

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: HEBREWS

HEBREWS

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

HEBREWS CHAPTER 1

1:1 I have suggested on [Heb. 13:22](#) that Hebrews was originally a transcript of a sermon at the breaking of bread meeting at the Jerusalem church, turned into written form, with a few practical comments appended to it at the very end. This accounts for various stylistic features in the book which would otherwise appear rather odd. The style and use of language is very clearly Pauline; that is beyond serious denial. Paul's major concern was that there was going to be a great falling away from the faith, and the initial cause of this was the Judaizing campaign against him and his converts. The large Christian church at Jerusalem, along with the other Palestinian congregations, were under particular pressure to return to Judaism. And it was against this background that Hebrews was written.

I noted throughout [commentary on Acts 7](#) that there are so many connections between Stephen's speech and Hebrews. The Jerusalem church, to whom Hebrews was primarily addressed, would have known Stephen well. Hebrews is full of allusions to Stephen's speech, and my suggestion is that it was not Stephen writing to his own church before his death, but rather Paul expanding upon Stephen's speech. As the bitterly angry Saul, keenly listening to Stephen and grasping his every allusion, he would have felt the goads of Scripture sticking into his conscience. He remembered every word, and after his conversion, he took Stephen's thoughts further. Hebrews, I suggest, is his development of Stephen's words and ideas. The

historical characters mentioned by Stephen are also mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 11. Paul draws his sermon in Hebrews towards a conclusion by speaking of how we as Christians have come into association with "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborns, who are enrolled in heaven; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:22,23). It seems to me certain that Paul had Stephen in mind at this point, a clearly 'just man', who had asked the Lord Jesus in Heaven to receive his spirit, as one of "the spirits of just men made perfect", and whose name as a martyr was for sure "enrolled in Heaven". The anonymity of the letter would be appropriate, as Paul was seen as a heretic and *persona non grata* among many of the Jewish Christians who were turning back to Judaism.

1:1 *God, who at various times and in various ways- Polymeros... polytropos* is framed in such a way as to aid memorization, and would be typical of a spoken address; see on 13:22 and 1 Thess. 2:1.

Spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets- The Lord was "the word made flesh"; having spoken to us through the words of the prophets, God now speaks to us in His Son (Heb. 1:1,2 RV). His revelation in that sense hasn't finished; it is ongoing. Right now, the Lord Jesus speaks with a voice like many waters and a sword of flame- according to John's vision of the Lord's post-resurrection glory.

In the first century, you usually began a letter with a preface, saying who you were and to whom you were writing. The letter to the Hebrews has a preface which speaks simply of the greatness of Christ (Heb. 1:1-3), tackling the devaluing of the Lord Jesus and the role of Messiah generally which was being done by the Judaizers. The higher critics speak of how the preface has been lost or got detached. But no, the form of Heb. 1:1-3 is indeed that of a preface. The point is that the greatness of Christ, of which the letter speaks, is so great as to push both the author and audience into irrelevancy and obscurity. It's significant that the New Testament writers speak so frequently of Jesus as simply "the Lord". This would've been strange to first century ears. Kings and pagan gods always had their personal name added to the title 'the Lord'- e.g. 'the Lord Sarapis'. To just speak of "the Lord" was unheard of. The way the New Testament speaks like this indicates the utter primacy of the Lord Jesus in the minds of believers, and the familiarity they had with speaking about Him in such exalted terms.

1:2 *Has in these last times spoken to us in the Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, on account of whom also He structured the ages-* The immediate purpose of the exalted language applied to Jesus in Hebrews was to tackle the devaluing of Him by the Judaism element within the church. Judaism understood the likes of David and Moses to be far higher than Messiah, whoever He was (hence the Lord's argument that David called Messiah his Lord, Lk. 20:44). This has of course led to passages like Heb. 1:2 being misunderstood to believe that Jesus created the earth. It could be argued that the prologue to Hebrews is based upon the prologue to John's Gospel. The same ideas recur- the Word of God from the beginning come to expression in Christ, "all things", glory, etc. Note the similarity between "apart from him not one thing came into being" (Jn. 1:3) and Heb. 2:8, "not one thing is not left put under him". Jn. 1:3 stated that "all things" were created by the Word, i.e. the logos / intention which God had of the Messiah. Heb. 1:2 clarifies this (because of misunderstandings in the early church?) to define the "all things" as all the ages of human history. These were framed by God with the Christ in mind. Later in Hebrews we meet the same idea- Heb. 11:3 speaks of how the ages were framed and then goes on to give examples of Old Testament characters who displayed their faith and understanding of the future Messiah.

It should be noted that the 'ages' which Christ was to be involved in creating refer to "the world to come"- for Heb. 2:5 says that this passage is speaking about "the world to come". Heb. 9:26 adds indirect support by commenting that Christ died at the end of "the (singular) age"; the ages [plural] to come are the eternity of God's Kingdom which is made possible through His work. Thus the idea is not that He created the world, but rather that through His work, the ages /to come/ were made possible through Him. And therefore those ages before Him find their meaning in the context of He who was to come and open the way to eternal ages.

We read of "the Son... by whom [Gk. *dia*] He [God] also made the worlds [Gk. *aion*]"'. '*Dia*' can mean 'for whom / for the sake of / on account of'. It doesn't *always* mean that, as it's a word of wide usage- but it very often does mean 'on account of' and actually frequently it *cannot* mean 'by'. There are stacks of examples listed in [Appendix 11 of The Real Christ](#). Thus in a creation context, we read that all things were created *dia*, for the sake of, God's pleasure (Rev. 4:11). Significantly, when 2 Pet. 3:5 speaks of how the world was created "by" the word of God, the word *dia* isn't used- instead *hoti*, signifying 'causation through'. This isn't the word used in Heb. 1:2 about the creation of the *aion* on account of, *dia*, the Son. Eve was created *dia* Adam- she wasn't created *by* Adam, but *for the sake of* Adam (1 Cor. 11:9). 1 Cor. 8:6 draws a helpful distinction between *ek* [out of whom] and *dia*- all things are *ek* God, but *dia*, on account of, Christ (1 Cor. 8:6). The context of Heb. 1:2 features many examples of where *dia* clearly means 'for the sake of' rather than 'by'. Just a little later we read in Heb. 1:14 of how the Angels are "ministering spirits" who minister *dia*, for the sake of, the believers. Because of [*dia*] Christ's righteousness, God exalted Him (Heb. 1:9). The Mosaic law was "disannulled" *dia* "the weakness and unprofitableness thereof" (Heb. 7:18). The weakness of the law didn't disannul the law; the law was disannulled by God *for the sake of* the fact it was so weak. Levi paid tithes *dia* Abraham (Heb. 7:9), not *by* Abraham, but *for the sake of* the fact he was a descendant of Abraham. Jesus was not an Angel *dia* the suffering of death (Heb. 2:9). Clearly here the word means 'for the sake of' rather than 'by'. Jesus was born a man *for the reason that* He could die. He was not an Angel who was then made 'not an Angel' *by* the fact of death. That makes no sense.

Note that *aion* [AV "worlds"] is a plural- if this verse means 'Jesus created the earth', then, did He create multiple, plural 'earths'? That the word means 'the ages' or 'an age' is again clear from seeing how else '*aion*' is used. In almost every case where the word *aion* occurs in the New Testament, it doesn't mean 'the physical planet earth', but rather an age or situation on the earth, rather than the physical planet. In Eph. 2:7 we read of "the ages to come"- and it is the word *aion* again. The church will glorify Jesus "throughout all generations", and this is paralleled with the phrase 'the *aion* of the *aions*' [Eph. 3:21- AV "world without end"; the same parallel occurs in Col. 1:26, "hid from *aions* and from generations"]. Clearly *aion* refers to periods of time rather than a physical planet. Just a few verses after Heb. 1:2, we read that the son will reign 'for the *aions* and the *aions*', or in English "for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8). Surely the combined message is that the previous ages / *aions* existed only for the sake of Christ, and He will rule over all future *aions*. There is the *aion* to come [AV "the world to come", Heb. 6:5], and Christ will be a priest "for ever" [Gk. 'for the *aion*', Heb. 5:6]. The *aion* to come is the eternity of God's Kingdom. It will be, in somewhat hyperbolic language, an eternity of eternities. Later in Hebrews we read that Jesus made His sacrifice for sin "in the end of the world / *aion*" (Heb. 9:26). If an *aion* ended at the death of Jesus, then clearly the word doesn't refer to the physical planet- but rather to the age which then ended. The Hebrew writer clinches this view of *aion* in Heb. 11:3, where he prefaces his outline of Bible history from Abel to the restoration from Babylon by saying

that the ages / *aion* are framed by the word of God. Response by faith to God's word, seeing the invisible with the eye of faith, occurred amongst the faithful in every *aion*. The *aion* [AV "worlds"] were framed by the word of God. Consider other uses of the word *aion* where clearly it refers to the ages and not to a literal planet (Mk. 4:19; Lk. 1:70; 16:8; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:6,8; 3:19; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:10).

The whole of history, with all its ages, and all that is to come, exists solely for the sake of Christ. He is the One who gives meaning to history. Further, if this verse means 'Jesus created the earth', then OK, question: Genesis and many other passages say *God* created. If this says Jesus was the actual creator, then is Jesus directly equal to God? Also, if Heb 1:2 is saying that *Jesus* is the creator of earth, the One through whom God did the job, then, *why* do we have to wait until Hebrews to know that? There's no indication in Genesis or even in the whole Old Testament nor in the teaching of Jesus that Jesus was the creator of earth on God's behalf. That's my problem with the pre-existence idea- it's nowhere in the Old Testament. So would believers have been held in ignorance of this fact for 4000 years? If so, then, is it so important to covenant relationship with God? I am sure David, Abraham etc. believed that *God* and *not* Messiah created the earth. If they'd have been asked: 'Did *Messiah* create the earth, or God? Does Messiah now exist?', they'd have answered 'No' both times. Surely?

It is argued by trinitarians that *dia* + the genitive, as we have in Heb. 1:2, means that the ages were made by the instrumentality of Christ. But *dia* + genitive doesn't only mean 'by whose instrumentality'. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, p. 90 explains the uses of *dia* with genitive:

"1. With a genitive, through

a. Used of place or medium through

b. Used of time, during in the course of; through

c. Used of immediate agency, causation, instrumentality, by means of, by; of means or manner, through, by, with

d. Used of state or condition, in a state of".

Meaning (b) appears relevant to Heb. 1:2 because it is *dia* Christ that the *aions* (a time reference) were created. This would require us to read in an ellipsis: "Through the (period of the ministry of) the Son, God framed the ages". Or, "Through(out) the Son, God framed the ages", i.e. all God's purpose throughout the ages was framed with Christ in mind. Acts 3:18 uses *dia* + genitive to explain how God had spoken of Christ "by" or throughout the period of all His "holy prophets".

1:3 *Who being the brightness of His glory and the exact image of His person, upholds all things by the word of his power*- Nearly all the titles of Christ used in the letter to the Hebrews are taken from Philo or the Jewish book of Wisdom. The writer to the Hebrews is seeking to apply them in their correct and true sense to the Lord Jesus. This explains why some titles are used which can easily be misunderstood by those not appreciating this background. For example, Philo speaks of "the impress of God's seal", and Hebrews applies this to the Lord Jesus. The phrase has been misinterpreted by Trinitarians as meaning that Jesus is therefore God; but this wasn't at all the idea behind the title in Philo's writings, and neither was it when the letter to the Hebrews took up the phrase and applied it to Jesus. This sort of thing goes on far more often than we might think in the Bible- existing theological ideas are re-cast and re-presented in their correct light, especially with reference to the Lord Jesus. Arthur Gibson notes that "there is an important second level within religious language: it is a reflection upon, a criticism of, a correction of, or a more general formulation of, expressions which previously occur".

3 Enoch [also known as *The Hebrew Book Of Enoch*] spoke much of an Angel called

Metatron, "the prince of the presence", "the lesser Yahweh", who appeared as Yahweh to Moses in Ex. 23:21, sat on "the throne of glory" etc (3 Enoch 10-14). Early Jewish Christianity appears to have mistakenly reapplied these ideas to Jesus, resulting in the idea the first of all Jesus was an Angel, and then coming to full term in the doctrine of the Trinity. J. Danielou devotes the whole fourth chapter of his survey of the development of Christian doctrine to the study of how Jewish views of Angels actually led on to the Trinity. Paul's style was not to baldly state that everything believed in by the Jews was wrong; he recognized that the very nature of apostasy is in the mixing of the true and the false. He speaks of how Jesus truly has been exalted and sits at God's right hand (Rom. 8:34) and has been given God's Name, as the Angel was in Exodus (Phil. 2:9-11); but his whole point is that whilst that may indeed be common ground with the Jewish ideas, the truth is that Jesus is *not* an Angel. He came into physical existence through Mary ("made / born of a woman", Gal. 4:4), and as the begotten Son of God has been exalted above than any Angel. The language of Heb. 1:3-6 clearly alludes to the Metatron myth and deconstructs it in very clear terms. For Jesus is described as "being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image / pattern of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee? and again, I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son? And when he again bringeth in the firstborn into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him".

When he had accomplished the purification of sins- In a sense, all sins were purged by the Lord's death. Sin, the 'devil' of Heb. 2:14, was destroyed; He "made an end of sins" (Dan. 9:24). We can easily forget the wonder of this; Peter uses the same word about those who had forgotten their purging [s.w.] from their old sins (2 Pet. 1:9). They lacked the spiritual vision to look back to the cross and perceive that now, human sin is no longer a barrier between God and ourselves. The Lord's blood is therefore of such power as to purify even our conscience from the guilt of past sins (Heb. 9:14; Tit. 2:14). But this was all achieved at a specific historical point- when the Lord died on the cross. We receive not only the word of pardon, that we are forgiven; but the deep cleansing from sin on a psychological level, achieved by the Lord Jesus working through His Spirit in the believer.

The allusion is to the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. The Lord sits down having done this, whereas the priests remained standing, as their work was never done. We note that sin has been dealt with- we have been purified. We are saved. As Daniel 9 prophesied of Messiah, He "made an end of sins".

He then sat down on the right hand- In his time of dying, Stephen saw the Lord Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). But about 13 times in the New Testament, the point is made that the Lord *sits* there, unlike the Mosaic priests who stood (Heb. 10:12). The Lord Jesus was passionately feeling for Stephen; and He just as emotionally and passionately feels for us in our struggles. This alone should lift us out of the mire of mediocrity. Prayer will have meaning and power. It won't just be the repetitious conscience-salver it can descend into. Many of those 13 NT references to the Lord being seated at the right hand of God are in Hebrews; and this again encourages us to see Hebrews as Paul's deeper reflections upon Stephen's speech. This would especially be the case if the Jews in the council actually saw something of what Stephen saw.

Of the Majesty in Heaven- It is a majestic, glorious theme of the Bible that God is revealed as a real being. It is also a fundamental tenet of Christianity that Jesus is the Son of God. If God is not a real being, then it is impossible for Him to have a Son who was the "image of His *person*" (Heb. 1:3). The Greek word actually means His "substance" (RV). Further, it becomes difficult to develop a personal, living relationship with 'God', if 'God' is

just a concept in our mind. It is tragic that the majority of religions have this unreal, intangible conception of God.

1:4 *He thus became so much better than the angels, as he has inherited a more excellent name than they-* Judaism was obsessed with Angels, reflecting the pagan notion that there were various 'spirits' controlling various aspects of life. This idea likewise entered the Catholic and Orthodox churches. But the point is laboured here that the Lord Jesus as begotten Son of God is far better than Angels. The more excellent Name would appear from :5 to be connected to His Sonship. Angels are also "sons of God" but not in the ultimate sense in which the Lord Jesus was the only begotten Son. Angels too can bear and manifest the Yahweh Name just as we can, but the Lord inherited that Name in a "more excellent" sense than them; for He had achieved the characteristics of that Name within His own personality. This all adds even more wonder to the fact that by being "in Christ", all that is true of Him becomes true of us; and we are co-heirs with Him, inheriting as He did (Rom. 8:17), fully sharing in all His glorification.

Hebrews stresses the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, and how true faith is Christ-centered. The audience were those who had initially been convicted of their sins against Him, had accepted His resurrection and exaltation, and had repented. They had been baptized into Him and accepted His full forgiveness, and rejoiced in the absolute certainty of their salvation. And so they were characterized by "boldness" in their preaching. They are being urged to maintain that boldness and confidence *in Him*. But they had drifted from that. The pull of the Jewish system, the human desire to return to your culture of origin, weariness from persecution, the spirit of the world around them urging them to get caught up in anti-Roman Jewish nationalism, arguments within the church, false teaching... the loneliness of the long distance runner... had all taken its toll. And so they are being urged to get back to Jesus, and to the original message they had responded to- that the crucified Lord Jesus was not only alive, but highly exalted in Heaven. This is why Hebrews 1 begins with all this talk of the Lord's highly exalted status- to get them back to their Christian roots, their "original confidence" (Heb. 3:6,14). Their drift into 'we can be Christian but not see anything so unique in Jesus, we can remain within Judaism quite comfortably' is, in essence, akin to the drifting of Christians in our age towards the post modernism which surrounds us. Hebrews 1 uses extreme language about the Lord's exaltation, rather than seeking to put it to the Hebrew Christians in terms which they might be more comfortable with. The language is so extreme that careless expositors have pressed it into service to justify the pagan idea of the Trinity. But the extreme language is there in order to force the audience to realize that Jesus is indeed highly exalted- and they had to live in response to that. There was no way to compromise nor renegotiate His high exaltation- and the response required from us who accept Him as our Lord and Master.

1:5 *For to which of the angels said He at any time: You are my Son, this day have I begotten you? And again: I will be to him a Father and he shall be to me a Son?*- The "more excellent Name" which the Lord inherited (:4) therefore appears to be "My Son". Now we can understand why :2 strangely speaks in Greek of simply "by Son", not "His Son". Rom. 1:4 says the same- He was "declared to be the Son of God with power" by the resurrection. This is why Psalm 2, about the Lord's birth, is applied to different points of His career. He was presented as God's Son in the fullest sense when He received Divine nature at His resurrection. Note that His Name now given is "Son" and not 'Yahweh'. And this is why confession of faith in Jesus as "Son of God" is seen as the essence of belief in Him.

Ps. 2:7 is applied to the Lord's resurrection in Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4. But the rest of Psalm 2 is quoted about various points of the Lord's work; at His birth, death, resurrection, return and at the time of the final rebellion against Him. And the original application appears

to be to David and then to Hezekiah. Clearly it is not always so that if a verse is quoted in one context in the New Testament, then the surrounding context of the original quotation must refer to the same time. And it is likewise clear that the same scripture can have multiple fulfillments; Psalm 2 is a classic case of that. The insistence upon context as the guiding light of interpretation is often misplaced; because the mind behind the word of God does not work according to the Greek influenced linear thinking of the European mind, with its emphasis upon logical corollary and linear progression and development of thought and context.

James Dunn quotes Tertullian, Justin, Epiphanius and Clement as all believing that the Lord Jesus was an Angel: "So too Jewish Christians of the second and third centuries specifically affirmed that Christ was an angel or archangel... Justin's identification of the angel of Yahweh with the [supposedly] pre-existent Christ". It was this Jewish obsession with Angels, and the desire to make Jesus understandable as an Angel, which led to the idea that He personally pre-existed and was not quite human. And hence the specific and repeated emphasis of the New Testament that the Lord was *not* an Angel but *because* He was a man and *not* an Angel He has been exalted far *above* Angels (Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:16; 2:8-10; Heb. 1; 1 Pet. 1:12; 3:22; Rev. 5:11-14). It's the same with the idea of Melchizedek, whom the Qumran community and writings understood as an Archangel. The commentary upon Melchizedek in Hebrews stresses that he was a *man* ("consider how great this *man* was...", Heb. 7:4)- therefore *not* an Angel. He was a *foreshadowing* of Christ, and not Christ Himself. It would appear that the commentary upon Melchizedek in Hebrews is actually full of indirect references to the Qumran claims about Melchizedek being an Angel and somehow being the Messiah. Sadly, too many trinitarians today have made the same mistake as the Jews- arguing that Melchizedek was somehow Jesus personally. The Jews of Qumran were quite obsessed with Angels- they also suggested that Gabriel was somehow the pre-existent Messiah. Bearing that in mind, it would appear that the descriptions of the Angel Gabriel announcing the conception and birth of Jesus are almost purposefully designed to show that Gabriel and Jesus are *not* the same but are two quite different persons (Mt. 1:20,24; 2:13,19; Lk. 1:11,19,26-38; 2:9).

Hebrews 1 can be a passage which appears to provide perhaps the strongest support for both the 'Jesus is God' and 'Jesus is not God' schools. Meditating upon this one morning, I suddenly grasped what was going on. The writer is in fact purposefully juxtaposing the language of Christ's humanity and subjection to the Father, with statements and quotations which apply the language of God to Jesus. But the emphasis is so repeatedly upon the fact that God did this to Jesus. God gave Jesus all this glory. Consider the evidence: It is God who begat Jesus (Heb. 1:5), God who told the Angels to worship Jesus (Heb. 1:6), it was "God, even your God" who anointed Jesus, i.e. made Him Christ, the anointed one (Heb. 1:9); it was God who made Jesus sit at His right hand, and makes the enemies of His Son come into subjection (Heb. 1:13); it was God who made / created Jesus, God who crowned Jesus, God who set Jesus over creation (Heb. 2:7), God who put all in subjection under Jesus (Heb. 2:8). And yet interspersed between all this emphasis- for that's what it is- upon the superiority of the Father over the Son... we find Jesus addressed as "God" (Heb. 1:8), and having Old Testament passages about God applied to Him (Heb. 1:5,6). The juxtaposition is purposeful. It is to bring out how the highly exalted position of Jesus was in fact granted to Him by 'his God', the Father, who remains the single source and giver of all exaltation, and who, to use the Lord's very own words, "is greater than [Christ]" (Jn. 14:28).

