be grasped or perceived through the things of the created order as Paul states in Rom. 1:20. But to apprehend the divine in nature is not the same as faith, nor has it the same issue. It is one thing to have a 'sense' of God but another thing to know what God is like, to know what He is saying and what He is thinking about us. Faith receives what God has said and begins to comprehend the world's beginning, continuance and end. This is the life of faith. To abandon this and to seek to live on the basis of statistics, analyses and trends is to go mad, as society is in fact going.

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11:4

In daily notes we cannot possibly engage in a detailed exposition of the specific examples of faith and must content ourselves with indicating the broad lines of study. The story of Cain and Abel in Gen. 4:1-16 is full of significance and must be set in context. In the story of mankind there are already present the facts of the fall, sin, and judgment; the family of man is outside God's garden, under sentence of death and with a barrier of sin and estrangement between them and God (Gen. 3:8-14, 22-24). Now, there was no need for God to have any more dealings with sinful man, but the God who spoke in the Garden had promised the "seed" to come who would deal with the Serpent. We assume that God continued to speak and we assume that the parents of Cain and Abel spoke to their sons concerning God's dealings with them. We have cause also to assume that the Holy Spirit was at work through the speech of God to prompt and to point out the way of approach to Him. It is in this context that we see how people divide into those who hear the Word in faith and those who respond in unbelief (Heb. 4:2). Both Cain and Abel drew near to God with offerings appropriate to their life and work, and while emphasis may be laid on the fact that Abel's offering involved the sacrifice and death of an animal and Cain's represented only the fruit of his labours, the real difference seems to be in the attitude of heart in which each man came. Think of Jesus' story in Lk. 18:9-14. How they came is revealed in how they went away. Cain was angry and unmoved even when God urged him (Gen. 4:6,9)..Cain wanted God, but on his own terms. Abel came in the attitude of faith to be accepted on the ground of grace, not merit. He was accepted. God honoured his faith, but Abel became the first man to die, and he died a martyr for his faith.

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11:5-6

If the story of Abel concerns a man coming to God in faith, the story of Enoch is of a man going on with God in faith. The glory of Enoch's life is not the miracle of translation at the end, when God simply by-passed death and took him to glory, but the steady, consistent life of faith in which he walked in company with God. This is the fellowship of faith and obviously both Enoch and God found it a satisfying and desirable and fulfilling thing. The story is in Gen. 5:18-22, a gloomy chapter marked by the tolling of the funeral bell over the generations of men. The Devil had said that sin would bring fulfilment, development and satisfaction to all human aspirations, but God had said that sin would bring death. The world of Enoch was a degenerating and frightening one, as Gen. 6:1ff. tells, but in the darkness this man looked to God in faith, walked with God, pleased God, and testified to God's righteous judgments (Jude 14-15), and he did this for the greater part of his life, the turning point being possibly when his son was born. Perhaps it was with a sense of responsibility for the next generation that he walked with God when the whole of society was walking away from God. No great exploits are recorded of him, but all his life he was going somewhere in company with God, not knowing the full route, nor running on ahead or lagging behind, but being persuaded in his heart that the "reward" of faith and fellowship is real, both in time and in eternity. Enoch believed God, had confidence in God, delight in God, abhorred anything that would estrange him from God, and found his chief delight in drawing near to God.

The transition from this world to the next was very simple (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51 ff.; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

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11:7

The story of Noah is given in great detail in Gen. 6-9 and repays study. New Testament comment on the life and times of this man engaged in the service of God is found in Matt. 24: 36-39; 1.Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5. An.

interesting comment is also found in Ezek. 14:14, 20. In Hebrews, Noah's faith is firmly related to things unseen. His whole life was one long preparation for what God said He would do, even when there was no sign at all of God doing it. The spirit of Noah's generation was such that God regretted making man. It is easy to imagine the mockery, strain and challenge to faith, that were part of Noah's life as, in obedience to God, he built the huge ark on dry land. No doubt he was helped by a massive labour force of godless, blasphemous people who must have mocked his faith again and again. This was not an easy generation in which to preach impending judgment as is indicated by the casual confidence expressed in Gen. 5:29. It is clear from Gen. 6:1ff. that a new stage had been reached in the progress of evil, an overstepping of the bounds to the point of inescapable judgment. Noah was aware of the diminishing remnant of faith, the running out of God's patience, and of his own person and ministry being like a voice crying in the wilderness. But he stood his ground in faith, believing God and acting upon that faith. By his attitudes and actions as well as his words, he testified of righteousness to a generation that would not listen and which was left without excuse. It is in the light of this stature of faith that we must view the saint's collapse, and he was a saint. It was the work of the enemy, the Devil, who found his opportunity both in the culmination of strain which no man sought to ease and then the wrong kind of relaxation. when the crisis of the flood was over. Think of the times Noah may have resisted the temptation to escape into carnal "comfort" before condemning him for his fall. Perhaps Noah thought that because the battle was won the Devil had gone. Watch and pray!

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11:8-19

The life of Abraham is the story of a man in the school of discipleship. We can liken his experience to that of Martin Luther who said, "I did not learn my theology all at once, but learned it deeper where my temptations led me." The story is fully documented in Genesis chapters 12-25. It is commented on in Acts 7:1-8, in respect of Abraham's call; in Rom. 4:1-5. 18-25 in respect of salvation; in today's passage in respect of the obedience of faith; and in James 2:23, where he is called the friend of God. Abraham went out on his life-time of pilgrimage because he believed God had spoken to him. He did not know why he had been called, where he was going, what it would involve, how long it would take nor how it was all to be accomplished. But he went in obedience to God, and was a stranger and pilgrim having only a "forwarding address". He was heading for the city of permanence whose architect and builder was God. Throughout the whole of his life, the more Abraham was heavenly-minded, the more he was of mighty use among men. The whole of his life was miracle as v. 11-12 make clear. But it was also a life of faith, believing God, and never, even in tremendous difficulty, showing any real disposition to contract out and go back to life as it once was, without God. If there was a "secret" to this man's faith it was that he discovered increasingly just how big and great his God was and how comprehensive and far-reaching His purposes were. Abraham's God is our God and worthy of trust such as Abraham showed. There is in fact no ground for not trusting Him.

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11:8-19

In the centre of this passage (13-16) we have a revealing comment on Abraham's attitude to life. It is seen in measure also in all those after him, who lived their lives in the obedience of faith. Even though in their life-time they did not take possession of what God had promised them, they did not in consequence slander either the name or the integrity of God. They had a forward look and even in death they continued to look forward to the fulfilment of the promises, believing that in spite of death they would yet share what God would bring to pass (cf. Job 19:25-27 AV). By faith they saw what was not visible and not yet within their grasp (Heb. 11:1,27; 2 Cor. 4:16-18). It is not easy to live as strangers and exiles but an acceptance of that fact is of practical value in recognising that this world is not our home. It helps us to refuse the pressures of the world (Rom. 12:1-2) and the powerful enticements of it (1 John 2:15-17). But even more, as v.16 indicates, it leads to a particularly sweet and satisfying relationship with God Himself.

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11:8-19

Read Gen. 22:1-19 to savour again the wonder of the story referred to in v.17-19, the high peak of Abraham's faith. At the beginning of his pilgrimage Abraham believed God in respect of himself, and later he believed in respect of his marriage and the fruit of it. After long waiting he got his son but not his

city. Through the fifteen or eighteen years of Isaac's life up to the story of Gen. 22, the young man was a help and support to Abraham's faith since the father could rest in the assurance that even if *he* did not see the realisation of God's promise his son would. Then came the day when God asked this blessing back from Abraham and in a way that seemed a denial of and final contradiction of all his hopes. But, when he was put to the test, Abraham yielded up the only real fruit he had of years of waiting and believing God. Remember that Isaac was irreplaceable. Abraham could not understand this costly demand on his human affections and spiritual trust, but he yielded in faith believing that if necessary, in order to remain faithful, God would accomplish a resurrection from the dead. In Gen. 22 the main note is that of peace not worry. There was a mighty problem, but as far as Abraham was concerned it was God's problem, not his. This indeed is faith.

But, of course, faith grounded in resurrection is faith anchored in eternity. This is another aspect of living in the power of the world to come (Heb. 6:5). Read 1 Pet. 1:3-9 and rejoice.

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11:20

Here again we have emphasis on the future and on the thought of God's purposes moving forward inexorably from generation to generation. This is something we need to grasp very clearly. Each generation and each individual within it must play a God-given part and pass that work on to those who come after. This should eliminate carelessness and inspire faithfulness. It should also minister real comfort when we remind ourselves that none of these great heroes of the faith was perfect. They had character flaws and made terrible blunders. It is wonderful to see how God began, at times, with such poor material and accomplished so much. This is the possibility opened up by faith. Isaac was one of the ordinary figures of the Old Testament, in many ways a sad figure who never realised his full potential, partly because of self-indulgence and partly because of an attitude to life that tended to side-step issues rather than face them in the resolution of faith. At one point he nearly frustrated the purposes of God, and would have done so had he not been overruled by God and deceived by his own family (Gen. 27). We are told that Isaac trembled, as well he might, for all along he had preferred Esau to Jacob. He had allowed personal preferences to interfere in God's purposes and had the "blessing" been given to Esau, what would have happened to God's holy work in the hands of that profane man? In that solemn moment in his old age Isaac recovered the submission of faith, acknowledged that the future belonged to God by right, and said, "Amen, so let it be."

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11:21

If Isaac was the man who let things slide, taking the easy way out, and spoiling his spiritual life with his carnal love of good living and fleshly relationships, Jacob was the man of drive and scheming determination who spent the greater part of his life wrestling with God in wilfulness and trying to manipulate His purposes. Two magnificent descriptions attach to Jacob. He is called a worm (Isa. 41:14) and also a prince with God. (Gen.32:28AV). The story of Jacob (Gen. 25:19-50:14), mingled with the story of Joseph explains the joyous thrill of the Psalmist when he said, "Blessed is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help," (Ps. 146:5AV). It was only at the end of his life that Jacob's faith came to real fruition and he saw himself and those coming after him as living links in the chain of God's purposes. "A whole turbulent life-time of knocks and shocks, of lapses and reverses was not too big a price to pay for the faith by which he bequeathed his blessing to Joseph's sons," (W. Still). When we think of the complications of Jacob's personality and the vagaries of his life, together with his running away from God (Gen. 28) and his wrestling with God (Gen. 32), we can only pray, "O God, make me usable in your holy purposes." But be careful. If we mean it God will do it, whatever the cost.