1:6 *And again, when He brings the firstborn into the world He says: And let all the angels of God worship him-* "Brings" is strictly 'brings again' and refers to the resurrection, as noted on :5. The quotation is not from the Masoretic Text but from the Septuagint of Dt. 32:43 and perhaps Ps. 97:7. This indicates that the inspired writer considered that material in the LXX which is not in the Hebrew text is inspired by God and worthy of quotation as such.

The context of both those passages is hardly that of the Lord's resurrection; but as noted on :5, the New Testament writers tend to quote without attention to context. Dt. 32:43 LXX is also quoted by Paul in Rom. 15:10. Another example of this kind of thing would be how in Romans 3 there is a quotation from Ps. 14:1-7 LXX; but six of the quoted verses are not in the Hebrew text.

We might well wonder why Paul is quoting verses only found in the LXX in order to prove that the Lord Jesus is greater than Angels; and why he insists on quoting only from the LXX. It's as if he is making some kind of point about the Septuagint. I suggested on 1:1 that Paul was appealing to the Jerusalem Christians, in terms which recalled the witness of their famous martyr Stephen. What brought about Stephen's demise was his apparent backing of the Greek speaking Jews in the Jerusalem church. This might explain why Paul is appealing specifically to them by quoting so insistently from the Septuagint and even from passages which are only to be found there and not in the Hebrew text.

1:7 *And of the angels He says: Who makes His angels winds, and His servants a flame a fire-* The quotation from Ps. 103:4 LXX only demonstrates the Lord's supremacy over Angels by stating that God makes the Angels into winds / spirits and flames- we recall the Angel seen by Samson's parents ascending in a flame of fire- whereas He has made His Son to be a king with a sceptre. The Lord Jesus is able to rule and decide issues on His own volition and agenda, rather than simply be sent as Angels are sent to obey the Father's agenda. The idea may be that the fact the Lord Jesus was human, not a fame of fire nor a wind / spirit, actually places the Lord ultimately above the Angels. He was made lower than them for the experience of death, but because He was a human, and humans are made in the form of God, His perfection led Him to be exalted far above them.

1:8 *But of the Son He said: Your throne, O Mighty One, is for ever and ever, and the sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness-* See on :7. The Angels are sent out with temporary power to perform specific tasks they are given to perform; whereas the Lord Jesus is an eternal Kingdom, with a seceptre, i.e. ruling and issuing orders Himself rather than taking them. Ps. 45:6,7 quoted here is clearly about Solomon in its initial application, so it is fruitless to argue that "Mighty One" refers only to God Himself. For it can be applied to human kings.

1:9 *You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows-* We should not see sin as something to be regretfully avoided and denied; the Lord's example was of hating sin. And that hatred of sin arose out of the depth of His love for righteousness. Being loved and exalted above his brethren is a Joseph allusion. The idea of "your God" anointing Messiah with joy above His "fellows" is all impossible to make sense of within the standard Trinitarian paradigm. The connection between anointing and joy is that there were traditionally expressions of joy and praise when a man was anointed or chosen for some special task such as rulership. David in writing this surely had his heart on the way that he had been anointed above his brethren. And yet "fellows" is being interpreted as referring to the Angels; the Lord Jesus was anointed above them.

And yet the "fellows" of the Lord Jesus also have ourselves in view. The idea may be that the Angels are the Lord's "fellows" in that they are identified with us, whose guardian Angels they are. The same identity between believers and Angels is found in Revelation. The same word is used of how we are "partakers of Christ... of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 3:1,14; 6:4; 12:8), because He likewise partook [s.w. shared / fellowshiped] our humanity (Heb. 2:14). "For we are all partakers in that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17,21 s.w.). We too are anointed with the oil of the Spirit; but the Lord Jesus was anointed with it without measure. His gladness or

joy is beyond anything we experience, because of the depth of His sufferings as the ultimate man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

1:10 *And: You, Lord, in the beginning did lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands-* Heb. 1:10 appears to quote words about God (from Ps. 102:25) and apply them to Jesus. To take a Psalm or Bible passage and apply it to someone on earth, even a normal human, was quite common in first century literature (Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 234). It's rather like we may quote a well known phrase from Shakespeare or a currently popular movie, and apply it to someone. It doesn't mean that that person is to be equated with Romeo, Juliet, Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth etc. By quoting the words about them, we're saying there are similarities between the two people or situations; we're not claiming they're identical. And seeing that the Son of God was functioning for His Father, it's not surprising that words about God will be quoted about the Lord Jesus.

In the same way as the Angels are so closely associated with their charges that they are identified with them, so the Angels are described as the things in the natural world which they have created. The quotation of Ps. 102:26 in Heb. 1:10 can appear to pose major problems for belief in the humanity of Christ and that the world will never be destroyed. The context in Hebrews is again Christ's superiority over the Angels; however, the context in Ps. 102 is of Christ on the cross thinking of the eternity of God, how that "of old", "in the beginning" (clearly alluding back to the beginning of the natural creation in Gen. 1), God created the Heavens and earth by His Angel-hands. But "they shall perish... wax old like a garment... as a vesture shalt thou change them" (Ps. 102:26). This language is similar to that used elsewhere about the ending of the Angel-oriented Mosaic Law (e. g. Heb. 8:13). Thus the literal Heavens and earth will not perish, but the Angelic system that created them will do. Thus both the natural creation and the Mosaic system are identified exactly with the Angels that created them.

1:11 *They shall perish, but You continue; and they all shall wear out as does a garment-* As noted on :10, the purpose of the quotation is to demonstrate the Lord's superiority over Angels. One approach is to understand the Hebraic way of stating that 'even X shall happen to prove the greatness of Y'; e.g. heaven could pass away [X] but the Lord's words would not [Y] (Mt. 24:35). This is not to say that X shall literally happen; it is stated as a hyperbole, to demonstrate the greatness of Y. And that may be the case here too. God's eternity is contrasted with the [relative] passing of the Heavens, which were made by Angels. "They shall perish" may not therefore mean they shall literally perish.

The context of Ps. 102 is however pertinent. The "set time [had] come" suggests that the Psalmist is writing maybe in captivity in Babylon as the predicted 70 years of Judah's captivity there came to a close, and he looks forward to the promised restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem. He enthuses in :16 that "Yahweh has built up Zion"- although He had not then done so (:13). The earlier part of the Psalm laments this. But the Psalmist believed in God's prophecies of doing so, and considered them as good as already fulfilled. Faith is all about adopting God's perspective, seeing future promises as if they have already been fulfilled, thereby enabling us to live the Kingdom life now in its essence. Then in Ps. 102:25 we read of how "Of old, You laid the foundation of the earth, the heavens are the work of Your hands". The language of laying foundations is nearly always used about the laying of the foundations of the new, rebuilt temple at the time of return from exile (Ezra 3:10-12; 5:16; Is. 44:28; Hag. 2:18; Zech. 4:9; 8:9); and this is the context of this Psalm (see on :13 and :16). The 'heavens and earth' refer to Israel (Is. 1:2) and the temple. Although they had 'perished' in the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the first temple, God

remained and would, the Psalmist believed, install a new temple system (as outlined in Ez. 40-48). However, this never quite happened as God intended due to Judah's weakness, and so these prophecies were reapplied to how the entire Jewish system based around the temple and Law of Moses would 'perish' and God's new temple system based around the exalted Lord Jesus would come into existence (Heb. 1:10 and context).

1:12 *And like a cloak You shall roll them up as a garment, and they shall be changed; but You are the same and Your years are without end-* See on :10 and :11. The Jewish system would be rolled up (see on :11), as a scroll that is not going to be read any more; the Law would end. But Messiah would remain eternally. It was the Lord Jesus by His sacrifice which changed the Jewish system. The same word is used of the Lord's 'changing' the customs delivered by Moses (Acts 6:14).

1:13 *But of which of the angels has He said at any time: Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?*- Again the contrast is between the Lord being given a throne to sit on, from whence He can direct and control; and the Angels who are servants, sent forth to fulfil the will of Him that sits upon the throne (:14). See on :3 *He then sat down on the right hand*. The footstool refers to that which the King reigns over; we the enemies who were reconciled become the Lord's footstool, and we are 'made' like this by the Father's will and desire to glorify His Son in this unique way.

The sitting down of the Son is because His priestly work is done. This is to be quite a theme in Hebrews. As the High Priest on the Day of Atonement pronounced the people cleansed, because he had done the required rituals, so the Lord Jesus pronounces us clean- not simply morally clean of sin, but psychologically purging us by some mental deep-cleaning through His Spirit. And yet the Lord stood in Heaven when Stephen was dying. His work as mediator in another sense is ongoing, and He is able to enter into the passion and immediacy of our times of need.

1:14 *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of those that shall inherit salvation?*- "All" Angels are obedient servants; this of itself rules out any argument for some Angels being sinful. Their 'sending forth' from the Heavenly throne room has a literal aspect to it- see on Is. 37:36; Ex. 7:4. But in this context the argument is that the Lord Jesus is the enthroned King, whereas Angels are servants sent forth to serve us; and thus the Lord's supremacy over Angels is established. Indeed it could be argued that the position presented is that the Lord Jesus has been enthroned by the Father, and He sends forth the Angels to do His service for the sake of our salvation. The Lord Jesus is therefore the Lord of Angels.

"Shall inherit salvation" implies more that 'they are about to inherit', as if the receipt of the inheritance, eternal life (Tit. 3:7; 1 Cor. 15:50), was imminent. This language of expecting the Lord's return imminently is very common. It reflects how the Christian faith requires us to live *as if* His return is imminent. Although we can also consider that the second coming was potentially planned for the first century, but has been delayed. If we are heirs of salvation, then it is certain that we shall receive it. "For He is faithful that promised". The same word for "inherit" has just been used about how the Lord "by inheritance obtained" His glorification, and so shall we (:4). Salvation, the Kingdom, eternal life, blessing... are all termed our "inheritance". Receiving them is not therefore a vague possibility. It simply depends upon whether we believe it. From God's side, it is absolutely certain. He is "willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His word [of promise]". He promised, then confirmed it with an oath, and then confirmed this covenant of salvation again through the death of His Son. We take the cup of the new covenant to remind us of the utter certainty of the salvation promise- from His side. It is there for the taking by all who truly say "Yes" to that offer.

The argument of Rom. 8:17 and Gal. 4:1,7 is that because we are in Christ, all that is true of Him becomes true of us. He as the only begotten Son of God inherits all that is God's; He is "appointed heir of all things" (:2). We too have "all things" as ours ("For all things are yours. Whether... the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come- all are yours" 1 Cor. 3:21,22) because we are "joint heirs with Christ". We are no longer adopted sons, but actually turned by the Spirit into the actual Sons of God in that we are in Christ (so Gal. 4 reasons). He was the "heir" ("this is the heir..." is repeated in Mt. 21:38; Mk. 12:7; Lk. 20:14). And so are we if we are in Him. The Lord Jesus has already received "salvation", and if we are in Him, then that same inheritance is absolutely certain for us. We are justified by grace, counted as if we are Christ; and "being justified by grace, we are made heirs according to the hope [the definite certainty] of eternal life" (Tit. 3:7).

And yet with Abraham we ask: "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (Gen. 15:8). The answer was in the death of the animals with Yahweh Himself passing through the midst of them, cutting a unilateral covenant with Abraham; all looking forward to the Lord's death to confirm the covenant. All this was whilst "a deep sleep fell on Abram. Now terror and great darkness fell on him". He was impotent to *do* anything. There were no terms and conditions attached- apart from Him to simply accept this grace, notwithstanding his trembling and nervousness that this was really true for him. This is exactly our position, as his seed.

The whole metaphor of inheritance appears to break down in that you only receive an inheritance when someone dies. Metaphors all break down at some point. But inheritance, being heirs of salvation, the Kingdom, eternal life... is such a major Bible theme. The point is, the Lord died. And we then received the inheritance. Just as in the natural, we can squander that inheritance, as did the prodigal son. But we have it...

HEBREWS CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest attention to the things that we heard, lest we drift away from them-* The more earnest attention continues the theme of chapter 1, that the things of the Lord Jesus are of greater moment than those spoken by Moses and declared by Angels (:2). "That we heard" suggests they would have heard rather than read the Gospel message. All they had was their memories of the word spoken; we therefore can the more understand the significance of the New Testament being written down. Hence the appeal to give attention to those things. Those things were about their personal salvation (:3). The more we believe that we really have been redeemed, the more evident it becomes that these things demand our whole and total devotion. If we "neglect so great salvation", we will have 'drifted away' (RV) from the solid assurances which are in the Gospel we first heard. Clearly, it is a temptation to drift away from those assurances, even if we 'hold' to the doctrinal propositions of the Gospel in theory. The wonderful reality of it all for us can so easily drift away. But; we will be there!

2:2 *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution-* "Transgression" is more 'inattention'. Although the judgments of the Mosaic law were not put into effect by the priesthood, the intention was that every act of violation, conscious or otherwise, had retribution. And God to this day is a sensitive responder to the works and thoughts of His people (s.w. 11:6). We should realize that under the new covenant, behaviour is even the more significant, and every act of life and thought is therefore the more culpable in light of the fact that God's Son shed His blood for our salvation.

2:3- see on Acts 1:1.

How shall we escape- The rejected will have a desire to escape but having no place to run (Heb. 2:3, quoting Is. 20:6 concerning the inability of men to escape from the approach of the invincible Assyrian army). Rev. 20:11 likewise speaks of the rejected 'heavens and earth' fleeing from the Lamb's throne and finding no place to go. Before the whirlwind of God's judgment, the false shepherds of Israel "shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape" (Jer. 25:35). The rejected will see that the Lord is coming against them with an army much stronger than theirs, and they have missed the chance to make peace (Lk. 14:31). They will be like the Egyptians suffering God's judgments in the Red Sea, wanting to flee but having no realistic place to run to. Uzziah hasting to go out from the presence of the Lord after he was judged for his sin was a foretaste of this (2 Chron. 26:20). But the "escape" in view may specifically refer to escape from the tribulation to come upon Jerusalem in the last days (Lk. 21:36 s.w.), and this had special relevance if indeed as suggested on 1:1 Hebrews is addressed primarily to the Jerusalem church.

If we neglect so great a salvation?- "So great a salvation" is the LXX for "A great deliverance" (Gen. 45:7), brought about by the suffering of Joseph-Jesus at the hands of his brethren. "Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even to the death of the cross*" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden. "If *it* be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mt. 26:39) may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross.

Which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed to us by those that heard- This is the standard proof for a non-Pauline authorship of Hebrews. But see on 1:1. The "us" and "we" in Hebrews refers to the wider readership and don't have to demand that the author includes himself in the reference. There are other examples of this e.g. "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32). "We" should no longer be tossed around by false teachings (Eph. 4:14) surely precludes Paul personally. In Hebrews, the "we" who need to take more earnest heed to the Gospel is surely the readership rather than the author (Heb. 2:1). The personal notes at the end of chapter 13 are hard to interpret as written by anyone other than Paul. Even if the "we" must include Paul, "Those that heard" would refer to the disciples, whom Paul was not among. They "confirmed" the Lord's own message. It could be argued

that Paul is saying that he had heard the message directly from the Lord on the Damascus road, as he emphasizes in Galatians; and what he heard was corroborated by the witness of the disciples. Read this way, the argument would be that the "us" referred to someone who had heard the message spoken through the Lord Jesus directly, and had the content of it confirmed to him by the disciples. And that "us" could only be Paul personally. In this case, this verse confirms rather than questions Paul's authorship.

2:4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various powers and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will- The purpose of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit was to confirm the spoken word of the disciples, the eye witnesses and first hearers of the Lord Jesus (2:3). This clear purpose of these gifts is proof of itself that they were not for all time; once the Lord's message and the inspired interpretation of it had been codified in the New Testament, there was no need for these miraculous gifts to confirm the authority and veracity of the preachers.

2:5 For not to angels did He subject the world to come, of which we speak- Paul now returns to his theme of the Lord's superiority over Angels. The great salvation made possible by the Lord's death means a place in God's Kingdom, when the world shall be subject unto us- and not to Angels. Whatever their future role, Paul implies that our status in the future Kingdom will be far greater than that of the Angels currently. "Did He" rather than "will He" reflects suggests that the whole plan of our salvation has already been effected in God's purpose and will. The subjection of the world to us was what Paul spoke about- in preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God coming on earth.

2:6 But one has somewhere testified- As noted on 13:22, this is the kind of language appropriate to a transcript of a talk or lecture.

What is man, that You are mindful of him? Or the Son of Man, that You visit him?- The parallel between mankind generally and "the Son of Man", Messiah, clearly places this "Son of man" as one of mankind, and not God. But it is this total humanity of the Lord Jesus which is the basis of His exaltation above Angels, as the argument goes on to demonstrate. This is also answering the tendency within parts of Judaism to think that the Messiah would be some kind of Angel or pre-existent spirit which visited earth. Note that God is mindful of man because He visits him- which He does through His Angels (visiting is Angelic language). Thus God is mindful (literally mind-full!) of us because of the Angels "visiting" us with trials and observation "every moment" (Job 7:18). His mind was full of us in that He 'visited' humanity in His Son. Note that the Son did not visit earth; God visited not the earth but mankind, in that He manifested Himself in His Son who was born of our human nature. And who were we, a tiny planet in an infinitely expanding cosmos, and just a few of us two legged beings on its surface, that God Almighty should plan our salvation and high exaltation through the nature and sacrifice of His only begotten Son...

Heb. 2:6-9 is an example of the inspired writer using expected reader response and expectations in order to make a point. Having spoken of how the world to come will be given to redeemed human beings and not to Angels, the writer goes on to quote from the Psalms to prove that point. We begin reading the quotation assuming it's talking about humanity generally; but as it goes on, we realize it's talking about the pre-eminent Son of Man, i.e. the Lord Jesus. Notice how in :9 He is called "Jesus", with no 'Lord' or 'Christ' added on. The point of it all is to make us perceive how totally identified is Jesus with humanity as a whole; a passage which speaks in its

context of humanity generally is allowed to quite naturally flow on in meaning to apply to the Lord Jesus personally. It's a majestic, powerful way of making the point- that the Lord Jesus was truly one of us.

2:7 You made him a little lower than the angels, You crowned him with glory and honour and did set him over the works of Your hands- The context of Ps. 8:5 is of David's exaltation after killing Goliath. David sees in his victory the possibility for the exaltation generally not only of Israel but of all humanity. The individual in view is interpreted specifically as Jesus (:9). And it is likewise true that His exaltation is the possibility for the exaltation of all Israel and all humanity, insofar as we are "in Him" and identified with Him in baptism. The making of man or the Lord Jesus for a short time lower than the Angels is no evidence of His pre-existence or Divine incarnation in Him; for the words in their original context apply to the man David and to "man" generally. The idea is that man, and the Lord Jesus, is made for a little while / period lower than the Angels, and Paul takes this as implying that both the Lord Jesus and ourselves shall be exalted higher than the Angels, seeing we are only for a short period made lower than them.

2:8 You did put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that He subjected all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not see all things subjected to him- The "him" is mankind generally and also specifically the Lord Jesus. 1 Cor. 15:27,28; Eph. 1:22;5:24 use the same language to describe our subjection under the Lord's feet, becoming thereby His footstool. But the Gospel must yet advance, and those obedient to it must yet subject more parts of their lives to His kingship. Through His Spirit, we are progressively subjected to Him (Phil. 3:21). And finally, all things on earth shall literally be subject unto the Lord Jesus; and that includes Angels. For His superiority over Angels is the context of this passage. The same word is used of how Angels have been made subject unto Him (1 Pet. 3:22).

2:9- see on Rom. 3:19; Phil. 2:8.

But we behold him who has been made a little lower than the angels- Jesus- crowned with glory and honour because of his suffering of death, whereby, by the grace of God, he tasted death for every person- The focus is now moved from mankind generally to the Lord Jesus, the pre-eminent "son of man". He has been exalted to glory and honour, perhaps by implication a glory greater than of the Angels because of His suffering of death. The implication might be that Angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36) but the Lord did, and was thereby exalted above them. The Lord's exaltation is ours, and repeatedly we read in Hebrew 2 of the Lord's total connection with humanity in order to save and exalt us. That connection was not with Angels but with humans; for the Lord was not an Angel, seeing His mission was identification with men and thereby to achieve their salvation. His death was supremely a tasting of death for every man. Seeing Angels cannot die, the Lord's death was a clear enough statement He was no Angel but human, dying for His people. Death is the ultimate human fear and problem; and the Lord tasted every man's death, every man's ultimate fear and struggle. This was by God's grace because what is man, that He should be so mindful of us as to give His only begotten Son to identify with us and save a few of us.

By God's grace, the Lord tasted death *for* (Gk. *huper*) *every man*, as our representative: "in tasting death he should stand for all" (Heb. 2:9 NEB). In His death He experienced the essence of the life-struggle and death of every man. The fact the Lord did this *for us* means that we respond *for Him*. "To you it is given *in the behalf*

of (Gk. *huper*) Christ, not only to believe on Him [in theory], but to suffer *for his sake* (Gk. *huper*)" (Phil. 1:29). He suffered *for us* as our representative, and we suffer *for Him* in response. This was and is the two-way imperative of the fact the Lord was our representative. He died *for all* that we should die to self and live *for Him* (2 Cor. 5:14,15). "His own self bare our sins [as our representative] in his own body [note the link "*our* sins" and "*his own* body"] that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24,25). We died with Him, there on His cross; and so His resurrection life is now ours. He is totally active for us now; His life now is *for us*, and as we live His life, we should be 100% *for Him* in our living. He gave His life *for us*, and we must lay down our lives *for Him* (1 Jn. 3:16).