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11:21

Read Gen. 48:1-22, especially v.15-16, and see a man totally taken up with God and marvelling at how God had taken such time and patience with him. The story of Jacob is the story of the great Potter moulding the clay (Jer. 18:1-6), It is the story of the triumph of God's grace in the life of a man who had a miserable start in life. His father Isaac was a weak backslider and his mother was a domineering woman who manipulated her children. Esau, his brother, was a capable and attractive extrovert; profane and contemptuous of spiritual issues but obviously his father's favourite. Little wonder Jacob, overshadowed so totally, became a sly, manipulative character. But God had His hand on him. Running away was no use (Gen. 28). Fighting against God was no use

(Gen. 32) and in due time, "Jacob was left alone," (Gen. 32:9-10, 24-32), stripped of all he had acquired in twenty years of God's mercy, so that God could get the man for Himself to bless him truly and use him significantly in the forward movement of the purposes of salvation. God had tried to teach and fashion him with as little distress as possible, but now grace gave way to power because time was short; not short for God, but for Jacob. God broke the man and he carried the mark of it for the rest of his days. But in that moment Jacob realised how near he was to being cast off and he cried, "Not that, God. I will not let you go until you bless me." It was as if he said, "Take my life, pride, everything, but take not away Thy Holy Spirit (cf.Ps.51:11, in relation to service not salvation). Retain me in your service, make me useful." His life was preserved. That was his testimony.

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11:22

Note carefully how Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are all commended in respect of faith, in that they each passed on their living hope in the promise of God to their children who were to come after them. The children did not always deal rightly with what was committed to them, but the over-ruling grace of God preserved the work and carried it forward, generation to generation. From the age of seventeen Joseph spent his life in Egypt, as a household slave, as a forgotten prisoner in jail, and eventually as the Prime Minister, but he never reckoned that he belonged there. His "home" was as part of the on-going purposes of God and he refused to allow any circumstances, however prolonged and painful, to rob him of his assurance. Apart from the occasion when, as a teenager, his selfconscious spirituality and his over-confidence set in motion a sequence of disastrous but expected reactions (Gen. 37: 5-11), Joseph manifested an amazing stability. The key to his experience was simply that God was with him, and he knew it, and his desire was to be with God. Read Acts 7:9-14; Gen. 45:1-8; 50:1525; Ps. 105: 12-22. This man's whole attitude was one of looking to the future, which was God's future, being persuaded that he was and would continue to be part of it. In the face of faith like this even death itself must quail and give ground because we have been given the victory (1 Cor. 15:57). The mention of Joseph must have been a tremendous encouragement to these Hebrew Christians who were hesitating as they faced persecution. The testimony of Joseph insists that we look beyond the interim stages of our experience in God's work. Have faith in God whose purposes go on and on and cannot be frustrated by men or devils. Of course this kind of faith is forged in the fires of trial. Joseph was shattered when sold by his brothers; assaulted by the Devil when an evil woman set her lustful eyes on him; tested sorely when allowed to lie for years in prison; and tested to the limit in prosperity and advancement. But he had learned he was God's man, set where he was to do God's will. This was his faith.

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11:23-27

It is interesting in these studies of the men of faith to recognise how their natural personalities, gifts and capacities, which were to be harnessed and used in God's service, were the very avenues along which Satan operated in the early stages of their lives in particular in order to prevent their ever becoming God's fruitful servants. Abraham's resolute obedience and adventuresome faith was assailed by fear. Isaac's meditative confidence was corrupted by laziness. Jacob, so gifted and conscious of it, interfered in wilfulness. Joseph, the visionary, was almost destroyed at the beginning by presumption and by a refusal to see that his brothers had to be led not driven into God's will. Moses, the man of stature, the statesman, called to forge and build a nation, giving it its God-orientated disposition, was impetuous (Ex. 2:11-15; cf. Acts 7:23-29) acting too soon and taking for granted that the Israelites would apprehend at once the moving of God. But how could they understand, after four hundred years of slavery which had conditioned and corrupted their thinking and feeling, a fact which proved a continuing problem down through the journeyings of Israel. Moses had to be prepared for God's purposes. He had to learn faith in the factory of discipline and in the process he was assailed by the Devil at the three significant crises of his life: his birth, which the Devil tried to countermand; his first stirrings of awareness of God's call, which led him into an angry killing; and at the burning bush when he argued the point with God (Ex. 3:11; 4:1, 10-13). All this took place in the first two sections of his life in Egypt and Midian, covering eighty years. In Hebrews we have no mention of the final forty years when he led God's people forward in faith that was indeed mighty (Ex. 14:1-30). Moses was a man with the rod of God's authority in his hand.

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11:23-27

Read Stephen's account in Acts 7: 17-22, 30-44 and marvel at the over-ruling providence of God whereby Moses was not only preserved at birth but placed for safekeeping and training in the household of Pharaoh whose kingdom and power he was eventually going to smite and overthrow. Now, note how the great story of Moses begins with the faith of his parents who may well have grieved in their lifetime that they had not been able to do anything for God. But, having given to the world a child called Moses, having prayed that child into the world, guarding him and then giving him up into the safekeeping of God, continuing their prayers and nurturing him in godliness, teaching him the stories of the God of Israel and of the past heroes of the faith, they did a work that could never be assessed this side of eternity (Ex. 2:1-10). When the pressure of events compelled their acquiescence, they handed things over to God and waited to see what He would do.

He did wonders. But do not fail to see how in a time when all the people were disillusioned and fatalistic, forgetful of their high calling, their past history and future hope, God had a remnant of faith in Moses' parents, Amram and Jochebed, whose first two children, Miriam and Aaron, also played a significant part in God's plan. Moses' parents took a tremendous risk, imperiling the whole family, when they disobeyed the king. But faith stood over against their fear and prayer must have been the basis of their whole life. It was answered prayer because not even forty years in Pharaoh's court was able to erase from Moses' consciousness his identity as one of God's people and his sense of destiny. Thank God for faithful, praying parents!

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11:23-27

Three times in these verses the words "by faith" occur and they anchor us firmly in the unseen but ever active God of purpose and power. Moses endured "as seeing Him who is invisible"; it was the reality of God, His presence and sure commands, that sustained this man in all his varied experience. Moses "endured", and that costly word signifies not only submission to suffering and acceptance of isolation, rejection and even ostracism as spoken of in v.24-25, but also that spirit of dogged determination that enabled him to go on and on in obedience, always pressing forward into what God had marked out for him. Like Paul, he pressed on to the mark for the prize (Phil. 3: 13-14). There was a crisis of identification and decision when he had to choose which way he would go. There was a clear commitment of association when he numbered himself with the people of Israel, identifying with their present experience and future hope. He reckoned that the stigma of being linked with God was greater riches than all else the world could give, and he did so because he looked to the end. We tend to fall down on this business of spiritual long-sightedness. We are creatures of the moment:, or at least, of a few years, but God looks right through to the end. That is when the assessments should be made (1 Cor. 4:5). Note how in v.26 it is said that Moses suffered for *Christ's* sake, and in v.25 that he suffered for the sake of the people of God. This identifies Christ with His people, a wonderful thought, and it also indicates that in all the great men of faith in the Old Testament there was indeed a forward look, as if they were anticipating, certainly expecting, the fulfilment of God's salvation in the coming of the Promised One (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

The life of faith is immensely practical but it cannot be lived without a deliberate policy and standard of measurement (2 Cor. 4:16-1.8).

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11:28-30

Here are three mighty occasions in which the emphasis is on the faith of Israel, the congregation, rather than on the faith of individuals, although these occasions cannot be rightly understood apart from the leadership of Moses and Joshua. Of course true leadership must always inspire others to follow and it is a thrill to think of the whole of Israel going forward together in the obedience of faith. People vary in how they express their faith. While some do so verbally with great competence, others signify their faith by committing themselves to and becoming part of a work of God begun and continuing. In like manner unbelief testifies to itself in those who contract out of what God is manifestly doing. This was true on the night of the Passover instituted by Moses at the command of God. The people had to choose (Ex. 12:13, 28) and that initial choice had to be reaffirmed again and again in faith, as each successive crisis of experience hemmed in Israel and compelled them to live by faith in God rather than trust in themselves. The question was, "Do we go with God or don't we?" We do not go into the details of the institution of the Passover with its wonderful foreshadowing of the Lamb of God, but simply emphasise that in this matter of redemption, salvation and deliverance from Egypt's bondage into

newness of life there was only one way. That night in Egypt was a night of inescapable judgment and there was shelter only under the God-appointed authority of the blood of the lamb of sacrifice. Those who believed sheltered and lived. Those who did not believe died. The New Testament tells us that Christ our Passover has died for us (1 Cor. 5:7). In faith, believing God and abandoning all trust in our own ideas or efforts, we commit our selves to God. This is faith.

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11:28-30

The crossing of the Red Sea is a fascinating story (Ex. 14), with two clear miracles: the dividing of the sea, and the obedience of faith manifested by the people as they ventured forward with no guarantee except the Word of the Lord through Moses. The Israelites had scarcely begun their redemption journey when they were under pressure, seemingly trapped with the past chasing them and the future closed by impossibility. Almost at once they panicked in fear, doubt and bitterness, reducing themselves to total demoralisation. They looked at Pharaoh, the Red Sea and themselves and found no hope at all. But faith is often born of despair and, having nowhere else to look to, they looked to God, listened to His Word, followed God's man and they crossed the impossible sea (Ex. 14). Note that the pillar of cloud, signifying the presence of the Lord, did not lead them but took up a rear position of protection (Isa. 52:9-12; 58:8-12) as if to signify that the enemy would have to battle his way through the mighty Lord before reaching His people to harm them. What an encouragement to faith! But Israel did not march looking back, but looking on to Moses striding ahead of them. This is the Moses who, at the burning bush, had pleaded his weakness and incompetence. God demonstrated what can be done with a life given over into His hand. Israel's faith however did not rest in Moses but in the Word of God given by Moses. It is a glorious example of faith, but sorely clouded by the fact that, in the whole of the subsequent forty years, the dominant mark of the life of Israel was unbelief. Israel's years in Egypt had indeed worked a disastrous weakness which the Devil was not slow to make use of.

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11:28-30

The record of faith, suspended for forty years, is taken up again in the story of the capture of Jericho (Josh. 5:13-6:20). As the story goes on there is more and more ground for faith and less and less excuse for unbelief, because the people were living year by year with the Word and power of God manifest among them. Faith does not operate in a vacuum and we must thrill to the assurances of God in Josh. 1:1-11 and to the deliberate speaking and preparation in Josh. 3:5-11, whereby the hearts of the people were turned to God. This was a time of great dedication and spiritual eagerness. The people were ready to go forward with God and at once they found the way blocked by Jericho, a seemingly impassable barrier. When will we learn to recognise that spiritual advance will always be resisted by the entrenched powers of the enemy? It is bound to be so and we must refuse to be surprised or shaken when the battles come. Keep going back to Eph. 6:10ff; 1 Cor. 16:9. It is spiritual warfare, and it is God who gives the victory to faith. But faith often looks ridiculous in the eyes of the world. Could anything have seemed more puerile than the host of Israel marching round a city led by priests blowing trumpets? Can you imagine the mocking laughter from Jericho's walls? Perhaps, as some suggest, Jericho was worried by its own superstitions, feeling that this ritual of Israel was putting a curse on the city. Certainly they were being surrounded by God for their inevitable downfall. The explanation of the collapse of the walls is not to be sought for in the powers of vibration caused by the mighty shout, or by subsidence or earthquake, but in the unseen powers of the world to come, which world is under the lordship of someone we know, whose name is Jesus. We must not over-emphasise the apparent weakness of Israel in this venture. They had the promise of God, His presence and His power. What else could they possibly have?

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11:31

Our expectations of faith are too limited and we tend to look for conversion only among the 'best' or expected people. It may be surprising to find Rahab mentioned immediately after Joshua, but is it not part of the great crusade of salvation that people like the harlot should be brought to faith and to newness of life? Joshua's spies were amazed to find that God had been working in the pagan situation of Jericho, preparing a woman's heart for the advent of the message that would transform her life (Josh. 2:1-21). Rahab believed and was saved, took her place in the fellowship of Israel, and we find her name in the illustrious genealogy of Jesus in Matt. 1:5. Rahab's welcome of the spies was undoubtedly motivated by her faith, not her profession, although that faith

was as yet ill-formed. The very fact of faith beginning to stir signifies the sovereign work of God's Holy Spirit, the only one who is able to quicken those dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). The sign that God is granting repentance (Acts 5:31) is the awakening of desire in the mind, heart and life, the beginning of a longing for life which is confirmed by response to the preaching or proclamation of the truth (as the spies did) until the heart consents (Rom. 10:8-17). How Rahab first heard and how long she had been becoming aware of need we cannot tell. Jericho heard of the exploits of Israel and of Israel's God and of the advance in their direction. They feared, but that is not faith, just as remorse is not repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-11), and the people of Jericho dismissed the stirring of their hearts and manned the walls to resist. But Rahab was different. She knew her time had come, that God had come near to her and that a decision had to be made. She made it. She believed and trusted the outcome of her life to the God of Israel. This is faith.

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In daily reading notes we can scarcely plead lack of time for consideration of such a list of names as these, even though it is made clear that the list could be extended almost indefinitely. There is an important lesson here for faith, because we all tend to feel at times like Elijah, that we are a remnant of one in an impossible situation of unbelief (1 Kings 19:1-4). God does not leave Himself without a witness (Acts 14:16-17), and some of those called to be significant factors in His ongoing work are unexpected, to say the least of it. But the possibilities for service do not stem from our personalities and capacities, but from the amazing grace of God who lays hold on those whom He has chosen. He fits and prepares them, teaches them faith, and uses them for His glory. Such a man was Gideon (Judges 6-8), a diffident, inhibited character, full of fear and hesitation, living among a people who, after forty years of God's rich blessing had fallen away in moral and spiritual backsliding. The nation was demoralised and without hope (Judges 6:1-6), at the mercy of their enemies. God diagnosed their plight (Judges 6:7-10), for there is no betterment without realism. Then God began dealing with His chosen instrument Gideon, and the story tells of how the man was led to faith, his eyes fixed on God (6:12), his commission confirmed (6:14), and his provision assured (6:16). In weakness of faith he insisted on a visible sign (6:17), which God graciously granted and which left the man still afraid (6:22). Gideon then began to act tentatively at first in his father's house, which resulted in the massing of the enemy (6:33). The Spirit of God took possession of Gideon, who, being too conscious of himself and other men, asked yet again for signs to reassure himself that God could be trusted. But Gideon was still too aware of human strength and his army was reduced to a mere 300 to face 135,000 (8:10). He still feared, until it was revealed to him that God was working ahead of the confrontation to demoralise and demolish the enemy (7: 9-18). Gideon learned that fear was unnecessary. Have faith in God. He leads to life, not disaster.

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The story of Barak, in Judges 4, tells again of faith emerging in a generation of political, social and moral declension, when people were manifestly unwilling to listen to the voice of God. But a day of God's power came upon the nation and God was of a mind to break the powers of evil and set the people free. It was a day of opportunity, but would the people be willing? God looked for a man (Ezek. 22:30) and found only one, Barak, and he had to be urged to his spiritual task by a woman. A nation's spiritual health is reflected in whether or not there are men ready and willing for holy service and leadership! In the time of Barak the nation's condition was grim, because the people had forsaken the God of their fathers and chosen gods of carnal self-expression (Judges 2:11-15). Socially there was thuggery and contempt for life and property (5:6-7). The nation had become irrelevant internationally and almost an object of derision. Many claimed to be spiritually exercised and discussed the situation (Judges 5:15-17) but were preoccupied with other things. Then God laid hold on one man, Barak, who had lost his assurance in God, but who was quite sure that he wanted to be counted in on whatever God was going to do. He was afraid, needed encouragement, recognised that God was indeed with Deborah (not least because she had no desire to be in the limelight) and he was not put off in the slightest by being told that no reputation or glory would come to him. He went forward in the assurance of God's presence (cf. Ex. 33:12-16) and engaged in spiritual warfare (Judges 5:20) as the powers of heaven fought to break the chains of evil within the nation. It was into this dimension of life that Barak went in faith.

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Samson's life of faith was both triumph and tragedy. The story in Judges 13-16 tells of a man called into holy service, proving competent and successful through faith, and then becoming over-confident so that he presumed upon God, took liberties with God and with his own life, and ended up trying to do God's work after God had departed from him. When he eventually recognised that he had become a spiritual 'has been' there was a basic and glorious repentance worked in his heart and he was restored in his death. Samson's spiritual failure was manifested through his emotional, romantic and passionate nature which he refused to bring into subjection to God. Indeed it was because he departed from his original Nazarite separation to God's service (Judges 13:5) that his personality became a problem. He failed to learn what his weak points were and to set a watchful guard there. If we are to live the life of faith we too must learn to watch and pray.. In Hebrews it is Samson's faith, not his failure, that is remembered and in Judges 16:31 we see the reason. He judged Israel for twenty years and by the Spirit of God won mighty victories which demolished the enemy, set the people free and honoured the name of the Lord. His glaring failures could well have been confined to a matter of months during that lifetime of service. He lived with the results of his sins and his regrets but we must allow for the times when he was assailed and did not fall. In Judges 14:1-3 we see the impetuous decision that makes no reference to God's will and in Judges 16:4ff we see the prolonging of a relationship in spite of many warnings that it was not a. good thing. In 16:28ff we see the penitence that only a saint can feel and Samson was ready to be nothing, if only God would take him back into service again. What a story of faith! What would it have been if God had got all there was of Samson from the start?

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It is easy to criticise Jephthah for his terribly foolish and illegal vow concerning his daughter, but not so easy to copy his attitude to life and to God as he expressed it in Judges 11:35. This man is included in the list of the heroes of the faith with good cause because of his radical (if unenlightened) consecration to God, which accords with our Lord's words in Matt. 10:37-39, Lk. 14:26-27 and Lk. 9:57-62. Jephthah's grasp of redemption history is expressed in Judges 11:14-27. But we must see also his victory over heredity and circumstances. His birth was illegitimate and he was despised and rejected by the 'proper' members of his father's family, apparently with no intervention from his father. It was enough to make a man irretrievably bitter but he never lost sight of God (1 Pet. 2:23; 4:19). If the men who gathered to him were 'worthless' - a description no doubt given to Jephthah himself by 'the best people' in Israel- it was because he was a man who both knew and understood their brokenness and bitterness. The hymn writer's words, 'Man may trouble and distress me, 'twill but drive me to Thy breast.' (H.F.Lyte) certainly apply to Jephthah. This man was entrusted with the safety of the nation and he lived before the Lord. Something of his character of faith is seen in the grace and faith of his daughter. Both of them were persuaded that God was not to be trifled with and they are honoured for it. Granted the vow should never have been made, and once made, it should have been rectified as soon as possible. But there was no-one to counsel him. Honour his faith, not his mistake, and read Eccles. 5:1-7.

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It takes the whole of David's life to demonstrate his faith, as indeed it took the whole of his life to learn faith. Faith is not static nor is it just a once -for-all thing. It must grow and develop to meet the increased demands of life. In essence it is the fight to believe God and to trust yourself to Him when everything inside and outside clamours for you to do otherwise. David's faith was not perfect and on many occasions he acted in unbelief, with terrible complications that took him far away from God, yet in due time his heart swung back to its true direction. His heart was fixed (Ps. 57:7 AV). He was aware of his anointing by God and the destiny he was called to fulfil, yet he refused to be precipitate. There was a spirit of submission (1 Sam. 26:7-11), although this was assailed by the Devil in a surge of irrational fear, as in 1 Sam. 27:1, which led to sore humiliation of the man of God. The same submission of faith is seen when David accepted responsibility for Absalom's rebellion and committed his future to God's good providence (2 Sam. 16: 5-14). In faith David walked with God to do His will (Acts 13:22). But his faith is seen supremely in his attitude to his sins as expressed in such passages as Ps. 32 and Ps. 51. His whole life is summed up in Acts 13:36. He served the purpose of God in his own

generation, and he did so right to the end, even though some say he was never again the mighty man of God after his sin in respect of Bathsheba and Uriah.

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11:32

Samuel is one of the all-time greats in the matter of faith. His story covers twenty-seven chapters of 1 Samuel and his ministry spanned fifty years. That, without any further comment, testifies to his faith. He was a man of character, trained in God's ways in his youth, who emerged at a time of crisis and, virtually single handed, carried the nation and set it on its feet. He was a spiritual statesman who set the course of Israel for years to come, and he was above all a man of prayer (1 Sam. 7:9). He walked in the light with God and his life was so free from shadow that he challenged those who knew him best to point the finger of accusation (1 Sam. 12:2-5). But lest we idolise him, remember he had sons who were a heartbreak to him and a hindrance to the work of God (1 Sam. 8:1-7). Yet there is clear indication that Samuel was a man God trusted and with whom God shared His secret purposes. By the time this man was a lad of about twelve he was ready for God. (Was this the answer to his mother's prayers?) In 1 Sam. 3:19-4:1 we have the summary of his life of faith. He re-established the word of the Lord within the life of the nation and he began the schools of the 15 prophets, training men to continue the ministry of the Word after he was gone. Samuel had no thought of being indispensable. In 1 Sam. 7:1-9 we see this man of faith standing before the Lord for the nation, and being answered. He never retired, and so long as Samuel lived the nation knew that there was a God mighty to save. He was the first of the prophets, a long succession of men of faith, through whom God spoke His word to generation after generation. God has His men. His men have God. This is the thrill of faith for, if God be for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31).