Heb. 2:9 seems to describe the Lord *in His time of dying*, in the suffering [not just the experience of, but the suffering associated with] death, as "crowned with glory and honour". There He was crowned not with thorns but glory and honour, from God's perspective. The physical sufferings of the cross were an especial cause of spiritual temptation to the Lord; just as physical pain, illness, weakness etc. are specific causes of our temptations to sin. Heb. 2:9 defines the Lord's 'sufferings' as specifically "the suffering of death", the sufferings associated with His time of dying. Heb. 2:18 RVmg. then goes on to say: "For having been himself tempted in that wherein he suffered". The sufferings of death were therefore an especial source of temptation for Him. Truly did He learn obedience to the Father specifically through the process of His death (Heb. 5:8). Let's seek to remember this when we or those close to us face physical weakness, illness and pain of whatever sort. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us". This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

2:10 *For it became Him for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation-* The God for whom are all things wishes to bring many sons to glory- not just one, the Lord Jesus. He who could do all things, whose are all things, worked out His purpose of having many glorious sons through giving them an author of salvation who was perfected through sufferings. That salvation has to be authored for each son makes it personal, and the relationship between the author and the authored the more intimate. The false idea of each person having an inherent "immortal soul" totally destroys the wonder of eternal salvation being personally authored for each of us. The same word for "author" is used in this sense in 12:2, where Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. By His grace He began faith in people, and the grace / gift of His Spirit finishes our faith in salvation. Through that path the Lord Jesus is the author of our salvation.

Perfect through sufferings- The Lord Jesus alone could say, with full meaning, "I am". Who He appeared to be, was who He essentially was. He alone achieved a completely integrated, real self. He was what Paul called the "perfect man", the completed, integrated person (Eph. 4:13). But He had to work on this. Hebrews always speaks of Him as "perfected", as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective 'perfect'. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks like wise 'to perfect'. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. His final point of perfection was reached at the moment of His death; the sufferings of death elicited within Him that final point of completion / perfection. Which was why He died at just

that point. And this adds infinite meaning to the sufferings of death which are our common experience.

2:11- see on Heb. 11:26.

For both he that sanctifies and they that are sanctified are all of the same nature- This is yet more evidence that the Lord was not an Angel. He had the nature of those whom He sanctified in order to achieve that sanctification. This inspired principle is profound and underpins the representative nature of the Lord's work and sacrifice. The sanctifier must be of the same nature as the sanctified. This raises a serious question about the validity of the Mosaic sacrifices; they were only acceptable by reason of the truly representative Messianic sacrifice to which they pointed forward. And as Paul will later point out, it was therefore not possible for the blood of animals to take away human sin; the sanctification had to be achieved by a sanctifier of the same nature. But "of the same nature" is literally "out of one". The argument could equally be that they were of the same Father, which is why He is not ashamed to call us brothers, for we are of the same one Father. In this case, Paul read the virgin birth as no fundamental barrier to the Lord's identification with us, for we and Jesus are all "of the same one", i.e. God.

For this cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers- The very fact Christ calls us His brothers (as in Mt. 12:50) is seen as proof of Christ's humanity, that it was men and not Angels who were His brothers. The Lord shall be ashamed of His association with some at the last day, and of us He will not be ashamed in that day (s.w. Mk. 8:38). But His unashamed association with us begins now in this life. Because God's Son is unashamed now of having us as His brothers, therefore the Father is not ashamed to be known as our God (11:16 s.w.).

2:12- see on Mt. 28:10.

Saying: I will declare Your name to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation will I sing Your praise- The Psalm quoted predicts the Lord's crucifixion. His prayer thoughts to the Father then included His awareness that the *ekklesia*, the church or "congregation", were His brothers. For He realized that it was through His sacrifice that a new family was being created. The declaration or preaching of the Father's Name to us was supremely through the Lord's death on the cross. The cross was the supreme declaration of the Name (Jn. 17:26); the first letters of the Hebrew title over the cross spelt 'YHWH'. And that declaration of the Name in the naked, bleeding, betrayed and crucified Christ was to us. And the Lord looked forward, perhaps in literal terms, to singing praise to the Father in the midst of His brothers. This all hardly sounds as if the Lord Jesus was "God the Son". He positioned Himself in the midst of His brethren, singing God's praise- even after His exaltation.

2:13 *And again: I will put my trust in Him-* The fact the Lord Jesus needed to trust the Father is cited as an example of His humanity, and therefore proof of His not being an Angel- for Angels do not need to exhibit trust or faith in God. The quotation from Is. 8:17 goes on to state that God is hidden from the majority of Israel- relevant to the Hebrew Christians who were wondering how so many in Israel could be wrong, and who were returning to the majority, the broad way of Judaism. The original context speaks of the isolation of Isaiah and his family within Israel; "I", even if Israel *en masse* do not, "will put my trust in Him"; the majority in Israel had stumbled (Is. 8:15), a figure Paul elsewhere uses about Israel's stumbling on the rock of Jesus as Messiah. And it was all because they had not truly understood God's law (Is. 8:20) which spoke so fully of Jesus as Christ.

And again: Behold, I and the children whom God has given me- Isaiah is a confirmed type of Christ, and his school of prophets typical of the saints. "I (Isaiah) and the children (prophets - Is. 8:16) whom the Lord hath given me" (Is. 8:18) is quoted here as referring to Christ and His brethren. Other instances of Isaiah being a type of Christ can be found by comparing Is. 6:10 with John 12:39-41 and by appreciating that "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me... to preach good tidings... to comfort all that mourn" (e.g. Hezekiah) is primarily concerning Isaiah's message of hope to Israel during the Assyrian invasions, although it is quoted concerning Jesus (Is. 61:1,2 cp. Luke 4:18). Is. 8:16-18 could be taken as Isaiah saying that he had decided not to teach his school of prophets any longer, but rather to just personally focus upon his own relationship with God: "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him". The next verse is however quoted in Heb. 2:13 about the Lord Jesus and His brethren being of the same nature: "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts". The Hebrew writer therefore understood this statement to reflect an intense unity between Isaiah and his "children", be they his literal children [Immanuel and Mahershalalhashbaz] or his spiritual children. It seems to me that Immanuel could've been some kind of Messiah figure- but for whatever reason, he didn't live up to it and the prophecy was therefore given a greater application to the Lord Jesus. Likewise, the "children" Isaiah refers to in Is. 8:18 became the faithful children in Christ under the new covenant, according to how Heb. 2:13 quotes it.

2:14- see on Gal. 1:4; Rev. 20:5.

Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same nature; so that through his death he might bring to nothing him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil- The language of sharing and partaking does not mean that the Lord only shared part of our nature; for we the children are sharers or partakers in flesh and blood, and we are fully human. He likewise participated or shared fully in our condition. Not an actor, playing out a theological necessity that was scripted in the heavenly text, but in full total reality.

"Him that had the power of death, that is the Devil" (Heb. 2:14) may refer to the fact that "the sting (power) of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the (Jewish) Law" (1 Cor. 15:56; see also Rom. 4:15; 5:13; 7:8, where 'the Law' that gives power to sin is clearly the Jewish law). Bearing in mind that the 'Devil' often refers to sin and the flesh, it seems significant that 'the flesh' and 'sin' are often associated with the Mosaic Law. The whole passage in Heb. 2:14 can be read with reference to the Jewish Law being 'taken out of the way' by the death of Jesus [A.V. "destroy him that hath the power of death"]. The Devil kept men in bondage, just as the Law did (Gal. 4:9; 5:1; Acts 15:10; Rom. 7:6-11). The Law was an 'accuser' (Rom. 2:19,20; 7:7) just as the Devil is. Hebrews 2:14 states that the Devil was destroyed by Christ's death. The Greek for 'destroy' is translated 'abolish' in Ephesians 2:15: "Having abolished [Darby: 'annulled'] in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances". This would equate the Devil with the enmity, or fleshly mind (Rom. 8:7) generated by the Mosaic Law; remember that Hebrews was written mainly to Jewish believers. The Law itself was perfect, in itself it was not the minister of sin, but the effect it had on man was to stimulate the 'Devil' within man because of our disobedience. "The strength of sin is the Law" (1 Cor. 15:56). "Sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me (Rom. 7:8,11). Hence "the wages

of sin (stimulated by the Law) is death” (Rom. 6:23). It is quite possible that the “sin” in Romans 6, which we should not keep serving, may have some reference to the Mosaic Law. It is probable that the Judaizers were by far the biggest source of false teaching in the early church. The assumption that Paul is battling Gnosticism is an anachronism, because the Gnostic heresies developed some time later. It would be true to say that incipient Gnostic ideas were presented by the Judaizers in the form of saying that sin was not to be taken too seriously because the Law provided set formulae for getting round it. The Law produced an outward showing in the “flesh”, not least in the sign of circumcision (Rom. 2:28).

This passage places extraordinary emphasis upon the fact that the Lord Jesus had human nature: “He *also himself likewise*” partook of it (Heb. 2:14). This phrase uses three words all with the same meaning, just to drive the point home. He partook “of the *same*” nature; the record could have said ‘he partook of *it* too’, but it stresses, “he partook of the *same*”. The passages hammers home the same truth multiple times: “Himself... likewise... in like manner... partook... the same”. The Lord's humanity was of huge moment to Paul. It is the basis for our salvation. The Lord partook in our nature, and we are made partakers in Him unto salvation (Heb. 2:14 cp. 3:14; 12:10; 2 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:13). As He partook in our nature, so we partake in Him and symbolize it by partaking at His table (s.w. 1 Cor. 10:17,21,30). His humanity, when preached and understood, is a powerful invitation to partake in Him by baptism and a life lived in Him. A Divine “God the Son” has no such appeal.

2:15- see on Heb. 5:7.

And might deliver all those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage- The reference is to Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The “devil” who was slain in :14 could then allude to Pharaoh. But Israel were delivered from a greater bondage- to the law and the inevitable fear of death which it inculcated in sinful man (see on :14). It is the fear of death, the subconscious awareness in every human being that they have sinned and must die, which is here defined as the psychological bind which keeps people in bondage. The message of freedom from sin and death which is in Christ is only attractive to those who are honest enough to get in touch with themselves and realize that this is indeed the psychological tie that binds them. We can only experience the joy of release from bondage if we perceive we were in bondage; and such joy can only come from a firm persuasion that if the Lord were to return right now, we really will be saved. For anything less than that is not good news, just a fearful sense of responsibility to judgment to come, against which we vainly hope our knowledge of some true theology will somehow triumph.

The fear of death grips our society more than we like to admit. The Swiss psychologist Paul Tournier observed the huge “number of people who dream that they are locked in, that everywhere they come up against iron-bound and padlocked doors, that they absolutely must escape, and yet there is no way out”. This is the state of the nation, this is how we naturally are, this is the audience to which we preach. And we preach a freedom from that fear. Because the Lord Jesus was of our human nature- and here perhaps more than anywhere else we see the crucial practical importance of doctrine- we are freed from the ranks of all those who through fear of death live their lives in bondage. For He died for us, as our representative. How true are those inspired words. “To release them who through fear / *phobos* of death were all their living-time subject to slavery” (Gk.). Nearly all the great psychologists concluded that the mystery of death obsesses humanity; and in the last analysis, all anxiety is reduced

to anxiety about death. You can see it for yourself, in how death, or real, deep discussion of it, is a taboo subject; how people will make jokes about it in reflection of their fear of seriously discussing it. People, even doctors, don't quite know what to say to the dying. There can be floods of stories and chit-chat... all carefully avoiding any possible allusion to death. This fear of death, in which the unredeemed billions of humanity have been in bondage, explains the fear of old age, the unwillingness to accept our age for what it is, our bodies for how and what they are, or are becoming. I'm not saying of course that the emotion of fear or anxiety is totally removed from our lives by faith. The Lord Jesus in Gethsemane is proof enough that these emotions are an integral part of being human, and it's no sin to have them. I'm talking of fear in it's destructive sense, the fear of death which is rooted in a lack of hope. There's a passage in *Hamlet* which speaks of not so much fearing death as "the dread of something after death" (some of the sentiments in Job 18 are similar). And modern psychoanalytical studies have confirmed this. A large part of the fear of death is the fear of what follows. For those in Christ, whilst like their Lord they may naturally fear the process of death, their future is secured; they know that death is unconsciousness and will end ultimately in a bodily resurrection at the Lord's return, after which they will share in His eternal life. For them, "the fear of death" in its ultimate form has been removed (Heb. 2:14-18).

This passage in Hebrews 2 says that the Lord can deliver us from such bondage because he is our representative, our brother, of our nature, not ashamed of His connection with us (2:11). Reasoning back from this, we can see that Moses' ability to redeem Israel from Egypt, his appropriacy for the task, was because he had openly declared that he was one of them. Yet the wonder of that was lost on them. And if we are not careful, the wonder of the fact that the Lord had our nature, that He was our representative and is *therefore* mighty to save, can be lost on us too. The thrill of these first principles should ever remain with us.

All the Judges in some way prefigured the Lord; for they were "saviours" raised up to deliver God's weak and failing people in pure grace, when according to God's own word, they should have received the due punishment of rejection (Neh. 9:27,28). He who delivered "them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15) was typified by all those earlier deliverers of God's people from bondage (cp. Mt. 1:21). The "great salvation" of Heb. 2:3 which the Lord achieved was foreshadowed by the great deliverance wrought by Samson (Jud. 15:18).

2:16 *For truly not to angels does he take hold in association; but he took hold of the seed of Abraham*- The tense of "take hold" suggests the Lord is doing this now. He does not take hold of Angels to associated with them, but of humans; because He had been intended through His nature to take hold of the seed of Abraham. The Lord Jesus is therefore an active Lord, calling men and women, taking hold of them by His calling. But the word translated "take hold" is used in the Gospels of the Lord taking hold of men literally (Peter on the water in his loss of faith, Mt. 14:31; the blind man of Mk. 8:23; the little child of Lk. 9:47 with his immature faith and understanding; the paralyzed man of Lk. 14:4). In all these incidents we see acted parables of how the Lord takes hold of people in all manner of situations; and He does so on account of having fully shared our nature. The seed of Abraham referred to a singular seed, not a plural (Gal. 3:16)- the Lord Jesus personally. But He takes hold of men and women and His humanity is a beckoning to them to become 'in Him' by baptism, so that they too are part of the seed (Gal. 3:27-29).

Angels cannot die: "Death... does not lay hold of angels" (Heb. 2:16 Diaglott margin). If Angels could sin, then those who are found worthy of reward at Christ's

return will also still be able to sin. And seeing that sin brings death (Rom. 6:23), they will therefore not have eternal life; if we have a possibility of sinning, we have the capability of dying. Thus to say Angels can sin makes God's promise of eternal life meaningless, seeing that our reward is to share the nature of the Angels. Heb. 2:16–18 repays closer reflection in this context of Angels and possibility to sin. It speaks of the reasons why the Lord Jesus had to be of human nature: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the [nature of the] seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted". Exactly because the Lord Jesus had to be tempted to sin, He did not have Angelic nature but human nature. His mission was to save humanity from human sin and death, not the Angels who cannot die. So, He had to have human nature so that He could be tempted to sin; and so this section so labours the point that therefore He did not have Angels' nature. Which, by inference, is *not* able to be tempted to sin. Note how the Bible speaks of "Angels" as if there is only one category of Angel— obedient Heavenly beings.

2:17- see on Lk. 24:6; Jn. 19:13.

Therefore in all things he had to be made like his brothers- The same Greek word is used in 1 Jn. 3:2 of how finally, we shall be "made like" Him. His experiences of life, of our humanity, brought Him into identity with us- so that we might reach final identity with Him. The language of 2:14-18 may well be intended to be talking specifically about the Lord's death. This ongoing process of being 'made like' us came to particular intensity at that time. The hymn of Phil. 2 makes the same point- that the Lord was made like us mentally particularly through His experience of crucifixion and death. His death became ours, so that His resurrection and life shall likewise become ours. But "made like" implies a process, as if through His life experience He progressively came to identify with all men, and this process of identification and total understanding of all men came to a peak culmination in His time of dying. "Made like" means fundamentally 'to assimilate'. He assimilated all that there is in man, so that nobody can ever now complain that there is nobody who understands them. On earth there indeed is not, but there is the Heavenly man who does.

Moses' persecution by Pharaoh enabled him to enter into the feelings of Israel in the slave camps; and as they fled from Pharaoh towards the Red Sea, Moses would have recalled his own flight from Pharaoh to Midian. The whole epistle to the Hebrews is shot through with allusions to Moses. "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Heb. 2:17) is alluding to Dt. 18:18: "I will raise them up a Prophet *from among their brethren* like unto *thee* (Moses)". The brethren of Christ are here paralleled with Moses; as if Moses really is representative of not only natural Israel, but spiritual too- as well as Moses being a type of Christ. For this reason he is such a clear pattern for us, and we are invited so often to identify ourselves with him by copying his example. Moses was *made like* his brethren through his similar experiences, as Christ was progressively *made like* us by his life of temptation.

So that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people- The Jewish High Priest was doing a job, and had no personal dispensation which allowed him to be merciful / compassionate (Gk.) to the offerers who came to him or to the people for whom he interceded. The Lord Jesus is a High Priest who has the capacity to show compassion, who is faithful or trustworthy to do the required work of obtaining our forgiveness. "Things pertaining to God" is an attempt to translate *pros theos*, the very phrase used

in Jn. 1:1, "with God" and Jn. 13:3 "to God" (also Jn. 20:17 "I ascend... *pros* my Father"). The Lord is not simply "with God" in a literal sense but He is before God and with Him in the sense that He and the Father are 'together'; and the Lord Jesus is very much with us, on our side. He therefore is able uniquely to get our forgiveness. For He wants to save us... quite simply so. He is God "with us", Emmanuel, bringing God to be on our side in the crucial area of dealing with our sins. When we read of prayer being made by believers *pros theos*, with or before God (e.g. Acts 12:5; Rom. 10:1; 15:30; 2 Cor. 13:7; Phil. 4:6), this is possible on account of the Lord's mediation for us there. It also explains how Paul could have a clean conscience *pros theos* (Acts 24:16), when there had been a time when he had walked against the goads of conscience. But his heavenly mediator *pros theos* brought him too *pros theos*, because he was "in Christ". There in heaven itself, before God, we have peace and every confidence *pros theos* on account of our Lord Jesus (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 3:4; 1 Jn. 3:21). For we are "in Christ", and are therefore and thereby acceptably *pros theos* in Heaven itself (1 Thess. 1:8,9).

2:18 *For because he himself suffered when tempted, he is able to succour those who are being tempted*- This succouring of tempted persons is surely psychological, seeing that temptation is internal to the human heart (James 1:13-15; Mk. 7:15-23). The succouring is therefore through the gift of the Spirit in the hearts / psychology of the believer. The Lord was tempted because He was human; God Himself cannot be tempted (James 1:13). And because He overcame, therefore He is now able to give His Spirit, the mindset He had, to those who are "in Him" and desire to truly be as Him. This verse suggests that in the heat of temptation, at the very moment of it, He is able to provide psychological strength to overcome it. And this is the path to salvation, it is how He saves us in practice. Now is the day of salvation, and so now is the time when He will provide us this "succour" or aid (see on 2 Cor. 6:2). We can boldly say that the Lord Jesus is my helper / succourer [s.w.], so we need never fear a situation that could spiritually swamp us (Heb. 13:6). "Suffered when tempted" doesn't mean that He simply suffered in the sense of experienced temptation. The word is used many times of the Lord's suffering on the cross, and later in Hebrews it is used in this way (5:8; 9:26; 13:12). His identity with our temptations came to a climax of total identity on account of His final sufferings, when He was the most sorely tempted.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Therefore holy brothers, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus*- Chapter 2 has emphasized that we are the "brothers" of the Lord Jesus. And yet the focus now moves on to the greatness of that supreme "brother". The argument is to counter the relatively low status assigned to the Messiah figure within the Judaism which was beckoning the Christians. Even if they accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, the view of Messiah was far too low, and was not giving due respect to the high status and work of the Lord Jesus. Judaism was at best an earthly calling; we are "partakers" in Christ (3:1; 2:14-18), and thereby of a calling from Heaven, i.e. of God. They were to "consider"/ 'observe or perceive fully' (Gk.) the real nature and wonder of the exalted Lord Jesus. He was a 'sent one', an Apostle, just as He sent us into the world. As the Father sent Him, so He sends us to the world in the great commission (Jn. 20:21). "Confession" means literally that, and implies that faith involves a literal confession or profession of faith to others. Paul uses it three times in Hebrews (also 4:14; 10:23).

Concentration on the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is something which the Hebrew writer so often encourages, in his efforts to encourage the Hebrew believers. After perhaps 25 years of believing (they were probably converted at Pentecost), they were starting to get bored with God's Truth; the will to keep on keeping on was no longer what it was. But because of the cross, because *He paid dearly for you*, because He is now thereby our matchless mediator: hold on, hold fast, *therefore* (a watchword of Hebrews) endure to the end (Heb. 3:1,6; 4:14; 10:21,23). For that great salvation will surely be realized one day. So, concentrate *personally* on the fact that He hung there for you, honour your solemn duty to at least try to reconstruct the agony of His body and soul.