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11:33-34

From here to the end of the chapter we are dealing with what faith accomplishes (33-34), what it endures (35-38), and what it receives (39-40). We are told that faith conquered or subdued kingdoms. These men and women of faith laid hold on an entire nation and retrieved it from the paganism and dereliction of sin and judgment. This is something we need to learn in the business of intercessory prayer. It is no use bewailing the faults of governments and the encroachments of atheistic ideologies into places of power and influence. We must pray (1 Tim. 2:1-2) and we must stand and speak, as the prophets did, in the right way and at the right time. Such a task awes the heart and makes us feel we are not 'big enough' for such mighty work. But the men of faith were not 'big' for they were of like passions as we are (Jas. 5:17). They won strength out of weakness (v.34), out of weakness they were made strong (AV), from being weaklings they became strong men and mighty warriors (JBP). God still chooses the weak things of this world, perfects His strength in that weakness and uses them to do mighty exploits (1 Cor. 1:26ff). All of these men blundered at times but God was with them. In battles and struggles, in dens of lions and fiery furnaces, in standing for truth and righteousness in days of falsehood and corruption, and in standing firm for God, when they did not know what God would in fact do (Dan. 3:16-18), they lived the life of faith. They were in fact more than conquerors through Him who loved them (Rom. 8:37). This should encourage us. The issues belong to God (Ps. 68:20AV).

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11:35-38

It is the remnant of faith within the nation that subdues what is contrary to God, establishes standards of righteousness and stands against the rising tides of evil. Such service is glorious and satisfying even though costly and strenuous. In part at least you can see and measure the results of your work. But there is a deeper and more costly way of faith to which some, perhaps all, are called. It is the way of suffering, and in this there is neither the release nor the reward that are found in the midst of work and battle. The time comes when there is nothing you can do. You have to be passive and in the spiritual, mental and emotional realms you can only hold on in faith. This is what is spoken of here when God's heroes were ostracised by men, assaulted by devils, reduced to the point of destitution, with God *seemingly* inactive and even disinterested. Of course this is exactly how it seemed to be when Jesus was led away to be crucified. He was despised and rejected (Isa. 53:3) and the deep darkness seemed beyond explanation and expectation (Matt. 27:46). Think of the drastic experience expressed in the phrase, 'He was led as a lamb to the slaughter' (Isa.53:7), and of the heroic faith expressed in

the words, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him' (Job 13:15 AV). But this kind of experience should not take believers by surprise. Jesus foretold it in John 16:1-3 and the apostles taught the inevitability of it in Acts 14:22; Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; 4:12-19. It is the way the Master went, and He said, 'Follow me'.

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11:35-38

The world of unbelief looks on the suffering and struggling of Christians with a mixture of contempt and indifference which can easily become anger and hatred. God looks differently and considers the world not worthy of such saintly and Christlike grace. God is proud of His people (Heb. 2:11; 11:16) and His word enables us to interpret our experiences in the light of His redeeming purposes. Experience is not the same for all. Some seem to suffer little and others greatly; some die a martyr's death while others are delivered in answer to prayer (Acts 12:1-5ff). Some face fierce and fiery persecution while others experience long-drawn-out niggling trial that wears them down. What does it all signify? In chapter 12 we will be taught about the sanctifying effect of the disciplines of experience. In Phil. 1:12 we are told that it is through our varied experiences that the work of the gospel is furthered. In Col. 1:24-29 we are taught that in bearing the reproach of Christ we are in some way not only 'reflecting' Calvary but being incorporated into and sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Our battlings of experience are not to be understood and interpreted only in respect of our own sanctification but also of our service. Death works in us but life in others (2 Cor. 4:7-12). This is wonderfully encouraging. It means that our battles, struggles and persecutions for Christ's sake are to be seen as a part of the process by which the plans and victory of Christ are worked out in history by the church. Christ continues to suffer in His members (Acts 9:4-5,16), and the members suffer in Christ (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5-7; 4:8-12; Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 2:21; 4:13). We suffer for the Name, the Body, each other and for the world. This is privilege.

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11:39-40

We leave the past and from the present we look to the future. What does faith receive? It receives attestation (a good report), and the names of the men and women of faith are entered in the record of those who believed God. Their faith was reckoned to them as righteousness and salvation. Faith received also the promise of God but not the fulfilment of that promise. The world does not lay much store by promises which are so often made for convenience, to be broken when suitable or advantageous. But when God says, 'I give you My word in respect of the future', we can afford to be confident and to wait patiently through the interim stages of experience until it pleases God in the fullness of time to bring to pass what He has ordained for our blessing and His glory. The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 lived and died in the faith of the promise, which was the coming of Christ. In like manner we live and die in the faith of that same promise, which cannot fail. If at the end of our allotted span the promise has not yet come to pass, we will not in any way lose out (1 Thess. 4:13-18). In this world and the next we are led along in Christ's triumphal procession (2 Cor. 2:14). The heroes of faith in the past, we in our time, and those who will come after us are all part of one complete and glorious plan, the dimensions of which are vaster in grace and in glory than we can ever imagine. We can count on God. He cannot fail.

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11:1-40

Read through the whole of this magnificent chapter without lingering over any specific character just to savour the thrill of the repetition of 'By faith'. It was faith in the living God and in the sure purposes of His grace, purposes that can never fall to the ground. These men and women knew themselves to be part of something bigger and surer than any part or combination of parts of their present experience. Because of this they set the present with its costly limitation over against the future with its sure fulfilment in God, and this made sense of life in the most practical way. Do not think it was easy for these heroes of the faith. Read Psalm 73, especially v.1-3, 16-17, 23-26. Faith compels us to face up to life in a most realistic way, providing no easy escape routes, and requiring that we learn to deal with God. This we must learn to do increasingly and in a spirit of joyous worship. Consider John Newton's great hymn and allow the grace of God to encourage and confirm your heart.

'Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He whose word cannot be broken
Formed thee for His own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou mayst smile at all thy foes.

'Saviour, if of Zion's city
I, through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in Thy Name.
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion children's know.'

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12:1-2

The whole of Hebrews is a word of encouragement designed to put fresh heart, hope and vitality into Christians tending to get a bit stale and defeatist. It does so by expounding God in the perfection of His salvation (1:1-3). Along with the doctrinal exposition there are certain passages of warning and passages of encouragement (2:1-3a; 4:1-2,14-16; 10:19-24). The encouragement of God is expressed and confirmed in the stories of the characters in chapter 11, whose lives with one accord testify to the life of faith. Their witness is unanimous. God is to be trusted and obeyed, and His grace is greater than any or every human weakness, failure or limitation. These witnesses are clearly urging us on saying, 'What He's done for others, He'll do for you.' To confirm that message we are told to get our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, on His person, work and ability to meet every situation and to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ever ask or think (Eph. 3:20). In this attitude of mind and heart we must go on to ask ourselves what justification, if any, we have for ever being cast down or doubtful (Ps. 3, 42 and 43). Even when the furies of Hell are let loose against us we have facts to fall back on. Christ is greater far than Satan (1 John 4:4). It is not easy to stand in faith. Indeed it is a constant fight to believe God rather than the clamant pressures of the world, the flesh and the Devil (1 Tim. 6:12); at the same time it is rest (Heb. 4:11). It is in this vigorous context that the two classes of people in the sphere of religious life are revealed by what they do. Some draw back, contracting out from the faith of the gospel, and do so to lostness and to the negation of all the hope and aspiration of humanity. Others go on in faith, enduring in spite of everything, and they keep their souls and take possession of life itself (10:36-39). Because the issues are so elemental, clear practical advice is given and we consider this tomorrow.

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12:1-2

Attitudes are very important because they determine our involvements. We need to grasp clearly that the Christian is a pilgrim not a tourist sightseer whose objective is pleasure. Because we are going places with God we are called to strip off like an athlete for a race that is vitally important. It is a matter of discipline. The weights may well be things good in themselves but no help in the business of Christian life and service. The sins are things wrong in themselves, things a Christian has no right to have or to practise, things which shackle us to the starting point, give us nothing and cost us everything. These are things to be recognised in their lying negativeness and we must see that we do not allow ourselves to be victimised by them. Weights may differ from person to person and we must exercise judgment in respect of *ourselves* (Rom. 14:1-4; 10, 13; 1 Cor, 4: 1-5) and act accordingly. Calvin says they are "the love of this life, pleasures of this world, the lusts of the flesh, riches, honours and the like." But we must widen the term to include inhibitions of personality inherited from the past, regrets and reactions to life's experiences, and above all the fears which demolish and paralyse our spiritual and human lives and make us less than we need to be and less able to enjoy being ourselves in Christ. Christ is the liberator from all these weights, and those who labour under them must come to Him for rest. The

next thing to put away is not sins but sin, indwelling sin which constantly works unbelief and sets us contrary to God. If weights hinder, sin diverts, bringing us into the confusion of our own thinking and we are left with such an awareness of all the "problems" that beset us that we forget the race that is set for us, marked out lane by lane. If we once lose sight of the fact that we are going somewhere, we will soon lose the urge to run.

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12:1-2

At the very best our knowledge is partial and limited (1 Cor. 13:9). This is one of the big problems in life. We know neither where we are going nor why the route is so often so difficult compared to the "by-path meadows" which worldly people seem to enjoy. This is corrected only by considering the "race set before us", the plans God has laid out for us not only in terms of salvation but also service. The thought of the sure purposes of God is quite thrilling, especially when we realise that in Christ we are called to share actively in the outworking of these purposes of glory. We are going with God into the future which belongs to Him and not to the Devil. Now, what God is doing is far more expansive than we realise or is evident at any given stage of development. This was part of the message of chapter 11. Each of these characters had a part to play; was a link in a glorious chain, and the purpose of God in its many sidedness moved forward irresistibly by the deliberate intention and activity of God. This purpose was not, and is not at any time, controlled or directed by circumstances, men or nations although at every step it is opposed by the powers of evil. In this purpose of God we have a specific part to play and this sets us free from jealousies and enables us to get on with the job in hand. We must have our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus the pioneer, who goes first to blaze the trail of faith, and is the perfecter who sees it through to the end. It was the joy of the perfected will of the Father that sustained and inspired Jesus and it is this Jesus, the all-sufficient enabler who gives His joy to us. The cloud of witnesses who have finished the race are not watching to see if we fail but rather encourage us to trust God as they did. To do this they urge us to look away from them and from circumstances and fix our eyes on Jesus. It is the Jesus who has come to us and who, by the Holy Spirit, dwells in our hearts and enables us to go on. This Jesus, as we have learned, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and cares with mighty tenderness. Think of Him. That is what the next verse says.

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12:3-4

When we consider Jesus we have a two-fold picture of the One who sits in glorious triumph at God's right hand until all His foes submit (2), and who also suffers all manner of wicked and spiteful slander and action against Himself. Now, it was because these Hebrew Christians were considering only the human and earthly aspects of their situation, failing to set this into the perspective of eternity, that they were being unsettled. They were being tempted to take the easy way out, evading the suffering by keeping quiet about their allegiance to Jesus. In handling our lives it is folly to leave out of our reckoning either God or the Devil. To do so is to end up with a completely distorted picture of life with apparently no purpose in it. This is demoralisation. The Devil works to confuse, turning our thoughts in upon ourselves or on to others, blinding our minds to the truth of what we are and have in Christ. The truth is that God is working to bless us, leading and urging us forward into a future in which we share His glory both now and in eternity. To this end every device and activity of the enemy, however fierce or prolonged, is incorporated and used. It is because Christ is greater than all that we must get our eyes back on to Him, and like Him set our hearts on the joy that is to come. Read John 15:1-11; 16:20-24; 17: 6-17. This joy is not cancelled out by suffering, and in it we are in fellowship with Jesus (John 15:18-27). We must remember that none of us have suffered to the extent Jesus did. We tend to give in before temptation has reached its full power.

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12:5-11

The education of the Christian is under the direct guidance of the Father Himself who sets such value upon His children that He is prepared to spend limitless time and energy upon them so that they will be blessed to the fullest possible extent. If the process of this discipline is painful, and we are never asked to enjoy pain, then we must be all the clearer in our minds as to what it is for. We are being taught to live by faith. This involves being weaned away from sin and the love of sinning; being compelled away from the shallows of Christian experience and superficiality of moral and spiritual character. We are being put again and again into situations

where the only thing we can do is to believe God and hold on in grim faith because there is nothing else. This is how our roots are driven down into the deeps of God; and the issue is stability, grace and assurance of character in Christ, and a personality marked by tenderness of spirit which is indeed the mark of maturity. When we interpret experience in this way the fruit is a humanity that is wholesome, mellow and balanced. But uninterpreted discipline leads only to hardness. This is why we are counselled not to sit lightly to God's providential dealings with us nor to give the impression we are taking it all in our stride with no effort. We are not meant to! It is no part of spiritual honesty to describe every experience as 'wonderful'. Indeed v.8 suggests there might be a question as to the validity of our spiritual experience if we never know the subduing and silencing of sore discipline. The issue is peace (11) and righteousness, but only to those who in fact have learned their lessons in Christ's school of discipleship.

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12:5-11

This passage is so very practical that we must study it in conjunction with other scriptures to which we turn again and again. They are Rom. 5:1-5; James 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; 2 Pet. 1:3-8,10-11. The attitude of our hearts should be, 'Go on, God, make a real job of my training and sanctification.' There is nothing He would rather do and, when He has finished, the end product will be marvellous indeed (1 John 3:1-3). The whole of life and service has to be tackled on the ground of faith and not only must we be prepared to work at it, we must take it to the Lord in prayer with clear resolution and in abiding fellowship with Him. One of the best illustrations (among many) of the principles of this passage is the life of Paul. In 2 Cor. 12:7ff. he tells us of the hideous thorn or stake in the flesh, or for the flesh. He describes it as a messenger of Satan to harass him, not one sharp conflict but a struggle going on for years. Whatever it was, and it may have been more mental, emotional and spiritual than just physical. It was something bad. Yet it was used by God. To what purpose? It was to guard Paul, to keep him useful and to extend his usefulness in the service of the gospel. Think of Paul's experience as a servant of Christ. At times his work was held up, his enemies ill-treated him with seeming impunity, waves of faintheartedness swept over him to agitate and distract him, and it even seemed that Satan had unhindered access to interrupt and disrupt all his work. Little wonder Paul prayed for the removal of the 'thorn', whatever it was. But his request was not granted. It was as if God said, 'This is how I can use you best,' and Paul consented. God's all sufficient grace finds its opportunity in and through human weakness. This does not lead us to excuse and accept our weaknesses but rather urges us on in God to be the best for Christ's sake. It all depends on having an eternal perspective.

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12:12-13

Tribulations are the gracious gifts of God to help us on to glory. That is why trials and difficulties are no cause for despondency. Indeed they should be a source of encouragement because the Devil seldom bothers with people who are irrelevant, but pays special attention to those who have a future of significance in God's purposes. He also assails those who have won spiritual battles, as is seen in the stories of Abraham, Elijah and David, to name but three. Trials then can be interpreted in terms of the past, present or future exercise of faith. For this reason we must get rid of despondency and defeatism, not only for our own sake but also for the sake of others with whom we are in fellowship in the service of the gospel, and who may be discouraged to the point of giving up. It is the duty of the strong, and their privilege, to carry the weak when they are in need and to minister to them until they are able to walk again. We tend to err by alternating criticism with coddling. Both are necessary in right measure and at the right time but sometimes we must refuse to carry people and compel them to stand on their own feet (by God's grace), though even then we have to make straight paths for their feet and our own. We are to be main-line Christians, not tossed about by influences that are more human than divine (Eph. 4:12-16). But the overall emphasis in these verses is on the ground of our confidence to go on, and that ground is God Himself and the word of His grace. Cf. Isa. 35:1-10. The NEB translation along with that of J B Phillips should be used for these verses in Hebrews. 'Tighten your grip and don't wander.' 'Remember that on the right path the limping foot recovers strength and does not collapse.' Read Gal. 6:1-10, where in v.1 the word 'restore' refers to re-setting a dislocated joint so that it will function properly once more. This is healthy fellowship.

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12:14

Peace and holiness go together and both have to be worked at and fought for. This is the life of faith and we must be clear that there is no short cut to holiness, nor is there any one experience that will settle the issue for the rest of life. The remnant of corruption in our natures, the pressures of the world and the stratagems of the Devil will see to that. It is a fight all along the line (Acts 14:22) as Eph. 6:10ff makes plain. But it is not an equal fight! We are more than conquerors and, because this is so, we must refuse to give ground to any influence that would destroy our own peace or that of the fellowship. (Rom. 12:14-21; 14:17-19; 15:13; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 2:14-17; 4:1-3; 2 Thess. 3:16; Jas. 3:17-18). Remember that Jesus said it was the peacemakers who were to be called the sons of God. 'The sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord is, as the words themselves make plain, no optional extra in the Christian life but something which belongs to its essence. It is the pure in heart, and none but they, who shall see God (Matt. 5:8). It is practical holiness of life that is meant We are reminded of Paul's words to the Thessalonians: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3) for the things that are unholy effectively debar those who practise them from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9ff) Those who are called to be partakers of God's holiness must be holy themselves; this is the recurring theme of the Pentateuchal law of holiness, echoed again in the New Testament: "Ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy," (Lev. 11:45 etc.; cf. 1 Pet. 1:15ff). To see the Lord is the highest and most glorious blessing that mortals can enjoy, but the beatific vision is reserved for those who are holy in heart and life.' (F. F. Bruce)

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12:15-17

In the light of the solemnity of the previous verse, we are counselled to watch, to look carefully, to see to it that any tendency that would work against our sanctification and growth in grace is nipped in the bud before it can develop into positive danger. But what does it mean to fail to obtain the grace of God, to 'forfeit the grace of God,' (NEB), or to 'fail to respond to the grace of God,' (JBP)? If any fall short of grace it is not because grace was inaccessible. We have already been told to come boldly to God for grace to help (Heb. 4:16). That grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9) but Paul warns against receiving grace in vain (2 Cor. 6:1) and against falling away from grace (Gal. 5:4,7). Now, no one can be saved and then fall away to be eternally lost. Therefore we are dealing here not with the salvation of the soul but with the practice of the Christian life. But we must not drive too firm a wedge between the two because it is only those who do in fact practise the Christian life and go on to full growth, enduring to the end, who manifest the evidence of true salvation. A mere profession of faith is in itself nothing! Those who trifle with sin and sit lightly to evil, tolerating it as if it were innocuous, are in peril. They are also a significant danger to the believing community for they pump a stream of poison into the life of the fellowship and many are troubled and defiled. The writer is obviously referring to Deut. 29:16-20, and we can link the present exhortation with that in Heb. 3:12. No man lives unto himself, and this is particularly true in the fellowship of the church, where we are in fact, by the Holy Spirit, members one of another (1 Cor. 12:14-26). If one suffers, all suffer. Infection in the life-stream is very difficult to contain. This is one reason why we must be right.

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12:15-17

This thought of the 'root of bitterness' is closely linked with the earlier section of the chapter dealing with God's providential discipline of and training of His children. Inspired by the lies of the Devil, and through being too consciously focused on present worldly experience, we can become resentful of God's dealings with us, especially if we are comparing our circumstances with those of other Christians we know. This seems to have been the case with Naomi in the story of Ruth (Ruth 1:1-13,19-21), for she had become a bitter old woman. We do not minimise her suffering, but her bitterness made it worse. Esau was also a bitter person. That he was profane and irreligious is clear from the biblical narrative regarding his despising and devaluing of the blessing of the Lord, but there is no mention of his immorality. Perhaps there is just a suggestion here that when a man 'fails to obtain the grace of God' there is in fact no limit to the depths to which he may decline. We may scorn such a thought but perhaps we know neither the weakness of our nature (guarded over by God's grace) nor the subtle temptations of sin and Satan. Remember that it was in a moment of immediate hunger for gratification that Esau sold his spiritual birthright. Now, the point here is that the decision could not be recalled. It was done

irreversibly. There came a time when he regretted what he had done but he found no place or opportunity of repentance, although he sought *the blessing* with tears (Gen. 25:29ff and Gen. 27:1-40). His father Isaac could not and would not recall the blessing given to Jacob. This gives great significance to the decisions of life. Some of them, such as starting in a job or course that proves unsuitable, can be rectified within six months or a year. Other decisions, such as marriage or the refusing of God's call to the ministry or mission-field, can affect the whole course of life. There are some who have been living God's second best for years, and they know it, but find no opportunity now to set things right.