3:2 *Who was faithful to Him that appointed him, as also was Moses in all his house-* "Appointed" is literally 'made'. The Lord was 'made' High Priest for us at His resurrection (5:5; Acts 2:36). The tense of "was faithful" implies that He was and still is. This High Priest can be trusted; the Mosaic High Priests simply did a job and it was over to God to grant forgiveness and acceptance. But our High priest has a role to play in the granting of forgiveness and mediation of blessing. The reference may be to how God 'made' or appointed Moses and Aaron (1 Sam. 12:6). Although Moses was not the High Priest, he effectively acted as such due to Aaron's inadequacy; hence the Lord's High Priestly role is contrasted to that of Moses, with the hint that the Aaronic High Priest was never fully adequate. One like Moses, but greater than Moses, was required; and that is how Messiah is defined in Dt. 18:15. The language of Moses being faithful in God's house is quoted from Num. 12:7, where "My servant Moses is not so. He is so faithful in all My house" is stated in the context of Moses' superiority over Aaron the High Priest. The house or family / people of Moses was Israel, but Messiah's house is universal in scope.

3:3 *For he has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, in that he that built the house has more honour than the house-* Judaism considered Moses worthy of higher glory than any Messiah figure. Again Paul is attacking their concept of Messiah as inadequate. The "house" of Messiah is different to that of Moses; Messiah built "his own house" (:6) and was and is faithful over it. Moses did not build the house of Israel; God did. Moses was placed over it. Messiah built His own house and was faithful over it. "He that built the house" doesn't mean that Christ built the house of Moses. It has a general reference to the fact that Messiah built and rules over *His* house, whereas Moses built no house but was simply placed over the house of Israel at the time. To build a house / family means to have children and raise them. This is what the Lord Jesus has done by having spiritual children of His own nature, as taught previously in 2:13, where the Lord is likened to Isaiah building up his faithful family, and we are as Isaiah's children of prophetic witness. Judaism had so glorified Israel as a people that they were effectively saying that they had as much glory as God who built them. They were confusing the creator and the created, as Paul points out in Romans 1. Effectively, Judaism was making Moses equal to God. The Rabbis argued that by gematria the numerical value of "Moses our Rabbi" was 613, which is also the value of the letters of "Lord God of Israel". Paul is seeking to refocus them upon the basics- that God is greater than Moses, and Messiah likewise is, for He has built a greater house which He is Lord over.

3:4 *Every house is built by someone; but He that built all things is God-* The Lord Jesus, Messiah, is the builder of the spiritual temple, the house of God (Zech. 6:12). But it was God working through Him to build it, in ultimate terms. Moses was not the builder of any house, and so God was not in that sense manifested through Him in such work as He was through Messiah.

3:5 *And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken-* Moses was a servant over his house, whereas Messiah had God manifested through Him in building *His* house over which He therefore was and is a true Master *over* His house (:6), and not simply a servant within the house. Moses is frequently called the "servant" (Josh. 1:1,2; 9:24 etc.). But the builder of a house is more than a servant; as the Son of the Divine Builder of all things, He is "over" His own house in a far superior way to that in which Moses served as a servant within his house. The faithfulness of Moses was a testimony towards someone far greater, Messiah Jesus.

If Moses' God is to be ours in truth in the daily round of life, we must rise up to the dedication of Moses; as he was a faithful steward, thoroughly dedicated to God's ecclesia (Heb. 3:5), so we are invited follow his example (1 Cor. 4:2; Mt. 24:45).

3:6 *But Christ, as a Son over his own house-* As explained above, the Messiah was to "over" His own house / family because He, on God's behalf, was the maker of it. Moses was a servant set over a household, but the Lord's household was made by Himself with God's manifestation through Him. We are that household.

Whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope, remaining firm to the end- Clearly enough, we must endure to the end to be saved (Mt. 10:22). We can, by implication, leave the household of Christ. We need to assess any exit from a church community in that light; for so often, disaffected individuals leave a local community and go nowhere, to then fade away in their faith. "Hold fast" is the same word used for the "good ground" 'keeping the word' in their hearts (Lk. 8:15). Without a written New Testament, they would have needed to quite literally remember and mentally keep hold of the word preached. They were to hold fast [s.w.] the confidence they had at the beginning (:14), in those heady days when thousands of Hebrews were baptized in Jerusalem. The same word for "confidence / boldness" is used four times about the early believers speaking "boldly" (Acts 2:29; 4:13,29,31). They were confident of salvation; but with the passing of the years, that joy which came from being confident of the outcome of the judgment seat had subsided. Whether we are still joyfully confident of "the hope", the *elpis*, the firm assurance, is what is finally the litmus test for our faith. We will be confirmed as the Lord's "house" at "the end"; He shall eternally be the master over the family which we have not joined, but which shall be eternally solidified, as it were, at the last day.

We see here that confident rejoicing that we really will be saved is utterly critical. This is what defines whether we are actually the household of the Lord Jesus. This is the lead characteristic of the family. That household is not, therefore, simply predicated upon a joint set of positions on theology. It all depends whether we are confident in the Hope, to the point of rejoicing in it. Rom. 5:2 teaches the same: "through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and in which we *rejoice in hope* of the glory of God". See on :14.

The word for "boldness" is so often used about our lives now, including our boldness before God in prayer- and this will seamlessly become our attitude when we come before God at the day of judgment, with a similar boldness. For our attitude before Him then will be our attitude we have before Him now. It's all about continuity of relationship. This boldness or confidence is not arrogance nor is it self confidence; but the confidence which comes from being in an assured, stable relationship, with none less than God's Son:

"Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16); Heb. 10:19 "Therefore brothers, having boldness to enter into the Holy Place by the

blood of Jesus". Eph. 3:12 "In whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him". 1 Jn. 3:21,22 "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have boldness toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him".

2 Cor. 3:12 "Having therefore such a hope [the utter certainty of our personal salvation], we use great boldness of speech".

Heb. 10:35 "Therefore do not throw away your boldness, which has great reward"

1 Jn. 2:28 "And now, little children, abide in him. That, when he shall be manifested, we may have boldness and not be ashamed before him at his coming"

1 Jn. 4:17 "In this way is love made perfect with us, so that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. Because as he is, even so are we in this world".

"Remaining firm to the end" uses the word elsewhere used about the firm certainty of our Hope, because of the Lord's death. Thus Heb. 9:17 "For a will is of force where there has been death"; the New Covenant promises came into personal effect for us through the death of the Lord Jesus. They are thereby "of force" or "firm", and so our Hope is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast [s.w.]" (Heb. 6:19). The solid firmness of the Hope is to be reflected in a "firm" holding on to faith, a solid character built upon this definite Hope.

3:7 Therefore, even as the Holy Spirit said-

The understanding is that the words of the Old Testament are God's Spirit speaking; for this is the meaning of the Scriptures being Divinely inspired or inspirited. The argument begun by "therefore" is picked up again in :12- therefore, "take heed".

Today, if you shall hear his voice- The Hebrew is an appeal: "Oh that today you would hear His voice". The emphasis upon "today" is in the context of appealing for confidence in the certain hope of salvation (:6). We should be able to say with confidence that "today" if the Lord comes or if we die, we shall be saved. This is the meaning of the emphasis upon "today"; Peter has the same idea when writing of our rejoicing in "the present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12), the ultimate truth that today at this moment we shall be saved if the Lord returns or we die. In this sense "now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). "This day" we can be that confident- if we hear His voice. And the simple message of that voice is that we really are saved; for Hebrews begins by saying that God has spoken to us in His Son, the message of sure salvation. At this moment we can seek and find the Lord, "while He may be found" (Is. 55:6). The Lord repeats the same argument by saying that "If any man hear My voice... I will come in to him" (Rev. 3:20). Hebrews opened with the statement that the God who spoke by the prophets has spoken to us in His Son; and it is directly from Him that we are appealed to. Hearing the Lord's voice may well allude to the Lord's statement that His sheep hear His voice; and the context of the Psalm 95 quotation is that "He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Ps. 95:7 ASV). The voice of God is therefore mediated to us through the shepherd voice of the Lord Jesus. The simple message we are to believe is that indeed, we are His sheep. We are His household, in the context of the argument here. We are His flock, being led to salvation. And we are to encourage each other in this, whilst ['insofar as now'] it is called "today", because we are in that "today" of salvation (:13).

Whilst the "rest" in view in Psalm 95 is indeed entry into Canaan / salvation, we note more specifically that Ps. 132:14 speaks of Zion as "This is my resting place forever". Eternity in Zion spoke of eternal fellowship together in His house. The temple was to have been "a house of rest" for Yahweh (1 Chron. 28:2; 2 Chron. 6:41; Ps. 132:8). Insofar as this Psalm must have relevance to the restoration, as do all the

surrounding Psalms, we must see the connection with God's insistence in Is. 66:1 that His place of "rest" ["where is the place of My rest?"] is no longer in any physical location nor temple, but in the humble hearts of His true people. There He will "rest" or abide. Just as the wilderness generation didn't enter the "rest" of the promised land, so He would not "rest" / abide in the physical temple any more. Hebrews 3 quotes these words and interprets the "rest" as a play on the Sabbath rest, and thereby meaning two things: 1) The experience of assurance of salvation now without works but by grace alone, entering into the "rest" of assured salvation; and 2) The future Kingdom of God, the rest which remains for the people of God to enter. This therefore becomes a classic case of Old Testament words having multiple applications over the course of God's working with man towards our final salvation. Heb. 4:4 reminds us that God entered into His rest after six days of creative work (Gen. 2:2). But the rejected Israel will not enter that rest- because they were not part of the new creation God was trying to work with them. This explains why Ps. 95:11 says, "They shall never enter *My* rest," not "they shall never enter *their* rest".

Hebrews was written approaching 40 years after the Lord's death. Perhaps the idea was that God's Kingdom could have been established in AD70. But the Hebrew Christians were falling away from the faith, and in this sense likewise would fail to enter the "rest" of God's Kingdom that was possible in AD70. Paul changes "that generation" to "this generation" in :10 when he quotes it in Heb. 3. This is in line with the argument that "Today..." (Ps. 95:7) appeals to every generation to know that right now, today, this argument is true for them too. And specifically, Paul perhaps saw that a 40 year period from the Lord's death was coming to an end, and the potential establishment of the Kingdom on earth, the entry into "rest", was not going to happen because like Israel, the new Israel were turning away from their Shepherd.

3:8 *Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, like the time of testing in the wilderness-* We note that it was the Jews who hardened their hearts when Paul preached to them (Acts 19:9). The entire period of wilderness wanderings was characterized by Israel putting God to the test; they were not confident of their final salvation, and were ever looking for evidence from Him. He had brought them out of Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb; and there were daily miracles of provision in the bread and water which pointed forward to the Lord Jesus. This desire for yet further proof is seen in various guises today; from the phlegmatic, wavering believer who wants more 'scientific proof' of God to those in the Pentecostal movement ever seeking visible evidence that the Lord is amongst them. The word of promise regarding salvation is to be believed and that faith and joy held on to (:6).

"Do not harden your hearts..." (stressed in :15; 4:7) must be compared to the threat "lest any of you be hardened" (:13). The whole context here is of attitudes within the heart. And God will confirm us in those attitudes, hardening those who harden their hearts. Clearly the allusion is to Pharaoh, in the context of the wilderness experience of Israel. He is recorded as hardening his own heart; and God hardened his heart in response. Mental attitudes will be confirmed by God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, confirming us in spirituality; and the evil spirit from the Lord which hardened Saul in the positions he himself chose to adopt.

"The time of testing" refers to how man puts God to the test (:9). The quotation from Ps. 95 is in turn a quotation from Ex. 17:7, where Israel are spoken of as taking out a law suit against God, 'putting to the test' in the sense of a legal test. The same word translated 'test' is also translated 'plead' in a legal sense of pleading in court (Jud. 6:31,32; Ps. 43:1; 1 Sam. 24:15 "judge between me and you, and plead my cause"; Is. 3:13;). Paul in Romans 3 develops this idea, saying that God has been put in the dock

by men who disbelieve His grace and utterly certain promise to save. And He will be justified in His word of promise, and every man who legally probes Him will be found a liar. Israel put God in the dock, "to the test", over the same issue- whether He would really give them Canaan, and whether 'Yahweh is really with us or not' (Ex. 17:7). The answer to that question is ultimately in Emmanuel, the Lord Jesus, 'God with us'.

3:9 *Where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years-* See on :8. They continually tested God even though they saw His works daily; the manna, water from the rock, shekinah glory over the tabernacle, the cloud by day and the fire by night. But still they tested Him. As noted on :8, this is our warning against ever seeking 'hard proof'. Even if we were to be daily given it, this would not take away the desire to test God. It is total faith in the word of promise which is required (:6), and the confirmation is not in petty experimentation day by day which 'proves' God, but rather has it already been provided in the Lord's death and resurrection.

3:10 *Therefore I was displeased with this generation, and said: They do always err in their heart. They did not know My ways-* This 'displeasure' or 'grief' lasted 40 years (:17 s.w.); it was a daily grief that they did not trust Him. To believe in God is to trust Him. In Hebrew, belief is trust. And no amount of petty testing of God will give us that trust. Psalm 95 gives us a unique insight into God's internal thought processes. He "said" within Himself that their problem was in Israel's hearts. They had seen "His way in the [Red] Sea" (Ps. 77:19), He had "made known His ways to Israel" (Ps. 103:17), but their heart was far from Him. But "My ways" refers so often to God's commandments; Israel were repeatedly asked to "walk in His ways" as they walked through the wilderness (Dt. 10:12; 11:22; 26:17 etc.). He sought not so much total legalistic obedience to His ways / commandments as to "know" them, to appreciate them, to perceive them in their hearts. The Hebrew word translated "err" is that used for Israel's "wandering" in the wilderness for 40 years (Ps. 107:4). They wandered in their minds, just as humanity does today- from this passing passion to that, toying with that principle or fantasy and then with this... and that mental lack of stability was reflected in how they literally wandered. This aimless wandering through life is the parade characteristic of the unbelieving world. Only a firm hope in Christ and our future salvation can give us this mental and emotional stability which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The error in the heart was simply not believing in salvation. They did not know His ways in that His ways are of salvation and grace.

3:11 *As I swore in My anger: They shall not enter into My rest-* God has emotion. The generation that were promised the rest, permanence and stability of the promised land were not given it, because in their hearts they wandered. And this, as noted on :10, was reflected in their wandering in the wilderness. This implies that God changed His mind about letting Israel enter the land; for He had promised that generation "rest" in that He promised them the land (Josh. 1:15). Or as Num. 14:34 (A. V. mg.) says: "Ye shall bear your iniquity, even forty years, and ye shall know the altering of My purpose". These were the words of the Angel to Moses. The apparent change of plans could be seen as more appropriate if it concerned the Angel which led them; and yet the Angel all the same was manifesting God. This oath they would not "enter into My rest" was solely because they did not believe (:18). The immorality, idolatry etc. were relatively incidental to the essential issue- that they did not believe He would give them rest in the promised land. And therefore He did not give it to them. The context of all this is Paul's appeal for confident hope in our future salvation (:6). It is

unbelief and a constant demand for 'proof' which was their problem which cost them salvation.

3:12 *Brothers, take care, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, causing you to depart from the living God-* The problem was in their hearts (:10), their unbelief (:18). The appeal to "take care" was not just to the Hebrew believers as individuals, but to them as "brothers" to ensure that not only in themselves personally but amongst none of them there should be this heart of unbelief. The immediate issue was of not believing in the Lord Jesus. This was the reason why they were no longer confident of salvation; because Judaism had eroded their faith in the saviour, their real confidence in salvation was waning, and likewise their joy (:6). It was this heart of unbelief in Messiah as Saviour which would cause them to depart from God, the God who is alive in His risen Son. This was the great tragedy- that Judaism which so prided itself in theism was actually turning people away from real faith in God. Because faith in Him is predicated upon faith in His Son.

The unbelief in view is not atheism, but rather disbelief in God's offer of salvation (:18). To disbelieve it is not simply a polite refusal of a proffered gift; it is described here as "evil". They are departing from the living God, from the God who is so alive in His grace to save; and so that will be confirmed by being told to "Depart from me" (s.w. Lk. 13:27). Rejection is simply confirming people in the way they have chosen. By turning away from total confidence in salvation, people are turning away from God. Even if they remain church attenders and professing acceptance of a set of doctrines about Him.

3:13- see on 1 Cor. 10:21.

But encourage one another day by day, so long as it is called today, lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin- See on :7 for the significance of "today"; "so long as..." has the idea of 'insofar as now...'. Because we are in the today of salvation, confident of acceptance if the Lord comes now, we should encourage each other in the certainty of our salvation. As noted on :12, the Hebrews were to not only worry about their own salvation but that of others. They were to encourage one another daily, which suggests the audience were daily with each other. This would fit the situation in the Jerusalem church, where it seems they daily encountered each other (Acts 2:46). It was the deceitful nature of sin which could harden their heart; but the 'heart' problem was a disbelief in the sure salvation available in Jesus. But ultimately it was sin which was deceiving them, albeit under the guise of claiming to be more rigorously legally obedient to Judaism. The final issue is between sin and righteousness; the kingdom of this world or the eternal Kingdom of God and His Son; the life of the flesh or the Spirit. It was sin which was attractive to them, and we can infer that this was the fundamental reason they were shying away from confident faith in their salvation. For if we are sure we are to live eternally in God's Kingdom in the spiritual life, we can hardly be enthusiastic for the way of the flesh in this life. So it is the desire to sin which militates against total confidence in salvation.

3:14 *For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast to our original confidence, remaining firm to the end-* The word for "partakers" is used of how we are His "fellows" or co-partakers (1:9); we partake in the heavenly calling (:1) and in the Holy Spirit (6:4). We are saved, and yet not finally; we are partakers, but only completely so at the last day, after we have held firm unto the end. The "original confidence" implies they were totally confident of their salvation when they were first baptized; "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16) rang so simply true to them. Salvation is on account of being "in Christ", but we must abide in Him to the end of our lives. It is then that we are "partakers of Christ". Paul envisaged the

Lord's return in the lifetime of believers, and so uses "the end" as a reference to both the end of a believer's life and also to the Lord's coming. The Lord Himself several times defined "the end" as the day of His return (Mt. 24:6,13,14). Paul asks us to hold our faith unto "the end" (6:11), which seeing death is unconsciousness means that he intended us to hold the faith until "the end" of our lives. And yet in effect, our death is His return, for the next conscious moment for us will be His return.

"Our original confidence" suggests that the converts were originally confident of salvation when they first believed. They were full of joy in prospect of definite salvation (:6). This very much sounds like the joy of the early Hebrew converts in Jerusalem in Acts 2, and I suggest that they are the audience of this letter to the Hebrew Christians. The same word for "hold fast" is used in Heb. 10:23 about the need to "hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering- for He is faithful that promised". Their confession of faith was not therefore a profession of doctrinal positions; but a confession that they absolutely believed that they would be saved, that they would live for ever; that Jesus was indeed their Saviour, He on the cross had saved them, they had eternal life [in the terms of John's Gospel]. And all their lives they were to retain that same faith in salvation, exactly because "He is faithful that promised".

3:15 *It is said: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion-* The idea of "today" as expounded on :7 is that if we right now hear the Lord's voice, we can rejoice that if today is our "end", then we shall be saved. We have heard in essence the same voice as Israel heard in that the Gospel was preached to them as well as to us (4:2). "The rebellion" is a phrase used only elsewhere in :8, where it refers to the whole period of Israel's testing of God in the desert, rather than some particular moment of rebellion. But the quotation from Ps. 95:8 specifically uses the Hebrew word *meribah* for "the rebellion" or "provocation". Their provocation at Meribah was that they had specifically challenged God to prove He was amongst them, despite having been given so many signs that He was; and they did this at a place called Meribah twice, at the beginning (Ex. 17:7) and at the end of the forty year wanderings (Num. 20:2-13). The observation is made in Ps. 78:18,41 that this latter testing of God was done "in their heart", and it is the heart which is Paul's concern in this section. The hardening of hearts was therefore in refusing to perceive all the evidence which God had already given in Christ and indeed in the miraculous signs which had been witnessed by the Hebrew Christians. Perhaps Paul felt that the 40 year period from the Lord's death was coming to a close, and the Hebrew Christians likewise at the end of a similar period were testing God and desiring to return to Egypt, which is what happened at Meribah (Num. 20:2-13). But the element of 'return' was in that they were returning to Judaism, which Paul sees as 'Egypt'. Stephen made the same connection in his speech (see on 1:1).

3:16 *For who, having heard, still rebelled? Was it not all those who followed Moses out of Egypt?*- The implication could be that having heard the message of salvation, they should not have rebelled. The argument and rhetoric is typical of one which would be used in a verbal address (see on 13:22); as if to say 'And let's remind ourselves, folks, who are we talking about? Who are these rebels who heard the good news but still rebelled? Was it not all those who followed Moses out of Egypt?'. The implication was that it was Christians who had followed Christ out of the world and through the waters of baptism towards salvation (1 Cor. 10:1,2)- who were now turning back to where they had come from. The total failure of that generation is cited as a sober example of a mass collapse of faith; "your whole number" were to perish as described in :17 (Num. 14:29 "Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and all

that were numbered of you, according to your whole number"). Paul in 2 Thess. 2 envisaged a great collapse of faith just before the Lord returned. And here he seems to hint at the same thing by suggesting that the Hebrews were at the point Israel were at in Meribah, at the end of their journey / 40 years, where they turned away and wished to return to Egypt.

3:17 *And with whom was He displeased for forty years? Was it not with those that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?*- The sustained series of rhetorical questions is appropriate to a verbal address- see on 13:22. The displeasure for forty years could suggest that the incident of Meribah, "rebellion" / "provocation", was the one at the start of the forty years; see on :15. Heb. 3:17 RVmg speaks of their "limbs [which] fell in the wilderness"- the picture is of condemned men staggering on through the desert, discarded limbs wasted by some terrible and progressive disease. This is the picture of the condemned. Israel wandering in the wilderness until their carcasses lay strewn over the scrubland of Sinai connects with Cain also being a wanderer after his rejection. He was made a "fugitive", from a Hebrew root meaning to shake, to totter, to reel. He was to wander, shaking with fear, reeling. The word is also rendered 'to bemoan'. It's an awful scene: bemoaning his lot, shaking, wandering, reeling, nowhere. The same image is found in Prov. 14:32: "The wicked is driven away [Heb. to totter, be chased] in his wickedness".