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12:18-24

This passage contrasts for these Hebrew Christians the experience of the old days, living under the covenant of Law, and that of living under the new covenant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in which there is all-sufficient grace to bring them to perfection, something that could never be under the old dispensation (Heb. 7:19; 10:1). There are only the two possibilities open to people in this world and this fact was urged upon these Hebrews who were being tempted to go back from Christ to the old ways. Under the Law of God, with all its terrible and unchangeable sanctions, there is fear and only fear for sinners. But under the Gospel there is forgiveness, access to God, present grace and promise of glory. Now, by natural birth we are born into a world that is under God's law and we stand condemned, helpless and hopeless (Rom. 3:9-10,19-20). It is Christ alone who has redeemed us from the curse of the law, set us free, reconciled us to God and brought us into life (Rom. 3:21-25; Gal. 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:17-21). Life in Christ is not a bed of roses but a fight of faith, and yet it is the way to ever increasing discovery of life that is eternal. It is a life of fellowship, a drawing near to God with boldness to receive grace for every possible situation (Heb. 4:14-16). Now, what were life and experience before Christ laid hold on us? What benefits could there be for the Hebrews in abandoning Christ and going back to the life that once was theirs (Rom. 6:21)? These believers were made to look back to the time when they lived under 'the terrors of law and of God', and when the thought of God's nearness made them fall back in fear. Read Exodus 19:7-13,16-21; 20: 18-21; Deut. 4:11; 5:23-27; 9:17-19. What a picture! Our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Little wonder the people trembled. Perhaps we should have more of this godly fear in our dealings with God, with whom at times we can be over-familiar. But contrast this picture with the welcoming words of the Jesus who said, 'Come to me, and I will give you rest,' (Matt. 11:28).

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12:18-24

What have we come to and what do we have in Christ? This is what the whole epistle expounds. The NEB begins this passage, "Remember where you stand" . We have come to Jesus, and we stand in Him and with Him. We have come to Mount Zion, the dwelling place of God Himself, that spiritual realm of experience described in the subsequent phrases. The city of the living God is that place with sure foundation to which Abraham looked forward (11:10), and it is the heavenly Jerusalem, the place where plans are made. The final and perfect manifestation of this new Jerusalem is spoken of in Rev. 21:1-5ff (cf. Rev. 14:1-7), but the emphasis in Hebrews is that the ultimate reality is in fact, by faith, ours now and our citizenship is even now in Heaven (Phil. 3:20). The God 'up there' is down here with us and we 'down here' are up there with Him. All this is God's doing and nothing can change it and nothing has the power to separate us from it (Rom. 8:38-39). We have also come to the 'innumerable company of angels' gathered in rejoicing, and this alone is the necessary corrective to that particular sense of inferiority and desolation that can come upon a people who are very conscious of being a believing minority in an unbelieving world. They that be with us are more than they that are with them (2 Kings 6:16; cf. 1 John 4:4). Remember that angels are sent to minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14) and if there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents. what will be the 'atmosphere' of the heavenly places at the final ingathering and perfection of all the saints? We need to think of these things more often than we do.

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12:18-24

Invisible but eternal realities are practical elements in the business of living the life of faith (1:27), and it is the conviction concerning these things that keeps us going when life is hard and apparently beyond explanation.

We are reminded here that we are part of the church or assembly of the firstborn and that our names are enrolled in Heaven (Luke 10:20; Rev. 21:27). This is indeed assurance and it is also thrill because the firstborn are those to whom the inheritance and privilege belong by right. "If believers in Christ are said to have come to 'the church of the firstborn' in this sense, the reference may be to those men and women who lived and 'died in faith' before Christ came, but who 'apart: from us' could not attain perfection. If so, the phrase is synonymous with 'the spirits of just men made perfect' at the end of the verse. But more probably the reference is to the whole communion of saints, including those who while 'militant here on earth', are enrolled as citizens of heaven. To this community believers have come into its membership." (Bruce) We have come also to God who is judge of all. This thought of the God with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:13) introduces an element of deep seriousness and responsibility into the privilege and rejoicing of these verses. We must all appear before the judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10) and those most privileged are most seriously judged. 'You only have I known therefore' (Amos 3:2). The reference to the 'spirits of just men made perfect' indicates the saints of earlier days and speaks of the unity and continuity of all the work of God. It also suggests how thin a veil there really is between this world and the next. We are nearer eternal things than we ever realise. All the more reason therefore to hold fast in spite of circumstances. To sum it all up, we have come to Jesus who Himself makes, seals and preserves this new relationship at the price of His own blood. All barriers of sin are removed. He speaks peace to our hearts and grants access to God Himself. This is where we stand and how we face both life and death, for nothing can alter our position. Why then go back to anything less?

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12:25-29

The function of this epistle, to encourage faltering believers, is evident right the way through, not least in this chapter where the thoughts of Christians are led forward to eternal things. We live always in the power of the world to come and this transforms death itself because, 'The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection,' (Shorter Catechism). We cannot ever think of life only in terms of this present world, which is essentially so short and uncertain, capable of being mightily shaken and removed. It is shattering to think just how quickly all that we count essential to life can be swept away. It might do us good to live for a time in lands subject to typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and savage famine. What is our life? What have we that carries abiding and eternal worth (Jas. 4:13-14; 2 Pet. 3:7-15a)? What of the choices we are constantly faced with throughout life? Are they being made in terms of eternal salvation, holding fast to Christ, or are we, like these Hebrews, loosening our hold on the things pertaining to salvation as the things of the world tighten their hold on our thinking, feeling and desiring? We must look into the future in respect of being eternally saved or eternally lost. This is why we are solemnly urged not to refuse the Word God is speaking. It is not simply refusing a message from God but refusing a Person from God, Jesus who has come down to be to us perfect salvation (Heb. 1:1-4). The danger in refusing One who is able to save and to lead into life and victory is emphasised by reference to the rebellion of Israel not only at Sinai, when the mountain shook at the voice of God, but down through all their wanderings and journeys. They constantly refused and resisted the voice of God (Acts 7:51-53) and the consequences were disastrous. How much more dangerous it is to refuse Him who speaks from heaven (2:2ff; 10:29). If Christ is God's last word to man and men refuse that word, what then? God is silent. We have lost everything.

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12:25-29

The further emphasis here is that time is running out. The language concerning earthquake and the shaking of the heavens is found frequently in the Old Testament in connection with the coming of the Lord to vindicate His cause, to confound His enemies and to establish His kingdom (Isa. 2:19,21; 13:13; Haggai 2:6,7). Here in Hebrews we are faced with a 'cosmic convulsion' in which the whole universe will be shaken to pieces. Everything that is capable of being shaken will be shaken and the whole world-order as we know it will come to an end. The things which are seen are in fact temporal. They have no continuance. The only things with permanence are the unshakeable things that belong to Christ and, if our lives are hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:1-4), then we have indeed received a kingdom which cannot be moved (28). This is something which should evoke a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving which, graces that are essential elements in worship. It is also something which should quench the critical and complaining spirit. It is when we consider our place in God's

kingdom as something 'ordinary' and feel almost entitled to have it and all its privileges with the least possible effort expected of us in return, that we begin to drift, sometimes irretrievably, from God. Reverence and awe for the mighty God, described here as a consuming fire, are further elements of worship that we neglect at our peril. They are also aspects of life and service that are immensely practical. It is God with whom we have to do all along the line and it is to God that we must give account of ourselves (Rom. 14:10-13), our opinions of others not being asked for. And it is from God that we receive what is due for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). This is indeed reward and loss (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

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12:29

F F Bruce in his commentary on Hebrews quotes in respect of this verse a passage from George Adam Smith's commentary on Isa. 33:14. "To Isaiah life was so penetrated by the active justice of God, that he described it as bathed in fire, as blown through with fire. Righteousness was no mere doctrine to this prophet: it was the most real thing in history; it was the presence that pervaded and explained all phenomena. We shall understand the difference between Isaiah and his people if we have ever for our eyes' sake looked at a great conflagration through a coloured glass which allowed us to see the solid materials - stone, wood, and iron - but prevented us from seeing the flames and shimmering heat. To look thus is to see pillars, lintels and crossbeams twist and fall, crumble and fade; but how inexplicable the process seems! Take away the glass, and everything is clear. The fiery element is filling all the interstices that were blank to us before, and beating upon the solid material. The heat becomes visible, shimmering even where there is no flame. Just so had it been with the sinners in Judah these forty years Isaiah alone faced life with open vision, which filled up for him the interstices of experience and gave terrible explanation to fate Life as he saw it was steeped in flame - the glowing righteousness of God. Jerusalem was full of the spirit of justice, the spirit of burning. The light of Israel is for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame (Isaiah 4:4; 10:17) So Isaiah saw life, and flashed it on his countrymen. At last the glass fell from their eyes also, and they cried aloud Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" This aspect of God's character and activity is seldom spoken of these days but it constitutes a sound basis for considering the perplexing mysteries and agonies of world experience. We are dealing with a God who is in fact dealing with a world gone wrong, in both salvation and judgment.

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13:1-3

The last three chapters of Hebrews belong together and are an exposition and illustration of chapter 10:22-25. Chapter 11 expounds the way of faith; chapter 12 exhorts us to stand firm in Christ; and chapter 13 demonstrates the way of love. The whole epistle is a unity and speaks of Christian life. It is life grounded in the salvation of God, which is in Christ; it is lived by faith which believes God in spite of all; it is set against the background of eternity and the final consummation of history; and it is to be lived in practical grace. In today's verses we are not so much coming down from the heights of theology to the business of ordinary life, as taking daily life and lifting it up on to a spiritual level, recognising the whole of life in its every aspect as being the area of Christian service. Link 12:28 with 13:1, because gratitude to God and brotherly love go together. This love begins within the fellowship and sets value on those for whom Christ has died. This must necessarily determine our attitudes to each other, for we cannot deny love to those who are the object of His love every bit as much as we are. This love must be ready to receive those who are brought into the fellowship through the Gospel and must go on to sanctify and sweeten all human relationships, to quench all bitterness of ambition and to lead to contentment, which is as near Heaven as you can get on earth. The graces enumerated in this chapter are love, hospitality, sympathy, purity and contentment. These are the marks of spiritual maturity, and they make people attractive as opposed to cynical, hard and graceless. The believers addressed here had manifested love (6:1-12; 10:32-36) and they are urged to go on doing so (cf. Ps. 133:1; 1 Thess. 4:9-11). The words seem to indicate that a weakening of faith and spiritual resolution will manifest itself quickly in the absence of love. This love is not sentiment nor essentially to do with the feelings of natural attraction. It concerns action, the practical expressing of the love of Christ in our hearts. (Rom. 5:5; 1 John 3:16-18; 4:7-21; 1 Cor. 13:1-7; John 15:9-17; Gal. 6:1-5).

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13:1-3

Note how the operations of brotherly love follow immediately after the reference to godly fear in the previous chapter. Brotherly love (philadelphia) is not a cheap version of spiritual love (agape). It is affection of great depth directed to another person, as Jesus showed to Lazarus, Martha and Mary. It is the kind of love that makes fellowship possible, for it not only cares but respects the other person. It carries the other man's pack when he is weary, but not when he is lazy. It is the love that prays as well as cares, and asks not, 'Lord, show him how wrong he is,' but 'Lord, restore your own'. Out of this love there stems hospitality, not so much for our own circle of friends whose company we have enjoyed over a long period of time, but for the stranger who happens to come within the fellowship of the church at worship. In Timothy and Titus spiritual leadership has as one of its marks, hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; cf. Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). Of course, like all good things this can degenerate until it is not only a distraction from but a substitute for true growth in grace, and indeed an indulgence of carnal pleasure which focuses on self not Christ. But at the same time the spiritual worth of a cup of coffee and an hour of chat can be beyond measure, even though the chat may not on occasion have turned to spiritual subjects. Think of what it means to solitary Christians, not necessarily young ones, to be made part of some Christian family for a meal, an evening, or a week-end that enables them to attend a living church. Sometimes we are so concerned to look for avenues of Christian service that we miss the most glorious ones right before our eyes.

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13:1-3

The strangers we entertain may turn out to be angels, rogues or even devils, and it is evident from the New Testament epistles that there were wanderers whose main objective was to make use of the gentle hearted kindness of Christian people. Some turned out to be alien and disruptive elements and had to be dealt with accordingly (Rom. 16:17-18). But this must not deter us from genuine care and practical help, for even a chance encounter can lead to blessing and salvation for all concerned. We must be alive to the ministry of hospitality but wise enough to be balanced and strong enough not to allow presumption. Never forget (3) the need to sympathise, to suffer together with those who are in fact suffering for their faith or going through deep waters of experience, even although much of the distress might be the result of their own foolishness. Think of the wonderful ministry of Onesiphorus who sought out Paul in his time of need (2 Tim. 1:16-18). It is not enough to say, 'People know they can come and I will be glad to help.' The sick or wounded animal tends to hide and humans are no different. Remember that the good shepherd went looking for the stupid sheep who had got lost (Matt. 18:12-14). We must remember also our own feelings and hungers when we were going through trials and this will help us to be more kindly disposed to those presently suffering. Bearing one another's burdens is spiritual service (Gal. 6:2) and in a true fellowship of believers it should not be possible for any individual to suffer in isolation (1 Cor. 12:26). Tenderness of spirit is a wonderful grace and carries with it to those in need an instinctive awareness that such a person cares. This is why needy sinners gathered to Jesus. To sum it all up read Matt. 25:31-46.

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13:4

When the creation ordinance of marriage is devalued and dishonoured, and when human relationships are allowed to degenerate into indulgence, and when charity and chastity are set in opposition to each other, human society is in danger. Such abandoning of standards does not simply bring an inevitable harvest of human complication but rather the direct and active judgment of God. 'Marriage is honourable; let us keep it so, and the marriage bond inviolate; for God's judgment will fall upon fornicators and adulterers.' (NEB) This is a theme emphasised by Scripture and to be taken seriously in an age when easy-going standards of permissiveness are the accepted norm even among some professing Christians. Such chapters as Deut. 22 make plain the seriousness with which God views the whole matter of sexual misdemeanour, and in the New Testament such passages as Eph. 5:3-6; Col. 3:5-10; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; and 1 Cor. 6:9-20 bring a baptism of health and reality to the whole subject. There is no particular exaltation of nor superiority in either celibacy or marriage, for each person has his own special gift from God (1 Cor. 7:1-7). Marriage is a gift, not a right, and it is given to some and withheld from others in God's good will. If it is given, then the wisest course is to give it back to God for safekeeping so that the relationship may serve the purpose of God in the spiritual growth and service of the

individuals and the marriage. Remember that it was the woman given by God to be a helpmeet to Adam who caused God's man to fall (1 Tim. 2:13-14). It is what we do with our relationships or lack of them that is important, and both self-confidence and self-pity are unhealthy attitudes. The whole of 1 Corinthians 7, difficult though it be in parts, points the lesson. We live unto God, and our availability to Him is the test of our attitudes and actions.

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13:5-6

It is the spirit of worldliness displacing the spirit of godliness that militates against the maintenance of healthy, pure, and God-glorifying relationships. It is the same spirit of worldliness that can infiltrate our thinking and feeling and so affect and indeed determine our whole attitude to life. The love of money, which spawns all manner of evil (1 Tim. 6:10), is not necessarily a brash and obvious disposition. It is more likely to be quiet, surreptitious and creeping, conditioning our thinking almost without our noticing it, and we are fortunate indeed if we have friends and counsellors wise enough to make us stop and consider the operative values of our lives. Our Lord's words are searching in Matt. 6:24; Luke 12:13-21ff. as are Paul's words in 1 Tim. 6:3-10. The wise counsel of Proverbs 30:7-9 indicates a truly spiritual disposition, so necessary in a greedy and discontented generation. It is God alone who has the ordering of our affairs and He can change them in any direction with a swiftness that takes the breath away. Why God orders things as He does (and we are not unmindful of the injustices, pressures and complications of a fallen world) is often beyond our understanding. But faith must always say, 'My times are in Thy hands: my God I wish them there'. He is our peace. This is our rest. All things are in fact ours in Christ (1 Cor. 3: 21-23). This is the contentment spoken of in these verses. It is not foolishness nor improvidence. It is faith. If God be for us, who can be against us? Does it matter?

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13:7-8

This whole chapter is closely reasoned. In v.4 we are made aware of the necessary conflict of experience as Christians set standards in the world. In v.5-6 we are called to that contentment of spirit which sets us free to be real people in a fraudulent generation (Phil. 2:15). In today's verses we are directed in thought to the outcome or consummation of the life of faith of those who have led the way in the service of the Gospel. Remember your leaders (cf. v.17,24), those of earlier days and those still active, because their lives are centered on the unchanging Christ. Consider what they accomplished (cf. 11:33-40). They blazed a trail for others to follow, carving out the way of faith through the gloom, sin and confusion of a corrupted world. How did they do it? They got up on to high spiritual ground, saw the city of God, got their bearings and then in the valley pressed on in faith. These were men who endured to the end and who, 'when last seen were still climbing,' (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6-8). They lived and died by the unchanging Christ who has been expounded in this epistle in terms of all He is, has done, and is able to do. All that Jesus was to the men of the past, He is to us now, and He will be in all future days. This we can depend on. Think of Joshua 1:1-9. This Jesus is able to deal with all our yesterdays, restoring the years of waste (Joel 2:25). He answers all our today's, and promises to go with us into all the tomorrows (Matt. 26:32). Yesterday He died for us (5:7; 9:11-14); today He represents us in the presence of God (4:14-16); forever He lives to make intercession for us (7:25). "He pleads our cause at God's right hand, omnipotent to save" (Rom. 8:31-34ff). Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

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13:7-8

One of the greatest needs of Christian life is to learn how 'big' a Jesus we have, and to do this we need more than the four Gospels, wonderful as they are, presenting God's Man, balanced, integrated, poised because at peace within Himself, totally human and tender, master of the elements, smiter of evil, loving the sinner, calling people to follow Him and being so confident in Himself that He urges them to count the cost before starting. Never be ashamed to introduce Jesus in any company. He will never let you down, although some of His followers will. Who is this wonderful Jesus? He is everything everlasting. He upholds the universe by His word of power. And yet, for some strange reason, we fear that He will drop us. Consider these references and make this day's reading a true Bible study. Heb. 1:1-4,5,8,12,13; Col. 1:15-20; 2:9-15; Eph. 1:15-23; John 1:1-5,10-14; Luke 1:31-33; Isa. 9:6-7; Micah 5:2; Rev. 1:17-18; 3:7; 5:1-14. This is the Jesus we have. This is the

Christ who dwells in our hearts by faith. What more can we possibly need? What more is there to get? Christ is all.

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13:9-16

Christ is everything and He does not change. The Christians are now warned about anything and everything, however spiritual it may seem to be, that distracts them from this glorious fact. There always have been strange doctrines circulating within the Christian church, and the most dangerous of them are the ones claiming to be invested with some spiritual superiority. Such spiritual distractions are usually concerned with some extreme form of self-denial or self-expression, and the use of the word 'self' signifies the basic defect of these attitudes. Whenever our own sanctification takes up more of our thinking than Christ who is our sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30), we have moved away from that glorious centre of life, peace, joy and power which is the unchanging and unchangeable Christ. To see how real a problem this was in the early Christian church, consider Eph. 4:14-15; Col. 2:16-23; 1 Cor. 8:8; Rom. 14:17; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-9. Whatever competes with Christ, even though it claims to be an extension of Christ, is a denial of the Gospel. Christian maturity and growth in grace is growth *in Christ* and a disposition of life settled in Christ rather than in the moods which so easily assail us. Now some by personality are more prone to 'moods' than others, but we must never allow the Devil to make capital out of our propensities or inhibitions. There is no need for it to be so, since we have Christ and He is stronger than all. But there is a practical aspect to this. Immaturity lets itself go with the mood, carried by its surges, and usually reacts against people and God alike. Maturity recognises the mood and the absence of joy but gets on with the business of Christian life and service, which take automatic priority over personal indulgence of moods. This is what grace is all about.

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13:9-16

The main thrust of this passage with all its detail is to emphasise to these Hebrew Christians that they must come out from the old associations of the past and go on into the new with Christ, even though that will certainly involve them in scorn and contempt from their old colleagues and from the world in general, particularly the religious world. The sequence of thought seems to be that in Christ we are part of something that began before we appeared on the scene and will go on after we have gone. This does not mean we are irrelevant or insignificant, but that we have a part to play that cannot be shunted on to others (7-9). In v.10-14 we are told that we have something, an altar and a sacrifice, not visible, tangible and earthly like the old order which centred on the Tabernacle and its worship, but spiritual and eternal. What we have is Christ (who was prefigured in the Old Testament worship and sacrifices) and all that is in Christ is available for us to partake of. It is ours by God's command. But the Christ we have is outside the camp; He is always the One who is 'despised and rejected of men'; the world will never understand what people 'see' in Christ and what it contemptuously calls 'evangelical religion'. Those who in this world go 'out' to Christ will most certainly feel 'outside', but being outside is not loss but gain, for it is to Christ that we go (cf. Phil. 3:7ff). No doubt the Hebrews would be quick to recall Exodus 33: 7-11, 14. It is quite a thing to burn your boats and go with God. It means glory.