God grieved over the carcasses of those wretched men whom He slew in the wilderness for their thankless rebellions against Him their saviour. The apostle makes the point: "With *whom* was He grieved?". Answer: with the wicked whom He slew! A human God or a proud God would never grieve over His victory over His enemies. Even in the fickleness of Israel's repentance, knowing their future, knowing what they would subject His Son to, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (Jud. 10:16). He delays the second coming because He waits and hopes for repentance and spiritual growth from us. But He praises the faithful for patiently waiting for Him (Is. 30:18; Ps. 37:7). Here we see the humility of God's grace.

The "sin" is defined as unbelief in :18,19- lack of faith in the simple assurance that they would be given the Kingdom. They were idolaters at this time, having taken with them the gods of Egypt. But their sin is defined as one thing- disbelief that they would be in the Kingdom.

3:18 *And to whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest, but to those that were disobedient?*- Disobedience is paralleled here with "unbelief" (:19) in that faith and works are related. Faith without works is dead. If we really believe that we shall be saved, and can say at this moment of time that in this "today" I shall be saved... then we will naturally seek to be obedient. But what was Israel's particular act of disobedience in the wilderness which led to their being excluded from entering the land? I suggest the reference is to Dt. 1:26: "Yet you wouldn't go up [AV "refused to go up"], but rebelled against the commandment of Yahweh your God". They were told to enter the land but refused. Refusal to accept the Kingdom of God is tantamount to disbelief we shall enter it (:19). This is where it is critical to understand "faith" as not simply belief in the rightness and logical correctness of a set of theological propositions. Faith is trust / confidence that we shall be saved. It is to say "Yes!" to the command to enter the Kingdom. If we cease believing this, then we are in that sense disobedient to the command to enter the Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. We thereby judge ourselves as those who shall be rejected from the Kingdom, in that we did not wish to be there ourselves.

3:19- see on Jn. 3:3.

So we see that they were not able to enter in because of their unbelief- See on :18. The essential problem with Israel was not their moral failure but their disbelief that really they would be saved. They did not enter in because they chose themselves not to. But once rejected, they then did attempt to enter the land, not by faith but in their own strength; and they were not able to enter (Num. 14:40-45). This again was a pertinent challenge to the Hebrew Christians returning to Judaism. Entry to the Kingdom of God can only be by faith that we shall do so; any attempt to enter in our own strength will leave us realizing all too late that we "were not able to enter in" because we lacked faith, even if we had belated desire and human effort. The *dunamis* ('ability') to enter the Kingdom is the *dunamis* of the Spirit gift, which is predicated upon faith alone (Eph. 3:16-20); the idea is parallel with not being able to see the Kingdom [cp. Moses seeing the promised land] unless we receive the birth of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3,5). "Cannot enter into" in Jn. 3:5 translates the very Greek phrase found here ["not able to enter in"].

HEBREWS CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Therefore, while the promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear-*As explained on 3:6, we should be able to say that "today" we shall be saved, and be confident in it, if the Lord returns today or we die. The promise of entering salvation in this sense remains to us; all we have to do is believe. But as in Rom. 11, there is the command to fear because of the real possibility of our being like natural Israel. There is a very powerful parable in the account of the wilderness journey through life, whereby the Red Sea represents baptism, eating the manna daily corresponds to daily feeding on the word etc. This parable is alluded to in so many parts of Scripture. However, only a minority of those baptized in the Red Sea actually reached the promised land. Can we expect the parallel with the new Israel to break down at this point? Just look back at your own Christian experience if you can't believe it. Add to this the number of those who spiritually fall asleep, and the frightening similarity between natural and spiritual Israel comes abruptly into focus.

"Let us fear lest any one of you..." rather than "one of us" could imply that the concern should be that others might fall away. Given the huge blessing ahead, it is the acutest tragedy of the cosmos if any one individual should 'fail to attain it'. And we need to sense that, and be sensitive and caring for all on the path there, lest they stumble from it. The same idea is in Heb. 12:15, "Looking diligently, lest any man [i.e. any other person] fail of the grace of God".

An element of fear is not wrong in itself. Israel in the wilderness had the pillar of fire to remind them of God's close presence, and to thereby motivate them not to sin: "His fear (will) be before your faces, that you sin not" (Ex. 20:20). Notice how Isaac's guardian angel is described as "the fear" in Gen. 31:42,53 cp. 48:15,16.

Lest any one of you should seem to have failed to attain it- The idea is 'be counted / judged to have arrived at it too late'. The same word is used in stating the concern that a man "*fail* of the grace of God" (Heb. 12:15). The events of Kadesh-Barnea seem so often in mind in Hebrews. The people were rejected from entering the land, and yet they then desperately tried to enter the land- but were not allowed. They as it were 'arrived at it too late'. This is the tragedy of rejection- arriving at the truth all too late.

4:2- see on Jn. 15:27.

For indeed we have had good tidings preached to us, even as also they did; but the word they heard did not benefit them, because it was not united by faith with them that heard it- The Gospel was preached to Abraham as it is to us (Gal. 3:8). That good news in its simplest form is not a set of theological propositions but the simple promise that by grace we shall receive an eternal Kingdom. The promise of inheriting the land is therefore a key part of the Gospel preached to us. They like the Hebrew believers in Jerusalem had "heard" rather than read this good news. But the message preached must be "united... with" us. This act of unity with the promise of the Kingdom is baptism and abiding in Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). The breaking of bread service is another opportunity to demonstrate our unity with the Kingdom promise in Christ, but unity with it is primarily in living the Kingdom life now. The ultimate "benefit" is that we enter the Kingdom of God (s.w. Mt. 16:26). The word of the Spirit is what profits or benefits us (Jn. 6:63 s.w.). By turning away from the word of promise, the Hebrew Christians were not going to be benefitted or [s.w.] 'profited'. The Jewish rituals upon which they were now relying would "profit nothing" (Gal. 5:2; Heb. 13:9 s.w.). The idea surely is that Christians cannot assume that they have responded better than did Israel. The same Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached to us as it was to them. Because they were broken off, Paul reasons in Romans 11, we cannot assume that as a community, we shall do better. And clearly only a small fraction of the Old Testament people of God shall enter God's Kingdom. The positive upshot of this approach is that we will not be so easily disillusioned with the church as we know it- if we understand that probably only a minority of them are serious Kingdom people.

The Greek here is difficult. The sense could well be "they were not united in faith with those who listened". The "those who did hear / listen" would then refer to Joshua and Caleb. As at several points in Hebrews, it seems that the events of Kadesh-Barnea are being alluded to. Israel turned against Joshua and Caleb rather than being united to them.

4:3- see on 2 Cor. 4:6.

For we who have believed do enter into that rest, even as He has said: As I swore in my anger: They shall not enter into My rest- The emphasis is upon the word "They". Because some would not enter the rest, the implication is that some would. This is a parade example of a cup half full rather than half empty attitude. It is typical of Paul's positivism, which should be seen in our thinking too. We "do enter" in the sense that we shall enter if we believe; a futuristic present middle indicative. Here we have the 'now but not yet'. We are in that rest, in that we do not trust in works. And yet in another sense, we labour today as God laboured, in order to come to that rest when the Lord returns.

Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world- The Kingdom has been prepared for us "from the foundation of the world" and we are to "enter" it as they were to enter the "rest" of Canaan (Mt. 25:34). So the tragedy was and is that those who have heard the word of promise of the Kingdom and who do not believe it... are missing out on a possible future that was carefully prepared for them from the beginning. It was not a question of doing enough works- all the necessary works had been done, the Kingdom prepared. They 'just' didn't believe it, didn't want it. To disbelieve in salvation is to spurn what was finished and totally prepared for us from the beginning.

4:4 *For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: And God*

rested on the seventh day from all His works- "A certain place" is again language appropriate to a verbal address, where the reference would not be turned up in the synagogue scrolls (see on 13:22). Again we see the doctrine of inspiration- for the author's comment that "God rested..." is quoted as God speaking. God's "rest" was not from exhaustion; He ceased working then. The works of creation were finished; and the finished works of :3 are our salvation. All the work of the physical creation was done with our eternal salvation in view. To spurn it is to spurn creation and all its intentions, to turn away from all things into the darkness of nothingness. This theme of works being finished and ceasing is picked up in 4:10; if we have believed, and "today" have effectively entered the Kingdom rest by faith, then we too have ceased or 'rested' (s.w.) from reliance upon our works. And this was just the message needed by the Hebrews who were falling away from faith and turning to works for justification.

4:5 And in this place again: They shall not enter into My rest- The point is being made that the "rest" of Gen. 2:2 is the same "rest" which God intended His people to share in Psalm 95. The sabbath rest therefore speaks of the Kingdom. It is as if God invites us to identify with Himself as having laboured, but now ceasing from that labour in 'rest'. The idea has been put forward that the seventh day of creation represents the 1000 years of the Millennium, and therefore this should begin at the end of the 6th day, i.e. 6 days or 6000 years after creation, if one day is as a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8). The view is therefore pushed that the Lord must return around the year 2000 AD, taking Biblical history as spanning 4000 years from creation to the Lord Jesus; and seeing His appearance as that of the sun on the fourth day. But this view whilst ingenious is problematic. Hebrews quotes almost exclusively from the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text, and so do many of the inspired New Testament writers. But the chronology presented in the Septuagint is very different from that in the Masoretic text; and the history from creation to the Lord Jesus is significantly shorter as the ages and order of the genealogies are different from the MT. And the idea of a literal millennium is also open to serious question, as noted on Revelation 20. The "rest" in view is a cessation from work and enjoyment of God's grace.

4:6 Seeing therefore it remains that some should enter therein, and they to whom the good tidings were earlier preached failed to enter in because of disobedience- God's plan will not totally fail. Some will enter the Kingdom rest. The good news of inheriting the Kingdom was preached to the Hebrews in Egypt and afterwards, but they disbelieved. But the rest of the Kingdom is still planned, prepared from the foundation of the world. Here in :6 "disobedience" is cited as the reason for their failure to enter; but the obedience in view was obedience to the challenge to simply believe that they would enter the Kingdom. See on 3:18,19.

4:7 He again defines a certain day, a today, saying through David a long time afterwards (in the words already quoted): Today, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts- As explained on 3:6, that "today" is our today; in that right now at this moment, if we hear and believe His voice that promises us eternal inheritance in the Kingdom, we can be saved. We can be assured that if we die today or the Lord returns today, we shall be saved. By grace. This is the crucial importance of life and living today. And again we see the point made about Divine inspiration- God spoke through David in his Psalms. This emphasis upon inspiration was necessary because there were sectors within Judaism which denied the Divine inspiration of anything apart from the Pentateuch. The appeal to not harden hearts is of course alluding to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who hardened their hearts and were confirmed in it by

being hardened by God. The point is that the Israelites who left Egypt repeated the same attitude- they too hardened their hearts, they thought like Egyptians. Despite, like the Egyptians, having seen evidence of God's hand through the signs and wonders done. The Hebrew Christians were in the same position.

4:8 -see on Josh. 22:4.

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken afterward of another day- The argument of Judaism was that Joshua-Jesus had given Israel rest. But of course Paul is arguing that a greater Jesus-Joshua offered the rest still to come. The "another day" is the "today" of :7. The today of entering the rest can be our today if we believe we are saved and shall enter into the rest. It's a case of 'now but not yet'; in a sense we are saved and have entered the rest, having ceased from justification by works; but in another sense we still await literal entry into the Kingdom of God.

4:9 *There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God-* God's people are not therefore the same as Israel after the flesh. Israel were not given "rest", their temporary possession of parts of the territory promised to Abraham was hardly entering the Sabbath rest. For they were removed from that land and did not permanently possess it, neither did they inherit the entire territory promised from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt. The argument in :8 has been that Israel as a people did not enter the 'rest'; they perished in the wilderness. But the 'rest' is to be given to the true "people of God", thus redefining God's people away from purely natural Israel. The 'rest' they will receive is entrance into the Kingdom of God. The idea may therefore be that Israel could have not only entered Canaan instead of perishing in the desert, but if obedient, some form of the Kingdom of God could have come in their national experience.

So often in Hebrews, the Day of Atonement is in view. The descriptions of the Tabernacle in chapter 9 are all from the viewpoint of that day. So it is possible that the Sabbath that is in view here is not the weekly Sabbath, but the Day of Atonement sabbath, when the people had been cleansed from sin. That will be the ultimate "rest".

4:10 *For he that is entered into His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His-* The sense may be that we are no longer justified by works insofar as in prospect we have entered the rest, as explained on :8. The "he" in view is the believer who is also doing part of God's creative work; as God ceased from works, so does the believer. But we are not yet entered into that rest, and must "give diligence to enter into that rest" (:11). In that sense we are continuing to work as God did during the six work day of creation. The works were finished from the foundation of the world (:3; see note there), but in another sense the Father and Son are working continually because their Sabbath rest has not yet come (Jn. 5:17 and context). Our work is therefore part of God's creative work, leading towards the re-creation of Eden on earth, the Kingdom of God in its full literal establishment when the Lord Jesus returns.

"Ceased from his own works" could imply 'has stopped trusting in his own works'. But the phrase for "own works" is that used in Mk. 13:34, where each believer is given "his own work" to get on and do until the Master returns. On one hand, we are saved, we are in the "rest". But in another sense, we are still working, doing creative work, looking to enter that rest at the Lord's return. Perhaps this connects with the concluding thought in Heb. 13:21, that God would "Make you perfect [bring to completion] in every good work to do His will". And it is the same phrase used in Rev. 22:12, promising that at the Lord's coming, He will render "to every man according as his [own] works shall be". In this sense, the ceasing or resting from work

is at the Lord's return. Now, we are in the six days of creative work. Our work for Him is not in vain- it is creative.

4:11 *Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no one fall by the same kind of disobedience-* As noted on :10, we are in a sense in the rest in that our salvation at this "today" is assured, but in another sense, we have not yet entered and are to labour as God did during the six days. Our labour and diligence is not just for ourselves personally, but to the end that nobody falls as the bodies and limbs of disobedient Israel fell in the wilderness. Those who no longer relied on the works of the Law but on faith were living in the spirit of the Sabbath- they had in some sense entered the rest. But despite their reliance on faith, works were still necessary: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God... let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall." (4:9,11). This is a perfect cameo of the whole situation; in prospect we are in the Kingdom, but have a very real possibility of falling from grace, and still need to labour for the final entry into that Kingdom. And that labour is especially in ensuring that others do not fall after the pattern of the Hebrews' fall.

4:12 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, and pierces even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart-* The motivation for the receding appeals is that the word of God, as a title for the Lord Jesus, is right now "quick to discern the thoughts and intents of [our hearts]" in mediating for us. Such language is appropriate to a person, Jesus as the word of God, rather than to the book called the Bible. And Hebrews began by saying that as God had spoken through the words of the prophets, so He now speaks to us in His Son. But this is how He was in His mortal life here- for then He was "of quick understanding" too (Is. 11:3). He would have had a way of seeing through to the essence of a person or situation with awesome speed- and this must have made human life very irritating for Him at times. But who He was then is who He is now. It's the same Jesus who intercedes for us in sensitivity and compassion. See on Heb. 4:15. The reference to the sharp knife dividing up the inner parts of the body is an allusion to the priest preparing the sacrifices, and :14-16 develops this theme in relation to the Lord Jesus as our priest. Our innermost parts are laid bare and placed on the altar before God. And it is the state of the heart which is, for this priest, the most significant part of the offering. Hence the earlier appeals not to harden our hearts but to be completely confident in our hearts that in this "today", at this moment, we shall be saved.

4:13 *And there is no creature that is not revealed to his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to give account-* We must see the urgency of our position as sinners; we are condemned now and yet we can repent; but not then. Heb. 4:13 makes the point that we right now are "naked" before the eyes of Him to whom we right now give account [*logos*]. We will give that *logos* in the last day (Rom. 14:11,12); yet before the Word of God, as it is in both Scripture and in the person of the Lord Jesus, we face our judgment today, in essence. And we are pronounced "naked" before Him. Yet therefore, in this day of opportunity, we can come boldly before the throne because we have "such an High Priest", as Heb. 4:16 continues. We must realize that we are right now revealed and laid open to the Lord Jesus; just as much as we shall be at the last day. We are to live now as if we are in His judgment presence.

4:14 *Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the*

Son of God, let us hold fast our confession- He endured our nature and temptations *so that* He might be an empathetic High Priest (consider the implications of Heb. 2:10,17; 4:14,15; 5:1,2); the Lord was fully consecrated as High Priest after His death, and it was then that He began to be the sympathetic, understanding High Priest which the Hebrew letter speaks of. The fact that He knows so thoroughly our feelings here and now, especially our struggles for personal righteousness, should *of itself* encourage our awareness of and relationship with Him.

The continuity between the mortal, human Jesus and the exalted Lord of all which He became on His ascension is brought out quite artlessly in Heb. 4:14: "Our great high priest, who has passed through the heavens". The picture is of "this same Jesus", the man on earth, passing through all heavens to 'arrive' at the throne of God Himself to mediate for us there. His ascension to Heaven was viewed physically like this by the disciples, and is expressed here in that kind of language of physical ascent, to bring home to us the continuity between the man Jesus on earth, and the exalted Lord now in Heaven itself. The allusion is also to the Jewish idea of there being many 'heavens'; whether there were or not, Paul's idea is that the Lord has passed through them all. The same Jesus who was once here is now there; He who once experienced temptation can thereby strengthen us in our temptations. We need to realize that nobody can be tempted by that which holds no appeal; the Lord Jesus must have seen and reflected upon sin as a possible course of action, even though He never took it. And for the same reason, several New Testament passages (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:5) call the exalted Lord Jesus a "man"- even now. Let's not see these passages merely as theological problems for Trinitarians. The wonder of it all is that Jesus after His glorification is still in some sense human. He as "the pioneer of our faith" shows us the path to glory, a glory that doesn't involve us becoming somehow superhuman and unreal.

Because the man of our nature, Jesus, passed through all the heavens to the actual throne of God, so great is His exaltation... therefore we should hold fast to the original confession of our faith. This implies that the Hebrews had originally confessed at their baptisms that they believed that for sure they would be in the Kingdom. We have fled for refuge to lay hold on the Hope, the utter certainty, that is set before us (Heb. 6:18 s.w.). It was this confession of faith which they were to hold on to; holding the hope is the same as holding the confession of faith. For that was faith / trust / belief in the sure Hope, that they really would be in the Kingdom, that the good news of the Kingdom applied to them. This is what it is to believe the good news of the Kingdom- to believe that I will be there.

4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things, yet did not sin-* See on :14. Note carefully the tense used: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities". It doesn't say 'which could not have been touched...', but rather "which cannot [present tense] be touched". It's as if He is *now* touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Which opens a fascinating window into what having God's nature is all about. When we by grace come to share it, it's not just that we will dimly remember what it was like to be human. We will somehow still be able to be touched by those feelings, in sympathy with those who still have that nature during the Millennial reign. The only other time the Spirit uses the Greek word translated "touched with the feeling..." is in Heb. 10:34, where we read of how the Hebrew Christians "had compassion of me", the writer of the letter. The link, within the same

letter, is surely to reflect how they had been so compelled by their Lord's fellow feelings toward them, His fellow feeling for them right now, that they in turn came to feel like this for their suffering brother. A related word is found in 1 Pet. 3:8: "Having *compassion one of another*, love as brethren". The wonder of the fact that Jesus feels for us, that He can enter into our feelings, should result in our seeing to get inside the feelings of others, empathizing with them, feeling for them and with them. It's this feature of the Lord Jesus which enables Him to be such a matchless mediator. Stephen saw Him *standing* at the right hand of the throne in Heaven, when usually, Hebrews stresses, He *sits*. The Lord was and is so passionately, compassionately, caught up in the needs of His brethren that this is how He mediates for us. And it's the same Jesus, who walked round Galilee with a heart of compassion for kids, for the mentally sick, for oppressed and abused women... even for the hard hearted Pharisees whom He would fain have gathered under His loving wings, such was His desire for others' salvation. Jesus, despite the moral splendour of Divine nature, is still able to be *touched* with the feeling of our infirmities as He intercedes for the forgiveness of our sins.

4:16 - see on 2 Sam. 7:27.

Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace- Coming boldly before the throne of grace in prayer is again judgment seat language (see on :13). Our attitude to God in prayer now will be our attitude to Him at the judgment; we are 'bold / confident' before Him now, and we can be 'bold' then (1 Jn. 2:28). Before the throne of grace we find grace to help; whereas we will "find" [s.w.] mercy in the day of judgment (2 Tim. 1:18). Each time we receive grace to help before the throne, we are anticipating the judgment day scenario. The throne *of grace* suggests that it is prayers of confession and seeking of forgiveness and salvation which are in view. Hebrews so often uses the word "therefore"; *because of* the facts of the atonement, we can *therefore* come boldly before God's throne in prayer, with a true heart and clear conscience. This "boldness" which the atonement has enabled will be reflected in our being 'bold' in our witness (2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4); our experience of imputed righteousness will lead us to have a confidence exuding through our whole being. This is surely why 'boldness' was such a characteristic and watchword of the early church (Acts 4:13,29,31; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:13; Heb. 10:19; 1 Jn. 4:17).