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13:9-16

There is a constant temptation to tie down our Christianity to this world and to limit our fellowship with Christ to certain stated occasions, whether infrequent communion seasons or even Sundays. But if we localise or ritualise our dealings with God we are falling back into the habit and attitude of the old covenant. We will also inhibit our service in the Gospel, for our tendency will be to withdraw from the world and to make our spiritual activity far too much centred on and confined to a building. How will the world of men, dying without hope, ever get to know the Christ who is able to save to the uttermost? We must go out to Christ, identifying ourselves with Him. We must stand up and be counted. We must be willing to go the way the Master went. He yielded His life. There is no other way to fruitful service than a 'dying to self', not only dying to sin. This is how the Gospel was carried in power to the world. Read 2 Cor. 4:7-18, not least to see how Paul links his suffering experience to the things of eternity. The same emphasis is in Hebrews. We have nothing here that is permanent (1 John 2:15-17) and just how transitory it all is is seen in James 4:13-15. But we have Christ and we are with Him. It is this thought that calls (15-16) for the sacrifice of thanksgiving and gratitude, together with the praise

of God which is expressed in countless deeds of kindness and the free offer of fellowship to all who need it and desire it. Share what you have with others, for what you have is Christ and from Christ. Selfishness and unwillingness can never be justified. Who would be slow to jump at the chance of serving such a Saviour? If the truth be told, many!

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13:17-19

It is always difficult to acquire and to preserve a balanced and authentic attitude to spiritual leaders within the church, and this is particularly so in a generation such as ours when every suggestion of authority and any seeming suggestion of inequality is resented. That all believers are equal in dignity before God is manifest in Scripture, and this must determine our attitude to each other. But at the same time God has set in His church those whose functions in spiritual things differ (Eph. 4: 1-13). They differ, as the members of the body differ, but each one's capacity, function and usefulness is as God has ordained, and all function in a complementary way, without competition or envy (1 Cor. 12:4-11,14-18,27-28). Spiritual maturity and faithfulness consist in being what God has ordained and set us to be, to the fullest extent of our capacity by His grace, and not insisting on being what we were never meant to be. There is glorious release in grasping this truth as it is expressed, for example, in Rom. 12: 3-8. Of course, as was evident in the Corinthian church, leadership in spiritual things can become a serious focus of distraction from God and hindrance to His work. This, in Corinth, was not initiated by wrong thinking on the part of the leaders but by spiritual shallowness on the part of some who, having succumbed to the wiles of the Devil, began to feel that the only way to affirm their own spiritual integrity was by denigrating the spiritual usefulness and value of others. What we all need to remember is how utterly useless we would be in every sense but for the grace of God. If we are anything, it is a gift (1 Cor. 4: 6-7).

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13:17-19

God sets His leaders in their places and the Hebrews are told to remember them (7), to obey them (17) and to recognise them (24) even as the church recognised them. Remember how Paul defended his own apostleship and how he spoke in support of his junior colleagues in respect of their ministry and the need for them to be received, supported and assisted on their way (Rom. 16:2). But, of course, leaders themselves are men under authority. They have only delegated rights and in their allocated work they are, in some senses, not to be envied. They may not seek to be or to do other than what God has apportioned to them and they must live in the awareness that they must give account to God of their ministry and leadership (1 Cor. 3:1-15; James 3:1). God holds the shepherd responsible for the flock and such a thought must cause him considerable concern, even to the point of losing sleep in watching over them. Think of Paul's agitation and distraction from his evangelical labours when he was worried about a certain group of Christians (2 Cor. 2:12-13). When the leader gives account to God he wants to do so with joy, not sorrow, and this end can be accomplished only by the mutual effort of pastor and people. If, on account of defection (the pressing issue in the Hebrews' situation), the leader must report with sorrow, the 'loss' will be to those who have defected. This is the serious theme spoken of by Paul in Phil. 2:14-18; 1 Thess. 2:17-20; and reflected in Acts 20:17-21,26-31,33-35. Spiritual leadership can be resented but if we are mindful of God's words to unfaithful shepherds in Ezek. 34:1-10 we will be more likely to pray than to criticise, unless we find pleasure in the downfall of another. If that be the case a poison has entered our souls. We are in danger.

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13:17-19

There is no greater joy than to speak to God and to others about our spiritual children and to do so with pleasure and confidence (cf. 3 John 1-4). There is no greater sorrow than to plead unavailingly with those who have drifted away but who are persuaded they have made spiritual advance (Gal. 5:7). It is to the whole fellowship that the appeal is made in v.18. 'Pray for us!' That is the heart cry of every true leader. It is based here not on any claim to perfection nor blamelessness but on a testimony of having done the will of God so far as the man knew his own heart. The good conscience spoken of here is best expressed in Paul's words in 2 Cor. 2:12; 6:3 , 'Our conscience assures us that in our dealings with our fellow men, and above all in our dealings with you, our conduct has been governed by a devout and godly sincerity, by the grace of God and not by worldly wisdom . . .

In order that our service may not be brought into discredit, we avoid giving offence in anything.' (NEB) Just how much we should read into v.19 with regard to any tensions or resentment is difficult to judge. Things are often read into situations when no such things were intended and the resultant emotional confusion is used by the Devil to work a breach of fellowship. Just what restraint was operating to prevent the writer coming to them is not clear. What is clear is this: the thing to do is to pray. The more you are concerned about your leaders (secular or spiritual) and the more you are disappointed in them and critical of them, the more you should pray for them. Take them on your heart (there is no other way to pray) and carry them into the presence of God, as the men in the gospel story did with their paralysed friend. Everyone called of God to lead in spiritual things says this: 'Brethren, pray for us' (1 Thess. 5:25).

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13:20-21

This tremendous prayer is more to be savoured than expounded. It centres on God who does everything on a big scale. To these Hebrew Christians, so conscious of and fearful of the tumultuous times they were living in, the mention of 'the God of peace working in them' must have both stilled their hearts and stirred them. They had read and studied a long epistle that expounds salvation. Now they were told that the God who worked that for us is the God who works that same salvation in us. What is more, this mighty God is the God of peace who works in terms of resurrection from the dead. The Jesus on whom their thoughts had been centred is described in terms of the great Shepherd of the sheep (John 10:11 ff) who by the shedding of His precious blood sealed the everlasting covenant. Christians are spoken of here as being those equipped by God Himself with everything good (1 Pet. 1:3-9), in order that they might work God's will to God's glory. The only response to all that is to say, 'Amen, let it be so, and let us get on with it,' so that God may fulfill His purpose and our destiny. This is the eagerness of faith and it is the answer to fear and uncertainty. In the midst of all possible pressures of experience, inward and outward, God has been working, is working, and will go on working in respect of His people and His kingdom. That working is on the scale of the power of the resurrection and it cannot be frustrated. He has covenanted to do it and not even death can prevent the final blessing of His people because death itself has been overcome. The epistle began with God and ends with God; perhaps we need Paul's words of doxology in Romans 11:33-36 to give us the right 'feel' of these verses.

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13:20-21

God is the God of peace, always at peace in Himself concerning the entire perfection of His purposes from eternity to eternity, and promising peace to His people. Read Isa. 26:3-4; John 14:1,27; Rom. 15:13-33; 16:20; Phil. 4:4-9; Col. 3:15. The emphasis in Hebrews is not so much on the God who makes peace (Col. 1:20) and brings peace as the God who is in Himself peace. We are being made to think of a Person of mighty tranquillity and serenity, eternally at peace in Himself, the God of assurance with no shadow of uncertainty ever falling on Him or from Him. He is the One in whom there is no variableness due to change (Jas. 1:17) and in the mighty operations of His grace and power He is ever far above all irritation, agitation or pressure. He is never hard put to it to decide and to act. He knows what He is doing, and He does it perfectly. 'I will work and who will hinder it?' (Isa. 43:13). Read also Isa. 43:1-7 and Isa. 40:21-31. What a God! But never think of peace merely in terms of absence of conflict and turmoil. The God of peace is an active God in whose work there is no stagnation, but His activity is to be likened to a wheel spinning so steadily that the human eye can be deceived into thinking it is motionless. We tend to confuse power with commotion. It was not so when God brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus. That was indeed a quiet miracle but its outworking turned the world upside down. We need to be reminded often that the life we live as Christians is lived in the power of the resurrection (Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:15-21; 3:20). Think what Spirit dwells within you, and think often of His determination to work out in you and for you the perfect salvation of God. The only reference to the resurrection in this whole epistle is in this verse but the whole epistle teaches us of the Ascension and the fact that our Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. It is from the standpoint of the throne that we must view all the future possibilities of life. It is all immensely vast and glorious.

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13:20-21

Following on from the close of yesterday's reading we take note of the fact that the very dimension of God's glorious purposes can at times make us fainthearted, almost as if we felt it was all too good to be true. How the Devil likes to entangle us in the mesh of our feelings of failure. This is perhaps why we are faced now with the description of Jesus as the Shepherd and the Mediator of the new and better covenant. These Hebrew Christians would look back over the whole history of Israel, the Exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, the journeying in the wilderness, the history of the kings, the captivity in Babylon and the restoration, down through the story of Ezra and Nehemiah over the generations until in the fulness of the time Christ was born. They would think of the story of the Gospel and of the early days of the apostolic church and they could come to only one conclusion: the faithfulness of God. Think of the great High Priestly prayer being offered now in the presence of God (John 17). What encouragement it gives, especially when we read here of God's equipment of His people. It is a word which speaks of supplying what is lacking (1 Thess. 3:10), of restoring what has been dislocated (Gal. 6:1), and of mending in preparation for further use (Mark 1:19). In this business of equipping, putting into proper condition, the emphasis is on the skill of the hand of the One doing it. God attends to the detailed fitting out of His people with everything good, holding back nothing, so that they may come to a full-orbed, fully developed personality, human and spiritual, just like Jesus. All this working in us, for us and through us is that God's will may be brought to pass, and that will, in experience, we prove to be good, perfect and acceptable (Rom. 12:1-2). According to Jesus it is also peace and rest (Matt. 11:25-30). What a word to all the complicated Jacobs of this world (Gen. 28:15)!

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13:22-25

These closing verses are not in any sense an anti-climax for they bring all the glorious truths of this epistle right down to the common day-by-day life of ordinary people. There may be a touch of humor in v.22 when the writer refers to the brevity of his exhortation. Possibly the whole of Hebrews would have been read to the gathered company of believers in one meeting for worship and it has been suggested that such a 'bible reading' would have lasted about one hour. In one sense, though complete in itself, the epistle leads on to further study and the writer has indicated that there is indeed more to be said (5:11; 9:5). This is the only account we have of Timothy being in prison and we wonder how that sensitive young man coped with such an experience. The writer obviously has confidence in him, for he indicates that he expects to join up with Timothy and continue the work of the gospel. Do not fail to see the fellowship that bound together these early believers and how there was much coming and going among them in the interest of God's business. The Christians are told to greet or salute their leaders (who would have been present when the epistle was read) and to greet each other, remembering those perhaps unable to be present in the gathering. How much we can do for each other if only we are so minded. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are sufficient indeed to make us be and become all we should be. Amen, so let it be.

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