That we may receive mercy and may find grace to help us in our time of need- The throne of grace means the throne from whence grace is given. And if indeed it is prayers for forgiveness and strength against temptation which are in view, then the grace given is in forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit to withstand temptation; this is the 'succouring' spoken of in 2:18 (see note there). The allusion is to Lk. 1:30. When you ask for forgiveness, be like Mary in her spiritual ambition in asking to be the mother of Messiah.

The Lord Jesus is prophetically described as He "that hath boldness to approach unto me" (Jer. 30:21 RV). This is applied to us, who boldly approach the Father in prayer likewise. We are bidden to draw near to the Father in prayer just as the Son drew near (Heb. 4:15,16). He wishes us to share in the loving relationship which there was between Him and His Father, and prayer is crucial to this. Really appreciating that Christ is our personal High Priest to offer our prayers powerfully to God, should inspire us to regularly pray in faith. "Time of need" is literally 'at the right time'; hence GNB "just when we need it". And it is in the moments of temptation and realization of failure that we need grace; and we are given it precisely then. Bear in mind that Paul often uses *charis*, "grace", to refer to the gift of internal strengthening

by the Spirit. It is this which will be our "help", a word only elsewhere used about the rope that undergirds a ship in difficulty in a storm (Acts 27:17). This is what holds us together.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 5

5:1 For every high priest, being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin- "Taken from among men" continues the emphasis upon the Lord's humanity; the language recalls the Passover lamb being taken out from among the flock. The connection of thought is that the high priest was appointed "for men" because he was "from among men"; this is a repetition of the argument in 2:11 that the sanctifier and the sanctified are "all of one". The Lord's high priestly work is not simply to get forgiveness for our sins; but to enable us to offer our "gifts", the sacrifices of our lives, our thank offerings, in a way acceptable to God.

5:2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray- The same idea of "going astray" is found in Lk. 11:6 AVmg., where the man "out of his way" comes knocking on the Lord's door. The image of the shut door is that of rejection; but here the door is opened, and the man given "as much as he needs" of forgiveness and acceptance. It is the same word used of the lost sheep which had "gone astray" and left the flock of God's people (Mt. 18:12,13). But the word is used of how the Judaists had gone astray (Mt. 22:29; M. 12:24), of how the Hebrews ancient and modern had gone astray (Heb. 3:10) and of how Judaism would make many 'go astray' in the last days before His coming (Mt. 24:4,5; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7). Even though the Hebrews had been made to go astray, Paul assures them of the Lord's continued compassion, just as much as for them who did not know the true way and were "ignorant". The Lord Jesus has compassion upon those who are ignorant of His Gospel, just as He does upon those who fall out of the way to life (Heb. 5:2, alluding to Christ as the good Samaritan who comes to stricken men). His current activity and range of feeling is amazing. It is He who brings men to faith in God (1 Pet. 1:21; 3:18), revealing the Father to men (Lk. 10:22; Jn. 14:21), calling and inviting them to the Kingdom (1 Pet. 5:10; Rev. 22:17), going out into the market place and calling labourers (Mt. 20:3-7), almost *compelling* men to come in to the ecclesia (Mt. 22:8-10), receiving them when they are baptized (Rom. 15:7). He is the sower who sows the word in men's hearts, working night and day in the tending of the seed after it has taken root (Mk. 4:27); the one who lights the candle in men's spirituality so that it might give light to others (Mk. 4:21). He permits and sometimes blocks preaching (1 Cor. 16:7,4,19; 2 Cor. 2:12; Phil. 2:24; 1 Thess. 3:11).

Since he himself is also subject to weakness- This speaks of the Mosaic high priests; the Lord likewise was "subject to weakness" and thereby qualified and motivated to be sensitive to the weak. "Subject to" in Greek really means 'impeded by', and is used of being bound with a chain (Acts 28:20) or having a weight tied around the neck (Lk. 17:2). The limitations, impediments and frustrations of human weakness were experienced by the Lord and motivate His sensitivity to us. And yet we notice the present tenses. He is not subject to weakness now, but in a sense the Lord "is" because of His total identification with us. In the same sense, He is described as being right now "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). This is so on account of His intense identification with us now, in all our aspects of weakness.

5:3 And because of it, he is required to offer sacrifices both for his sins and also for the sins of the people- The "weakness" of the high priest included moral weakness,

which required him to offer also for his own sins. The references to the High Priest are to present the Lord Jesus by way of both similarity and contrast. Thus the way the high priest served standing is contrasted with the way the Lord serves sitting (10:11); and the contrast here at this point is that the Lord had no sins to offer for. The Lord indeed was subject to weakness (:2), but without the need to offer sin offerings for his own sins.

5:4 And no one takes this honour to himself, but only when he is called by God, even as was Aaron- The Lord was likewise "called" and was not self-appointed; but the similarity then turns to contrast when we realize that He was not of the tribe of Levi, and was appointed not by birth from the tribe of Levi but through having been begotten at resurrection from the dead (:5). He was 'called' by reason of being the son of God, not the son of Levi through Aaron.

5:5- see on Rom. 8:26.

So Christ also did not glorify himself to become a high priest, but He that spoke to him: You are my Son. This day have I begotten you- The calling to be high priest was through His resurrection, which was when He was declared God's Son in power (Rom. 1:4). There is no record of the Father ever speaking these words to the Son; perhaps they were spoken in some intimate ceremony at or after the resurrection or ascension. The new kind of high priesthood in view is predicated upon sonship- but not of Aaron, but of God. God's Son was therefore high priest, on account of His begetting from the dead in resurrection. It was this which qualified Him to be High Priest, having been subject to human weakness (:2) and also to glory and power over that weakness.

5:6 As also He said elsewhere: You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek- This spoken word of inauguration and appointment was likewise uttered in the "day" when the Lord was "begotten" in resurrection (:5). There is no evidence here for any personally pre-existent Christ. The Hebrew writer alludes to and subverts the defiant language of the Maccabees in repeatedly describing Christ as "priest for ever" (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:3,17,21)- when this was the term applied to Simon Maccabaeus in 1 Macc 14:41. See on Lk. 20:25. The nature of the priesthood was to be eternal; so although there were similarities with the Aaronic priests, the priesthood of Messiah was not identical with it. It was after the order of Melchizedek.

5:7 Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard for his Godly fear- Verses 7-9 lead up to the climactic statement that therefore, the Lord was ordained as high priest at His resurrection and glorification. It could be argued that the prayers offered up refer to the prayers of believers which the Lord offered to the Father even in the days of His flesh. The plural "days" would encourage us to read this offering up of prayers as something which happened during His lifetime; for He did indeed pray the Father for His followers (Jn. 16:26). This was as it were training and preparation for His inauguration as High Priest over God's house which occurred at His resurrection. His behaviour and experience during His mortal life was what qualifies Him for the work He now does. And yet the prayers to be saved from death, offered with crying and tears, surely also reference the Lord's praying for personal salvation in Gethsemane. He "was heard"; not in the form He wished, i.e. immediate deliverance from the crucifixion process, but in that the essence of His prayer was heard, and "for his Godly fear" He was resurrected. The Lord's humanity is so stressed here that Trinitarians really need to recalculate their

positions based on these words. The Lord's prayers for others and His prayers for His own salvation from death are really part of the same nexus. This is why it's not so much a question of two possible interpretations [the prayers offered being of others, or, His own prayers for salvation]; but rather these two options are really part of the same picture, and this is why they artlessly merge into each other. For as Robert Roberts put it, "He died for Himself that it might be for us"; His salvation was so tied up with ours.

"With strong crying and tears" is certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of the Lord making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". One might think from Heb. 5:7 that the Lord Jesus made quite a noise whilst hanging on the cross or in Gethsemane. But Rom. 8:26 says that His groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. No doubt the Lord Jesus was praying silently, or at best quietly, as He hung there. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved on the cross for us is what He now goes through as He intercedes for us with the Father.

Heb. 5:7 can be understood as describing the Lord on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears". This must surely be a reference to "Father forgive them". Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes Christ as our High Priest making intercession for us "with groanings". "Groanings" is surely the language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation. See on Lk. 23:34.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when *we* in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" which enables Him now to save us from the bondage of fearing death (2:15). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a

profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity.

5:8 Though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered- A difficult verse for Trinitarians. This learning of obedience doesn't suggest there was ever any disobedience, but rather that the Lord progressed spiritually to the point when He was made fully mature, or "perfect" (:9). That point of final completeness was the same point at which He authored eternal salvation, and that point was at His death. The Lord's Divine Sonship cannot be used as any reason to think that the Lord somehow had spirituality easy; He still had to learn obedience in a progressive manner. And "*a* Son" rather than *the* Son suggests that for the purposes of spiritual growth, His Sonship functioned in a similar way that our sonship to the Father does.

But the learning of obedience through suffering may not necessarily refer to a progressive lifetime of obedience. Rom. 5:19 uses the word in speaking of how through the Lord's one act of obedience, in contrast to Adam's one act of disobedience, many are made righteous. That specific moment of obedience was in the death of the cross; Phil. 2:8 makes this explicit, in calling for us to have the mind of the crucified Christ and to follow Him in His obedience to death, even the death of the cross. This all leads on to the same word being used in :9 in calling for our obedience to Him- to He who was in turn obedient, asking us to follow His pattern. The things which He suffered would then refer to His final crucifixion sufferings rather than to the sufferings of His life. And Hebrews uses the word for "suffering" specifically in the context of the Lord's suffering at the time of His death (Heb. 9:26; 13:12).

5:9 And having been made perfect, he became to all those that obey him the author of eternal salvation- The authoring of salvation was on account of the Lord's death; as noted on :8, the final suffering of the cross brought the Lord to the point of total obedience and completion / perfection. The obedience in view in :8 was to the call to be obedient to the death of the cross, as in Phil. 2:8. There in the naked body of the Lord on a stake of wood outside Jerusalem, covered in blood and spittle and apparently defeated and forsaken by all... was the mind which was finally and totally obedient and perfected in every way. This was the moment the Lord had in mind when speaking of all how He aimed to finish or perfect God's work (Jn. 4:34; 5:36). It explains why the same word is used of how the Lord finished or perfected all at the moment of His death (Jn. 19:28), leading to the cry "It is finished". His moment of total moral perfection and completion was as it were eternally set in stone; for the same word is used of how the Son is perfected [AV "consecrated"] for evermore (7:28). And for those in Him, He shares that acme of spiritual triumph and achievement; for we in Him are "perfected for ever" (10:14). We too are on a path towards our spiritual perfection or maturing (12:23 "the spirits of just men made perfect"). In this lies the huge significance of old age and the time of dying; whereas in secular terms, life is seen as closing down once old age is reached, and significance of existence decreases rather than increases, as it does for those who are being led towards a point of completion or 'perfection'.

5:10 Pronounced by God a high priest- The Levitical priests became such by reason of age and birth; whereas the Lord's high priesthood was as it were created, He was pronounced a high priest rather than becoming one by default.

After the order of Melchizedek- A non-Levitical priest, greater than Abraham, whose office did not depend upon genealogy, who was both a King and a priest.

In the commentary on Melchizedek in Hebrews Paul admitted he was going deep, speaking of things which could only be grasped by very mature believers (Heb. 5:10,11,14). It is therefore not wise to base fundamental doctrine on the teaching of such verses; nor should the Melchizedek passages loom large in the minds of those who are still coming to learn the basic doctrines of Scripture. "This Melchizedek, King of Salem (Jerusalem), priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him" is spoken of as being "without father, without mother, without descent (genealogy), having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:1,3). From this it is argued by some that Jesus literally existed before his birth, and therefore had no human parents. Jesus has a Father (God) and a mother (Mary) and a genealogy (see Mt. 1, Lk. 3 and cp. Jn. 7:27). 'Melchizedek' therefore cannot refer to Him personally. Besides, Melchizedek was "made *like* unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3); he was not Jesus himself, but had certain similarities with Him which are being used by the writer for teaching purposes. "After the similitude of Melchizedek there arises another priest", Jesus (Heb. 7:15), who was ordained a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:5,6). The language of Hebrews about Melchizedek just cannot be taken literally. If Melchizedek literally had no father or mother, then the only person he could have been was God Himself; He is the only person with no beginning (1 Tim. 6:16; Ps. 90:2). But this is vetoed by Heb. 7:4: "Consider how great *this man* was", and also by the fact that he was seen by men (which God cannot be) and offered sacrifices to God. If he is called a man, then he must have had literal parents. His being "without father, without mother, without descent" must therefore refer to the fact that his pedigree and parents are not recorded. Queen Esther's parents are not recorded, and so her background is described in a similar way. Mordecai "brought up... Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother... whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter" (Esther 2:7). The author of Hebrews was clearly writing as a Jew to Jews, and as such he uses the Rabbinic way of reasoning and writing at times. There was a Rabbinic principle that "what is not in the text, is not" (See James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 276 note 59)- and it seems that this is the principle of exposition being used to arrive at the statement that Melchizedek was "without father". Seeing no father is mentioned in the Genesis text, therefore he was "without father"- but this doesn't mean he actually didn't have a father. It's not recorded, and therefore, according to that Rabbinic principle, he effectively didn't have one.

The book of Genesis usually goes to great lengths to introduce the family backgrounds of all the characters which it presents to us. But Melchizedek appears on the scene unannounced, with no record of his parents, and vanishes from the account with equal abruptness. Yet there can be no doubt that he was worthy of very great respect; even great Abraham paid tithes to him, and was blessed by him, clearly showing Melchizedek's superiority over Abraham (Heb. 7:2,7). The writer is not just doing mental gymnastics with Scripture. There was a very real problem in the first century which the Melchizedek argument could solve. The Jews were reasoning: 'You Christians tell us that this Jesus can now be our high priest, offering our prayers and works to God. But a priest has to have a known genealogy, proving he is from the tribe of Levi. And anyway, you yourselves admit Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). Sorry, to us Abraham is our supreme leader and example (Jn. 8:33,39),

and we won't respect this Jesus'. To which the reply is: 'But remember Melchizedek. The Genesis record is framed to show that such a great priest did not have any genealogy; and Messiah is to be both a king and a priest, whose priesthood is after the pattern of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6 cp. Ps. 110:4). Abraham was inferior to Melchizedek, so you should switch your emphasis from Abraham to Jesus, and stop trying to make the question of genealogies so important (see 1 Tim. 1:4). If you meditate on how much Melchizedek is a type of Jesus (i.e. the details of his life pointed forward to him), then you would have a greater understanding of the work of Christ'.

5:11 *Of him we have much to say and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing-* "Much to say and hard to explain" is language appropriate to the transcript of a verbal speech; see on 13:22. As the Hebrew writer spoke and wrote to brethren who were not as spiritually mature as they ought to be for their time in Christ, he saw the similarity between himself and the Lord Jesus talking to the crowds, those crowds of very human people who at that time comprised God's ecclesia (Mt. 13:15 = Heb. 5:11). The Hebrews failed to break into this upward spiral because they were "dull of hearing" the word (Heb. 5:11). The Greek word for "dull" implies 'lazy', and yet comes from the same root as the Greek for 'bastard' (*'nothros'* cp. *'nothos'*). Thus because they were not being properly born again by the word of the Gospel they were unable, in subsequent spiritual life, to receive the real power of the word. The fact they had "become" dull of hearing suggests a spiritual collapse amongst them. Their return to Judaism would have meant plenty of attention to the letter of God's word; but this made them dull of hearing to the things of the Lord Jesus. The word for "dull" is only used again in 6:12 where they are exhorted not to be lazy or slow to follow the examples of the faithful. It is a mental, spiritual laziness which seems in view; the idea was that they had not been quick to respond to the things of the Spirit, and their return to legalism was actually lazy man's spirituality rather than a zeal for God. The spiritual life moves at such a pace that it is not for the lazy.

5:12 *For when by reason of the time, you ought to be teachers-* Paul assumes that every believer over time moves towards a position of being a teacher. Teaching is therefore not just for some; we should be holding forth the knowledge we have for others.

You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God; and have become as those in need of milk and not solid food- The basic principles were those about Jesus, the word and oracles of God made flesh. For it was this which they had turned away from by returning to Judaism. The things of the Lord Jesus, therefore, are the elementary principles of the Gospel; the focus is upon Him rather than upon teachings about the Kingdom of God on earth, which both Christianity and Judaism at the time were broadly agreed upon.

The phrase "elementary principles of the oracles of God" is better rendered in the RVmg. "the beginning of the oracles...". The truth we learn and teach before baptism is but a springboard so much further. The writer seems to perceive the tendency to forever be digging up the foundations to make sure they are still there; for he says: "Wherefore let us cease to speak of the first principles of Christ, and press on..." (Heb. 6:1 RV). Sadly, as he goes on to say, he does have to speak to those particular readers of those basics again, but in a healthy spiritual life this shouldn't be the case. They should have used those basic doctrines to lead them further in following the

example of He who was also "made perfect", who reached 'perfection'. As He was "made perfect" (5:9), so we should strive to go on unto a like 'perfection' (5:14; 6:1). Paul doesn't balk at the height of this calling, unattained as it has been by us all. But it is the lofty height towards which the power of the Gospel can propel us. See on Heb. 6:1.

Paul likewise lamented the immaturity of the Corinthians in similar terms: "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food" (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14) surely alludes to Jn. 16:12, although it doesn't verbally quote it: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now".

5:13 For everyone that partakes of milk is without experience of the word of righteousness, for he is a babe- It's evident to me, from the very way the Bible is written, that an understanding of the deeper parts depends upon a correct understanding of the basic doctrines. The milk of the word leads on to the meat; Heb. 5:13,14 implies you can only understand the meat if for some time you have been properly feeding on the milk. This means that those who don't understand the basic doctrines of the true Gospel can't really understand the meat of the word. But "the word of righteousness" speaks specifically of the Gospel of imputed righteousness through faith in Christ, by grace and not legal obedience. The Hebrews had not personally experienced that, they had perhaps never fully believed it, and so they needed to be fed with that "milk" of the basic Gospel until they accepted it.

5:14 But solid food is for the mature, those who by experience of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil- The "solid food" in view initially is an exposition of Melchizedek. And yet Paul does give this, in chapter 7. But he is prefacing that here by saying that he knew it was beyond most of them. The "experience of use" doesn't mean they were experienced Bible students; for Bible study alone will not lead to maturity. The experience is as explained on :13; that of feeling and knowing imputed righteousness without legal obedience.

If we stay as babes, taking only milk, we will be unable to discern good and evil. The idea is that as a baby will put anything in its mouth, so does the immature convert. Those who don't mature on from the milk of the word run the risk of poisoning their spirituality. In the Hebrew context, it meant accepting Judaist false teaching. The drive to maturity isn't optional; if we lack it, our spiritual health will suffer. And by contrast, the more we grow, the more we will be able to discern what is harmful and what is nutritious. As noted on :13, it is the experience of imputed righteousness by grace which actually increases, rather than decreases, our sensitivity to good and evil. The allusion is to Adam in Eden attracted by the knowledge of good and evil offered through taking the forbidden fruit; and Paul is presenting that fruit as Judaism, which through endless legal codes still didn't give the sense of good and evil as God intended.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 6

6:1 Therefore leaving the doctrine of the first principles of Christ, let us press on to completion- The "us" would refer to Paul and his team. He wants to press on beyond teaching or re-teaching ["doctrine" = teaching] of the "first lessons" of Christ (GNB). They had heard those "first lessons" from Peter and the apostles when the Gospel was first preached to the Hebrews in Jerusalem. Paul felt that "completion" or "perfection" was to be pushed on towards after the first teachings had been believed. 1

Cor. 13 and Eph. 4 likewise envisage a point of "perfection" or completion. It seems Paul expected the Lord's return in the first century, and saw it as coming when the fruit was ripe to harvest, i.e. when the believers had spiritually matured into the image of Christ.

We must not see the learning of the basic doctrines and baptism as an end rather than a beginning. It is a tragedy if a man dies knowing and appreciating little more than he did at his baptism. Sunday School Christianity isn't the stuff of the Kingdom of God. We must go on unto perfection. "Let us cease to speak of the first principles of Christ, and press on unto full growth" (Heb. 6:1 RV). It almost implies that the Hebrews were so busy *talking* about the first principles that they had omitted to use them as the springboard to *growth*. See on Heb. 5:12.

Not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith toward God- "Dead works" could refer to the idea that works of legalistic obedience could bring salvation, without the life of the Spirit. Their "repentance" would have been a re-thinking about such justification by works. Likewise "faith toward God" does not imply that previously the Hebrews were atheists, but rather that the first principle of Christ was of faith in God's justification through His Son, rather than by works.

6:2 The teaching of baptisms and of laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment- These "first lessons of Christ" which they had forgotten were perhaps taught to the Hebrew Christians during Peter's sermon, the account of which in Acts 2 is certainly abbreviated (it can be spoken out loud in just a few minutes). Or it could be that the regular gatherings of the newly baptized believers in the temple afterwards included this kind of instruction. That judgment will be "eternal", that there is an eternity we may miss, was a first lesson in the faith in Christ. The serious consequence of faith and unbelief were to be accepted and seen clearly.

6:3 And if God permits, this will we do- Not in the rest of the letter, but through a visit to Jerusalem to teach them these things again. Paul's last recorded visit to Jerusalem led to his rejection by the Hebrew Christians, betrayal by those he came to give aid to, and his imprisonment and subsequent exile in Rome. So God's will or permission for this was apparently not granted.

6:4 For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit- Enlightenment is something done to another; we do not make ourselves see, for we are helpless as spiritually blind persons. The light comes through grace, through having our mental eyes opened by God's initiative upon our hearts. We likewise are "made" to partake in the Spirit, the gift from God to us, the power of change and transformation unto salvation which is placed in the heart of each believer. They were all "partakers" of the heavenly calling (3:1), "the heavenly gift", but would only be "partakers in Christ" if they remained firm in their faith in salvation (3:14). The Corinthians likewise received the Spirit, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1).

It seems that this passage continues alluding to Israel's experience in the wilderness- a commonly alluded to situation. The 'enlightening' would refer to the pillar of fire which enlightened [LXX] or gave light to Israel on that journey (Ex. 13:21; Neh. 9:12,19; Ps. 105:39). The "heavenly gift" which was "tasted" is clearly the manna which was "rained down from heaven" as a 'gift' (Ex. 16:4; Neh. 9:15; Ps. 105:40; 78:24). These Old Testament references always seem to place the pillar of fire and the manna together. They were partakers of the Holy Spirit in that the Spirit was given to the 70 elders in order to guide them through the desert (Num. 11).

The idea of "gift" would have played deeply upon the patron-client culture of the Greco-Roman world. There was no social security system or state health service. If you fell on hard times, you went cap in hand to your neighbour, family or employer. And within their culture, it was expected that you have charity to those in need. But you were forever then in social debt to your saviour. Society viewed in very harsh terms any ingratitude, just taking the assistance at the time and then not showing respect. That respect was to be shown by publically 'talking up' your saviour / benefactor, and loyalty to them in every way. This was at times expressed in superlative, over the top expressions of praise. There is something of this in the superlative expressions of Lordship and magnitude which are applied to the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. The way Israel, and the Hebrew Christians, had rejected God's gifts and even crucified His Son [afresh] was therefore to be seen as something deeply disgusting and awful. This is why we are confronted with the symbols of the Lord's death for us, regularly- in order to remind us of our deep and eternal obligation of loyalty to Him.

6:5 *Who tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*- As in John 6, the manna, the heavenly gift of :4, is seen as representing the word of God's goodness, His assurance of salvation. The allusions to the historical Israel are again clear, as we saw on :4. In this case, to Josh. 21:45; 23:15, where entry into Canaan was "all the good words which the Lord spoke to the children of Israel". They did not however totally possess Canaan at that point; the idea was rather that all God's good words to them had come true potentially. And so it was true for the new Israel. Israel at the Exodus witnessed miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit in order to back up the word of God spoke by Moses and Aaron. So often we encounter this: "Moses announced to Aaron *all the words* of the Lord... and *all the signs*. . . . Moses and Aaron went and Aaron *spoke all these words* . . . and Moses *performed the signs* before the people" (Ex. 4:28-30). Signs / miracles likewise back up the word spoken to Pharaoh (Ex. 3:18-20), and the subsequent reminiscences of these events likewise connect the miracles / signs to the word of God which was spoken (Neh. 9:10-17; Ps. 78:10-11, 32; 105:27-28; 106:7-12, 21-25). Likewise in the first century, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit backed up the spoken word of God. And the Hebrew Christians, many of them baptized around the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, had witnessed this. But again, miracles didn't inculcate real faith. Just as at Kadesh-Barnea the people decided to return to Egypt, so the Hebrew Christians were returning to Judaism. Which was effectively Egypt, with Jerusalem, the city where the Lord was crucified, being termed the city spiritually called Sodom and Egypt (Rev. 11:8). Just as the Hebrew Christians 'threw away your confidence' (Heb. 10:35).

The tasting of the Spirit (:4) is related to but not totally identical with tasting the goodness of God's word. These were the things promised in the word of God's goodness, and they had tasted them as real; and thus had had a foretaste of the Kingdom age. For the current experience of the Spirit is an earnest, a foretaste given "in our hearts", of our future salvation in the Kingdom (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). It is by the Spirit now in us that we shall be immortalized in the age to come (Rom. 8:11).

6:6- see on Mk. 15:15; 1 Jn. 2:28.

But then fell away- I suggested on :5 that the connection is with how at Kadesh-Barnea the people decided to return to Egypt; and so the Hebrew Christians were returning to Judaism, giving up on the Kingdom journey- at least in their hearts. The Hebrew Christians were tempted to "rebel... sin... disobey... disbelieve" (Heb. 3:16-18), which are the very words used of the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea. It was there

that God gave up with that generation: "When Yahweh sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying Go up and possess the land which I have given you, then you rebelled against the commandment of Yahweh your God, and you didn't believe Him, nor listen to His voice. You have been rebellious against Yahweh" (Dt. 9:23,24).

The 'falling [away]' is the same word for how the bodies of the rejected Israelites 'fell' in the wilderness ("whose carcasses *fell* in the wilderness", Heb. 3:17). The Hebrew Christians were not to "*fall* after the same pattern of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). The same argument and the same word is used by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:8,12: In the wilderness rebellion, 23,000 Israelites "*fell* in one day" and Christians are to beware lest they likewise "*fall*". So the 'falling away' here refers to death by Divine judgment. Otherwise there would arise the endless fear that our temporal failure, of 5 minutes or 5 years, was a 'falling away' from which there can be no repentance. It is only death which is the point of no further repentance. In the next verses, we will read that it is the land which bears thorns which is to be burnt in the rejection of the last day. Rejection only comes when the fruit is finally seen- whether it is thorns or fruit. The Lord taught that unless we repent, we will perish; or "die in our sins". This of itself implies that whilst there is life, there is the possibility of repentance. It cannot be that in mortal life, a man can cross a line to a point whereby there is no repentance. Once we understand the continual allusions to Israel's experience in the wilderness, then we will see that 'falling away' refers to falling down dead in condemnation; because like Israel, we have stated we do not wish to enter the promised land, and have set our hearts upon returning to Egypt. We note that the argument here is not that some of the Hebrews had at this point fallen away, indeed the rest of this chapter is quite positive about the audience. He writes in :4 of "those..." who fell away, i.e. the dead Israelites in the desert- not any still living Hebrew Christian. Because the falling away is ultimately in death.

It is impossible to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame- It is not impossible for anyone to repent. But a person cannot be spiritually renewed to repentance whilst they are crucifying the Lord afresh. Paul is addressing the Hebrews who have fallen away and is urging their repentance. So he clearly means that they cannot be renewed again whilst they are re-crucifying the Lord. He uses a related word in saying that how the Hebrews 'fell' in the wilderness is a warning to the Hebrews of his day (3:17; 4:11). It could be that by "then fell away" Paul is speaking from the perspective of judgment day; those who fall condemned in that day cannot be renewed again to repentance. We noted on Acts 3:26 that the gift of the Spirit involved not only forgiveness but repentance itself; they were led to repentance, renewed to it. Repentance us a gift from God, granted by Him (Acts 11:18) and also not granted by Him to some (Is. 6:9,10 "lest they should turn again / repent", as with 1 Sam. 2:25 and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart not to repent). But whilst the giving of the Spirit is not just at baptism and can continue throughout mortal life, it cannot operate on those who were once enlightened but refuse to stop crucifying the Son of God and shaming Him. They had been once renewed- the new life of the Spirit had been given them, they had become a new creation, the gift of the Spirit after baptism had been for them "the washing of regeneration" by the Spirit; but that regeneration / renewing could not again happen whilst they were shaming the crucified Christ. The idea is that the Holy Spirit would not be given again to those who refused it. For the believer, "the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). The "new man is renewed" (Col. 3:10). This new, inward man is renewed by the work of the Spirit; we are "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man... to truly know and understand the love of

Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:16,19). But that renewing by the Spirit cannot occur if a person sets their heart or spirit upon Egypt and gives up on the path to God's Kingdom. This withdrawal of the Spirit is what happened to Saul, he was given another heart, made another man- but the Spirit was taken from him, because he set his heart in the path of jealousy and egoism. We must understand "It is impossible..." as more referring to the limitation of man; for nothing is impossible with God. We think of Mk. 10:27 ("With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God"). Westcott observes: "The use of the active voice limits the strict application of the words to human agency". It is impossible for man to allow himself to be renewed whilst he is crucifying Christ afresh. And that I take to refer to how the Hebrew Christians were returning to Judaism, which had crucified God's Son. This was the real import of caving in to peer pressure and returning to your culture of origin [Judaism]. For by trusting in the ritual sacrifices, they were making the Lord's death to be in vain, and if they were to repent, they would as it were need to have Him crucified again. Or we can read "Seeing they crucify..." as effectively meaning 'Whilst they...'. Repentance, even for crucifying God's Son, was always possible. As the Hebrew Christians themselves knew; for it was they who had been convicted of this sin and had cried out "What shall we do?". Putting the Lord to an open shame implies there was some public dimension to their denial of the Lord. In the spirit of Saul, the Jews were compelling Christian Jews to blaspheme, and to call Jesus "accursed" (1 Cor. 12:3). This often involved mocking and blaspheming His cross.

The falling away, or falling dead, of the Israelites was in refusing to believe they would enter Canaan, and instead deciding to return to Egypt. To turn away from the path to the Kingdom is to crucify Christ afresh, it is to declare Him dead in vain. It is to do despite to the spirit of saving grace. Their decision to return to Egypt was irreversible, even though, like the rejected at judgment day, they sought to reverse it. The Divine comment is that in their hearts, they returned to Egypt. I take that to mean that despite their momentary desire to enter Canaan, they decided in their hearts that they wanted Egypt and not Canaan. Although they did not manage to physically return there, in their hearts they did- and this is how God counted them. Likewise at the day of judgment, there will be no second chances. But "we make the answer now" as to whether we want to keep on the journey to Canaan, or whether in our hearts we are Egypt people. And would prefer nothing better than sitting by the fleshpots of Egypt rather than fighting for the eternal milk and honey of Canaan. As Heb. 3 stresses, they disbelieved in their hearts. The single reason for their failure to enter the Kingdom was their unbelief in their hearts. And it is the same with us.

In the Lord's death we see the heart that bleeds, bared before our eyes in the cross. It is written of Him in His time of dying that He "poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12). The Hebrew translated "poured out" means to make naked- it is rendered as "make thyself naked" in Lam. 4:21 (see too Lev. 20:18,19; Is. 3:17). The Lord' sensitivity was what led Him to His death- He made His soul naked, bare and sensitive, until the stress almost killed Him quite apart from the physical torture. To be sensitive to others makes us open and at risk ourselves. A heart that bleeds really bleeds and hurts within itself. And this was the essence of the cross. It seems to me that the Lord was crucified naked- hence those who turn away put Him to "an open [Gk. 'naked'] shame". In being sensitive to others, we make ourselves naked. The heart that bleeds is itself in great risk of hurt and pain. The Lord Jesus is not passive in Heaven; He has sensitivity and pain, He can be shamed and crucified afresh by

those who turn away to legalism and Judaism. This of itself opens a window onto what it may mean to have Divine nature.

It was this same category who in 10:29 trod underfoot the Lord's blood and treated it as *unholy*. These one time Christians had become so influenced by Judaism that they considered Him *unholy* and despised His sacrifice, supporting the same Jewish authorities and mentalities which had crucified Him. They re-crucified Him by coming to agree that what the Sanhedrin had done was correct. It was as if by such an attitude, they too were guilty of His crucifixion. This falling away was all a matter of the heart; for no man or human organization can pluck us from the Lord's hand; we shall "never perish" because of that, but only from our own internal lack of faith (Jn. 10:28)

6:7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God- The land which has drunk in the rain gives forth "herbs meet for them by whom it is tended" (Heb. 6:7 RV). The parallel is intended with "those who have tasted the good word of God" (Heb. 6:5). If the land represents those who respond to the Gospel, as in the sower parable, who are those who tend it? Surely the preachers and pastoral carers. They benefit, they are encouraged, by those whom they have cared for and converted. I've seen this so very often- one goes to exhort, and comes back home exhorted. But this is all part of the intended upward spiral in functional ecclesial life. But the cultivation still depends upon the rain of blessing from God, which has been defined in 6:4,5 as the gift of the Spirit in our hearts. The Spirit is given not just once at baptism, but "often". For our fruitfulness is God's intention; He gives us the Spirit in order to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. The husbandman produces fruit which is appropriate to his labours, and so our eternal future and being will be a reflection of our labours now (Heb. 6:7). Not that salvation depends upon our works: it is the free, gracious gift of God. But the nature of our eternity will be a reflection of our present efforts and the efforts of others for us. The ground brings forth fruit appropriate to those who have worked on it. Does this not suggest that we each bring forth a unique and personally appropriate form of spiritual fruit?

The language of :7,8 very much recalls the promises for obedience and curses for disobedience offered in Dt. 28:1-6; 29:23. The "earth" is therefore an allusion to the land, of Israel. The idea is that the Hebrew Christians stood where Israel did- faced with blessings or curses.

6:8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is rejected and in danger of being cursed, whose end is to be burned- The parable of the wheat and weeds teaches that at the time of Christ's coming, there will be weeds actively growing in the ecclesia. Those are the "thorns and briers" of Heb. 6:8, the 'thorns' who crucify Christ again (2 Sam. 23:6,7; Heb. 6:6-8). Yet we will, in some sense, rub shoulders with this category if we are in the latter day ecclesia (Mt. 13:27-30). In the last days, the true Christian community simply won't be (isn't?) the spiritually safe place, where error is impossible, which we may have felt it to be in the past. The man of sin, the wicked one, will sit in the very *temple of God*, the ecclesia. The "end" of the rejected is to be later "burnt", as if rejection occurs in the mind of God now, but will articulate the punishment later, at the judgment. There is a play on ideas here, in that "thorns and thistles" were part of the curse; but if we bear them instead of spiritual fruit, then we shall be cursed. If we act as sinners, as the cursed, rather than seeing our potential to rise above- then we shall remain cursed. "In danger of being cursed" is literally 'close to being cursed' [AV "nigh unto cursing"], and probably refers to the soon coming day

of judgment in AD70. And in a wider sense, to our need to live life in the belief that judgment day is coming soon.

6:9 *But beloved, though we speak in this manner, we are confident of better things for you; things that accompany salvation-* This is the kind of positivism Paul employs to the Corinthians. He convicts them of serious failure and tendencies towards condemnation, and then states that he has every confidence in them and rejoices over them (2 Cor. 2:3; 7:16). "Better" is a common word in Hebrews, used of how the new covenant in the Lord Jesus is "better" than the Mosaic system (1:4; 7:7,19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 12:24). Paul wishes to be persuaded that they are going to be saved; he uses the same term "better things" of our final salvation in 11:40. We too cannot condemn our brethren, so we are to assume that all baptized believers shall be eternally saved.

6:10 *For God is not unrighteous to forget your work-* They were tempted to think that God did not notice the great love which the Hebrew Christians had shown to their fellow believers in selling their possessions and giving to the poor. Perhaps now in later life they were regretting their past generosity. But Paul encourages them that God would not forget what they did; to think that would be to suggest He is unrighteous.

And the love which you have shown toward His Name, in that you serve the saints and still do- Serving other believers is love toward the Lord's name in that these who needed help were baptized into His Name. Our attitude towards those in Christ is our attitude to Him. "Serve the saints" is a Greek phrase used only elsewhere in Rom. 15:25, again specifically concerning serving the poor believers in Jerusalem. The generosity of the Hebrew Christians towards their poor had been significant and perhaps the greatest ever display of Christian financial generosity.

6:11 *And we desire that each one of you may show the same zeal to have the full assurance of hope until the end-* The great devotion and generosity of the Hebrew believers (see on :10) was zeal indeed; but it was not works of generosity to the poor which would save. They needed to show the same zeal as they had in giving their wealth to the poor in maintaining their assurance of salvation, their "hope" in the sense of utter assurance. The joy they had once had in that assurance was waning, because their faith in Jesus as their saviour was fading and being replaced by dependence upon their own works. Their great works of generosity had earlier been motivated by faith and joy in an assured salvation, but now their works were motivated by a fear they were not saved and thinking that works could bring them salvation.

6:12 *Do not be lazy, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises-* The laziness in view is not regarding works, for they are commended for continuing to care practically for "the saints" (:10). See on 5:11. Paul's concern was that they would continue to totally believe that the promise of eternity in the Kingdom would be fulfilled to them. To maintain a real faith and confident assurance in future salvation, that if the Lord returns now or I die now, I shall be saved... this requires huge mental effort. For it requires our all. If I am sure of my salvation, this takes all my passion, thinking and living. It would be fair to say that this is demanding, so much so that the human tendency to laziness kicks in; we want a quieter, less mentally and practically demanding life, and so laziness can lead to a lack of faith in our future salvation. We must take for live templates those others who believed the promises of salvation and patiently endured in that faith.

6:13 *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself-* We are to be followers of Abraham's example (:12) because in essence, the very same promises have been made to us. The good news of eternal salvation in the Kingdom was preached to Abraham as much as to us (Gal. 3:8). We ought to believe that we will be saved because God made the promise of salvation "by Himself". the whole of God is as it were staked on our being saved. To doubt it is to doubt God and all God stands for.

6:14 *Saying: Surely blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you-* The emphasis is upon "Surely". The blessing is that of eternal salvation, and that a multitude of men and women would become in Christ and be saved in Him, thus bringing about the multiplication of Abraham's seed. The program, the plan and purpose, was "surely" going to work out; and we should be "sure" of this great salvation for ourselves.

6:15 *And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise-* See on :12. This patient endurance was not just a waiting, a sitting it out. Abraham's life was active, and motivated by his belief that the promises of future salvation and inheritance really would come true for him. Abraham received the promise in a limited sense in this life, just as the Holy Spirit is our foretaste of the future inheritance (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). Abraham is our example in that he received in his lifetime the promise, to an extent. We have been saved, we should be able to rejoice at this "today" that we will eternally live if the Lord comes for us today. In this sense Abraham is our example of obtaining the promise in this life. Indeed all the faithful "obtained promises" (11:33 s.w.). Abraham's patient endurance is that of :12, he kept on and on believing that the salvation promises would come true; and they did.

6:16 *For men swear by something greater, and in every dispute of theirs, the oath is final for confirmation-* The fact God has promised our salvation on oath should end any dispute within our own minds, or theologically with others such as Judaists, that we really can be saved by faith through grace. Romans 3 however presents the "dispute" as a legal challenge by doubting man against God, putting Him in the dock, judging Him as to whether He really can bring us to the Kingdom. And out of this showdown, every such doubting man is declared a liar. The greatest possible assurance has been given; oaths have to be made upon some higher source entity, and that entity is God. The confirmation should therefore be seen as "final", all our wonderings and hopping between certainty and uncertainty should be no more; the assurance is total and final. This oath is "an end of all strife" (AV), what cannot be contradicted (s.w. 7:7 "without contradiction"). There can be no argument against the proposition that we are saved in Christ right now. The confirmation is in the Lord's death (Rom. 15:8) and the gift of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:21,22; Heb. 13:9 s.w.). But His word of promise is itself confirmed. The arguments every way are for our total assurance that His promise of salvation shall come true for me, today.

6:17 *Therefore God, determined to show more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the immutability of His purpose, confirmed with an oath-* The word of promise was enough, seeing it came from God; but God confirmed it with an oath, because He was "determined" to show us the certainty of the promise. Despite having promised us eternal inheritance, as promised to Abraham, God is eager for us to accept it. He has not just made promises and left us to do our part by believing them. He comes to meet us, using every logical, intellectual and spiritual instrument to do so, and crowning

them all with the death of His Son to confirm the word of promise to Abraham which comprised the new covenant. God discerned that we fear His promise might change; the oath showed it was immutable. Perhaps our wide experience of failed promises and agreements is the psychological root of our difficulty in accepting the most simple truth- that we really shall be saved if we have said 'Yes' to God's purpose of salvation for us. The Galatians like the Hebrews had been "removed" from the Christian Gospel to another (Gal. 1:6); and "immutable" here translates the negative of this word, the 'not-removable' nature of God's promise. The priesthood was "changed" (7:12), but the new covenant promises of God to Abraham of our salvation will not be "changed" as they are not-changeable, "immutable".

6:18 *So that by two immutable things-* The promise of God and the oath confirming it.

In which it is impossible for God to lie- To doubt our salvation is to effectively accuse God of being a liar. But that is impossible. And yet in this sense, as Romans 3 puts it, man has put God in the dock. And yet He shall be justified, and every man shall be declared a liar who has doubted His salvation.

We may have a strong encouragement- God not only promised our salvation but confirmed the promise with an oath. Paul says the same in different terms in Rom. 5:8: "God commends His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly".

Who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us- The allusion is to how the person who found they had committed a sin worthy of death, yet without as if they were wishing to have done so, could flee to a city of refuge and be saved there by the death of the high priest. The curse upon Levi was that the members of this tribe were to be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7). However, this resulted in the cities of the Levites being scattered throughout the land, thus providing accessible cities of refuge to all who wished to escape the consequences of sin. Those cities were evidently symbolic of the refuge we have in Christ (Heb. 6:18). Again and again, the curses and consequences of human sin are used by the Father to mediate blessing. It is the sure hope before us which is our refuge. "Hope", *elpis*, is a confident knowledge of a future reality, rather than a hoping for the best. We should be confident in our salvation.

6:19 *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and passing into the presence beyond the veil-* The certainty that we shall be saved is what give us spiritual and personal stability, as an anchor. But the "anchor" in view is not simply that of a moored boat. This anchor enables us to pass beyond the veil into the most holy place, the very presence of God. The allusion is to how the high priest entered the most holy each year to make atonement for Israel with a rope attached to him in case he were to die there and need to be pulled back out of the most holy, so that no man needed to enter the most holy to retrieve the body. The height of the challenge for first century Hebrews is hard to appreciate; we are called not simply to salvation but to the very status of the high priest on the day of atonement. For we are in Christ. We are to go into God's very presence, in Christ, to do the work of atonement for others. This is the spirit in which we should pray for others. And we need no human anchor- for our sure knowledge of future salvation is our anchor.

6:20 *Into which as a forerunner Jesus entered for us, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek-* As noted on :19, it is us who are called to enter the holiest place and God's presence. The Lord Jesus has entered there, but He has done so as a forerunner, whose steps we are to follow. Priestly work is therefore to be

our eternal occupation- seeking salvation and blessing for others. He is like the boy who brings the ship's line to shore ("forerunner"), and then guides the ship to dock. But that dock for us is the most holy place, the presence of God personally, when God Himself shall dwell amongst us in the Kingdom of God on earth.

Here in Hebrews alone in the New Testament is the Lord's simple, human name "Jesus" used so baldly- not 'Jesus Christ', 'the Lord Jesus', just plain 'Jesus' (Heb. 2:9; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2,24; 13:12). And yet it's Hebrews that emphasizes how He can be called 'God', and is the full and express image of God Himself. I observe that in each of the ten places where Hebrews uses the name 'Jesus', it is as it were used as a climax of adoration and respect. For example: "... whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:20). "But you are come unto... unto... to... to... to... to... and to Jesus the mediator" (Heb. 12:22-24). The bald title 'Jesus', one of the most common male names in first century Palestine, as common as Dave or Steve or John in the UK today, speaking as it did of the Lord's utter humanity, is therefore used as a climax of honour for Him. The honour due to Him is exactly due to the fact of His humanity. The juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His exaltation is what is so unique about Him. And it's what is so hard for people to accept, because it demands so much faith in a man, that He could be really so God-like. The juxtaposition of ideas is seen in Hebrews so powerfully.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 7

7:1 For this Melchizedek, king of Jerusalem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him- As noted on 5:14, Paul doesn't consider the Hebrews mature enough for this exposition. But he still gives it. The material in chapter 6 is therefore almost in parenthesis, which is very typical of Paul. There is no hint that Abraham and Melchizedek were personally acquainted before this meeting, although they both were servants of the true God. We might wonder why God didn't connect them earlier. In His wisdom He doesn't always force believers to regularly fellowship with each other, indeed He made Abraham travel all around Canaan rather than telling him to settle near Melchizedek and form some kind of ecclesia or community of believers. And clearly the implication is that Abraham maintained a legitimate relationship with God without needing to use a human priest, even one as good and exalted as Melchizedek. For more on Melchizedek, see on Heb. 5:10.

Paul was writing to Jewish converts. They were under the influence of various Jewish fables about Melchizedek which were current. The Qumran documents include that now known as 11QMelchizedek, which claimed that the Archangel leader of the Angels was Melchizedek, and he would bring salvation to Israel when under Gentile oppression. Hebrews began with the strong argument that salvation is in God's Son, the Lord Jesus, who is not an Angel. And so now the argument is repeated; the Lord Jesus is not Melchizedek [Trinitarians, eager for support of a personal pre-existence of Jesus, totally fail to grasp Paul's point here]. Melchizedek was not an Angel, but a real historical figure ["consider how great *this man* was..."]. He looked forward to the Lord Jesus, who is greater than Melchizedek, just as He is greater than Angels.

The blessing with bread and wine (Gen. 14) clearly looks forward to the work of the Lord Jesus. Receiving those elements is therefore a sign of His blessing. He does something for us at the breaking of bread; something happens. He blesses us, and the bread and wine are given to us by Him as the symbol and representation of that blessing. And the argument will develop that this blessing means ultimate salvation

and perfection, whereas all the old covenant priests could offer at most was forgiveness for specific sins. The king of Sodom, whom Abraham had saved, likewise came out to meet Abraham. But Melchizedek King of Jerusalem had not been saved by Abraham; it was the kings of Sodom who had been. So Melchizedek, representing the Lord Jesus, blesses Abraham (and his seed "in" him) by grace; for Abraham had done nothing for Melchizedek.

7:2 To whom also Abraham divided a tenth part of all. He was first, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and then also, King of Jerusalem, which is, King of peace- "King of righteousness" connects with Paul's appeal for the Hebrews to accept the word or Gospel of imputed righteousness in Christ; see on Heb. 5:13, remembering that here in chapter 7 Paul is picking up from Heb. 5:13 after the parenthesis of chapter 6. The connection between righteousness and peace is a feature of Messiah- in Him, they kiss each other (Ps. 85:10), and are the mainstay of the Messianic Kingdom on earth (Ps. 72:3; Is. 32:17; Rom. 14:17). Righteousness is emphasized before peace- "then also... king of peace". "The work of righteousness shall be peace" (Is. 32:17). But in Paul's theology, it is the righteousness of King Jesus which is imputed to us and thereby creates peace with God. This is the much laboured message of Romans 1-8. So we can understand his enthusiastic perception that Melchizedek, a type of Messiah, was king of righteousness "and then also... king of peace".

As discussed on :1, Paul's immediate context was in deconstructing Jewish myths about Melchizedek being some Angel who would save Israel from the Gentiles. "King of righteousness" is the phrase used in the Qumran documents about the supposed "chief good Angel" who would save Israel. Paul again alludes to this wrong conception; his point is that Melchizedek was not an Angel ["consider how great *this man* was..."], but pointed ahead to the Lord Jesus, Israel's true saviour. And He is not an Angel, but is now greater than Angels, and will bring Israel a far greater salvation than any Angel could.

7:3 He was without recorded father or mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life but presented as being like the Son of God, abiding a priest continually- Without doubt God frames the Biblical record in order to highlight certain facts. Thus there is a marked lack of information concerning the father and mother of Melchizedek in Genesis. God is providing us with an interpretation of how He worded the account in Genesis, making the point that Melchizedek typified Christ. But although we are not to read Hebrews 7:3 at face value, there is no explicit indication to this effect. The objection that the New Testament does not warn us against reading the 'casting out of demons' language literally is therefore not valid. Hebrews 7:3 is one of many examples of where it is imperative to understand the way in which God is using language if we are to correctly understand His word, but there is no explicit warning about this in Hebrews 7:3!

Jesus has a Father (God) and a mother (Mary) and a genealogy (see Mt. 1, Lk. 3 and cp. Jn. 7:27). 'Melchizedek' therefore cannot refer to Him personally. Besides, Melchizedek was "made *like* unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3); he was not Jesus himself, but had certain similarities with Him which are being used by the writer for teaching purposes. "After the similitude of Melchizedek there arises another priest", Jesus (Heb. 7:15), who was ordained a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:5,6). The language of Hebrews about Melchizedek just cannot be taken literally. If Melchizedek literally had no father or mother, then the only person he could have been was God Himself; He is the only person with no beginning (1 Tim. 6:16; Ps.

90:2). But this is vetoed by Heb. 7:4: "Consider how great *this man* was", and also by the fact that he was seen by men (which God cannot be) and offered sacrifices to God. If he is called a man, then he must have had literal parents. His being "without father, without mother, without descent" must therefore refer to the fact that his pedigree and parents are not recorded. Queen Esther's parents are not recorded, and so her background is described in a similar way. Mordecai "brought up... Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother... whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter" (Esther 2:7). The author of Hebrews was clearly writing as a Jew to Jews, and as such he uses the Rabbinic way of reasoning and writing at times. There was a Rabbinic principle that "what is not in the text, is not" (See James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 276 note 59)- and it seems that this is the principle of exposition being used to arrive at the statement that Melchizedek was "without father". Seeing no father is mentioned in the Genesis text, therefore he was "without father"- but this doesn't mean he actually didn't have a father. It's not recorded, and therefore, according to that Rabbinic principle, he effectively didn't have one. There is however also evidence that "without father, without mother" was a term used of men who were orphans or illegitimate. That it is used for such men shows that it cannot at all be taken as any evidence for the pre-existence or Divinity of the Lord Jesus. Whatever we make of the language here, it refers to Melchizedek, the one time king-priest of Jerusalem, described as a "man" (:4).

The book of Genesis usually goes to great lengths to introduce the family backgrounds of all the characters which it presents to us. But Melchizedek appears on the scene unannounced, with no record of his parents, and vanishes from the account with equal abruptness. Yet there can be no doubt that he was worthy of very great respect; even great Abraham paid tithes to him, and was blessed by him, clearly showing Melchizedek's superiority over Abraham (Heb. 7:2,7). The writer is not just doing mental gymnastics with Scripture. There was a very real problem in the first century which the Melchizedek argument could solve. The Jews were reasoning: 'You Christians tell us that this Jesus can now be our high priest, offering our prayers and works to God. But a priest has to have a known genealogy, proving he is from the tribe of Levi. And anyway, you yourselves admit Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). Sorry, to us Abraham is our supreme leader and example (Jn. 8:33,39), and we won't respect this Jesus'. To which the reply is: 'But remember Melchizedek. The Genesis record is framed to show that such a great priest did not have any genealogy; and Messiah is to be both a king and a priest, whose priesthood is after the pattern of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6 cp. Ps. 110:4). Abraham was inferior to Melchizedek, so you should switch your emphasis from Abraham to Jesus, and stop trying to make the question of genealogies so important (see 1 Tim. 1:4). If you meditate on how much Melchizedek is a type of Jesus (i.e. the details of his life pointed forward to him), then you would have a greater understanding of the work of Christ'.

7:4- see on Heb. 1:5.

Now consider how great this man was, to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the spoils- Melchizedek was a man, not a pre-existent God. The argument is that tithes are given to someone greater. Hence Jacob offers to give tithes to his father's God if He will preserve him (Gen. 28:22).

7:5 And they indeed of the sons of Levi that receive the priest's office- Paul doesn't call them Aaronites because he wants to make the point that the tribal head, Levi, was not the ancestor of Melchizedek; and as one of the patriarchs, he as it were paid tithes in Abraham to Melchizedek.

Have the commandment according to the law to take tithes from the people, that is, of their brothers; even though they are also descendants of Abraham- Levi's sons could take tithes of their brothers, but this did not make them 'greater' than their brothers. They were 'brothers' on the same level as those who tithed to them. But payment of tithes to an unrelated person was a more impressive evidence of the greatness of that person over the tithe payers.

7:6 Melchizedek was not descended from Levi by genealogy- There is no evidence that he was even from within the Abraham family; he was effectively a Gentile, the king-priest of Jerusalem. But the fact he was not a Levite is emphasized because this was a reason some were giving for not accepting the priesthood of the Lord Jesus.

But he took tithes of Abraham and blessed him that had received the promises- The blessing was given from Melchizedek to Abraham in response to tithes. Yet Abraham is the one who was to be a blessing in the land, according to "the promises" received. But actually, the blesser had himself first to be blessed. This definitely places Melchizedek on the level of manifesting God to Abraham. The idea was that this blessing by Melchizedek was that of peace and righteousness [ideas tied up in the meaning of the name Melchizedek], and this was the primary fulfilment to Abraham of the promised blessing. Peace and the gift of righteousness are the clearly related to peace with God through sin having been dealt with, and righteousness imputed. Peter in Acts 3:25,26 makes the same interpretation of the Abrahamic blessing as being forgiveness of sin.

7:7 But without any dispute the less is blessed of the better- To suggest anyone was "better" than Abraham was radical for Hebrews, who considered Abraham the father of their race. And to rub the point in by saying that he was "less" was to suggest that the entire metanarrative of descent from Abraham being so important was being overwritten- and had in fact been overwritten by any sensitive to the brief details given about Melchizedek. That the ministry of the Lord Jesus was "better" than that of the Mosaic law is stressed in Hebrews (1:4; 7:19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 12:24).

7:8 And here mortal men receive tithes; but there one received them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives- The argument here might appear somewhat forced, but it was all legitimate within the style of Rabbinic midrash. Melchizedek "lives" in that there is no record of his death; we noted on :3 the Rabbinic principle that "what is not in the text, is not". And Paul goes on to reason that the priesthood of Melchizedek continues still, in that Messiah was to have this priesthood eternally. "That he lives" can also be understood as meaning that Melchizedek had a lifelong priesthood, that was not replaced by others because he had reached a certain age. McKnight observes that the Greek verb *zē* here is not in the present, but the imperfect of the indicative, and he translates "that he lives" as "lived, a priest all his life, in contradistinction from those who ceased to be priests at a certain age". "But there" can bear the idea 'but in this case'.

7:9 And, so to say- Another usage of language which suggests we are reading a transcript of a spoken address; see on 13:22.

When Abraham paid the tithe, Levi, whose descendants receive the tithe, also paid a tithe- Abraham is seen as representing his descendant Levi. The Levitical

priests did indeed pay a tithe of their tithes- to God. But Paul argues here that Levi, in Abraham, paid a tithe to Melchizedek, thus making him a manifestation of God.

7:10 *For Levi was yet in the loins of his ancestor Abraham when Melchizedek met Abraham-* This kind of argument may appear forced, but it was quite legitimate within the milieu of Jewish midrash.

7:11 *Now if there was perfection through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be reckoned after the order of Aaron?*- The argument is that the whole mention of Messiah having a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek would have been unnecessary if the Levitical priesthood and legal system could bring "perfection". Paul forces through the logic of his position by reasoning that the "need" for the Melchizedek priesthood meant that this new priest must actually not be "after the order of Aaron" and therefore must not be a descendant of Aaron. I have previously noted that this kind of apparently forced argumentation would have been acceptable to those used to this kind of reasoning in the rabbinical interpretations of the Old Testament. But it is all the same logically forced, although from our Christian perspective it all makes good sense. I suggested on expounding Paul's obsession with the Jerusalem Poor Fund in 2 Corinthians that he had an obsessive streak within him, whereby he marshalled all possible evidence to support his positions and at points his logic and reasoning bears the hallmark of the obsessive. It could well be that we have a case of that here.

7:12 *For the priesthood being changed requires also a change of the law-* This verse is a stubborn problem for those who consider that the Mosaic law has not been changed nor abrogated. The reasoning here is logically sound, but it depends upon the assumption that the Melchizedek priest has in fact come; and only in that case could it be reasoned that the priesthood had been changed from the Aaronic to that of Melchizedek, this requiring a change of the law. The argument only had [and has] force for those who accept Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. It is therefore highly relevant to the Hebrew Christian audience but would lack logical power with Hebrew non-Christians.

The whole Law of Moses is described as an everlasting covenant (Is. 24:5; Dt. 29:29), but it has now been done away (Heb. 8:13). The feasts of Passover and Atonement were to be "an everlasting statute unto you" (Lev. 16:34; Ex. 12:14); but now the Mosaic feasts have been done away in Christ (Col. 2:14-17; 1 Cor. 5:7). The Levitical priesthood was "the covenant of an everlasting priesthood" (Ex. 40:15; Num. 25:13), but "the priesthood being changed (by Christ's work), there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). There was an "everlasting covenant" between God and Israel to display the shewbread in the Holy Place (Lev. 24:8). This "everlasting covenant" evidently ended when the Mosaic Law was dismantled. But the same phrase "everlasting covenant" is used in 2 Samuel 23:5 concerning how Christ will reign on David's throne for literal eternity in the Kingdom. In what sense, then, is God using the word *olahm*, which is translated "eternal", "perpetual", "everlasting" in the Old Testament? James Strong defines *olahm* as literally meaning "the finishing point, time out of mind, i.e. practically eternity". It was God's purpose that the Law of Moses and the associated Sabbath law were to continue for many centuries. To the early Israelite, this meant a finishing point so far ahead that he couldn't grapple with it; therefore he was told that the Law would last for ever in the sense of "practically eternity". For all of us, the spectre of ultimate infinity is impossible to intellectually grapple with. We may glibly talk about God's eternity and timelessness, about the wonder of eternal life. But when we pause to really come to

terms with these things, we lack the intellectual tools and linguistic paradigms to cope with it. Therefore there is no Hebrew or Greek word used in the Bible text to speak of absolute infinity. We know that death has been conquered for those in Christ, therefore we have the hope of immortal life in his Kingdom. But God speaks about eternity very much from a human viewpoint.

7:13 For he of whom these things are said belongs to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar- The "He" refers to the Melchizedek priest who was to be Messiah. "Has ever" makes the point that a new priesthood is now in view. The Lord Jesus serves at *the* altar; this is the altar at which the Levitical priests have no right to eat / fellowship, but we Christians do (13:10), suggesting that we in Christ are likewise there, serving at and eating at the heavenly altar which features so strongly in Revelation, as part of the Heavenly sanctuary which the tabernacle was a dim reflection of. The Lord Jesus is actively 'serving' there; He is not passive in Heaven, just waiting to return to earth.

7:14 For it is evident that our Lord originated from the tribe of Judah. Regarding this tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood- The Lord being descended from Judah was "evident" or obvious- presumably from the genealogies which connected Mary to the tribe of Judah. But again as noted on :11, Paul's enthusiasm seems to be carrying him away, for it was far from obvious that Jesus of Nazareth was from Judah. However he may have meant instead that Messiah had to come from Judah; this much was indeed "evident" from the Old Testament and undisputed.

7:15 And what we say is even more abundantly evident, if after the likeness of Melchizedek there arises another priest- The abundantly obvious argument was that the Melchizedek priest had to be eternal (see :16,17); and the only candidate was Jesus, whom Christians believed had been resurrected and given eternal life. He was the only person who had then been immortalized. But this argument again was logically powerful only to a Hebrew Christian, and not to a Hebrew non-Christian. The 'arising' of this 'other priest' may be a hint at His resurrection to immortality.

7:16 Who has been appointed, not on the basis of a law about physical descent, but according to the power of an endless life- The Levitical priests became priests by reason of their age and descent, whereas the Melchizedek Messiah priest had to be "appointed". The basis of the Lord's appointment was His immortality- because the priest had to have an eternal ministry, so it was necessary that he was immortal. And the only immortalized human was Jesus of Nazareth. His endless life has power in that His eternity is spent interceding for us; He has obtained for us eternal salvation, but there is an ongoing element to this. We will live eternally because He is as it were the basis for that eternity. And in that sense, His priesthood for us is eternal. We will spend eternity always aware in gratitude that we are only 'here' because of Him. Our gratitude expressed at the breaking of bread meeting is therefore something which will eternally continue. So in that gratitude, we are experiencing part of the Kingdom life, living the life eternal now.

7:17 For it is witnessed: You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek- "For ever" is being interpreted as meaning that the priest would be immortal, making the resurrected, immortalized Jesus the only possible candidate. The 'witnessing' by God in Ps. 110:4 is understood as the priest being "appointed" (:16).

7:18 On the other hand, there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness- This new priesthood required a new law; a changed priesthood meant a changed law (:12). And this required an "annulling" of that law, and that was because it was weak and unprofitable. Such language appears to deprecate the law, although Paul elsewhere says that the law was

"holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12); it was weak and not profitable because it was unable to bring salvation or perfection to those under it. The strong language used here about the law of Moses must be given its full weight by those who argue that it should still be kept today.

7:19 (*For the law made nothing perfect*)- Likewise :11 has argued that the Levitical priesthood had to be changed because it could not bring "perfection". The law convicted men of sin and offered some mechanism of patching up the broken relationship caused by it. It offered forgiveness, as part of an endless cycle of human failure and Divine forgiveness; but eternity and perfection are different ideas to that of forgiveness. And it is these things which are enabled by the new priest. The Mosaic priesthood and associated sacrifices did not enable moral perfection. But by being in Christ, we can be counted as Him, the only perfect human. Faith in Christ could therefore make perfect in that the Lord Jesus was 'made perfect' by His sufferings, particularly on the cross (5:7-9).

And a bringing in thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw near to God- By being counted as in Christ, having His perfection as ours due to our status in Him, we have the sure hope of future salvation. The *elpis* or hope in view is a solid expectation regarding the future, not a mere hoping for the best. And it is by having this hope that we find strength against materialism and "draw near to God". The Hebrew readership would have understood this as meaning 'drawing near in priestly service' (cp. Ex. 19:22). The Hope we have compels us to God's service. All that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes true of those in Him; His priesthood becomes ours. And it is after the order of Melchizedek, which is why non-Levites can be part of it. We may well enquire why the translators have settled for "hope" rather than "certainty" as a translation of *elpis*. Probably it was for the same reason that we too baulk at the idea of our future being totally assured and certain; we'd prefer to have these great things as a mere hope rather than a certainty. Because to be certain of my eternal future requires my heart and soul in this life. And many would quaver before signing that away to the things of Jesus and His Kingdom.

7:20 *And the Melchizedek priesthood was not without the taking of an oath-* The oath taken was by God (Ps. 110:4), vowing by Himself to honour the eternally powerful priesthood of Messiah. Such Divine underwriting was not given to the Levitical priesthood.

7:21 *The Levitical priests were made priests without an oath, but he with an oath: The Lord swore and will not change His mind; you are a priest for ever-* The eternal nature of the Lord's Melchizedek priesthood is at the basis of the certainty of our hope for future salvation (:19). God Almighty guarantees that the Lord Jesus will be our eternal priest. Our standing before Him is therefore eternal; we have such a priest who is not simply a mediator between God and men, a conduit allowing us to offer to Him and approach Him, but a priest who on His own agenda eternally secures our salvation.

7:22 *By this also has Jesus become the surety of a better covenant-* The sure hope of :19 is underpinned by the way the Lord is the surety or guarantor of the better covenant. The argument here extends that of Heb. 6:13-15, where it is the promises to Abraham which were the subject of a covenant oath on God's very own life. They were and are the essence of the new covenant. They are a simple unilateral promise that Abraham's seed will inherit the earth for ever, with all that implies about salvation through the resurrection of the body.

The Greek for "surety" occurs only here in the NT and LXX. The idea is of a guarantor who promises his self sacrifice in the case that the party to the covenant is

unfaithful. It literally means 'the pledge of a limb'. The "surety" could offer his own limbs, or himself into bondage as a slave, if the person being guaranteed somehow failed. The Lord's death confirmed God's promises as being for real. But did God's side of the covenant need such a surety? Perhaps we are better to think of the Lord's being a surety as being a guarantee for our faithfulness to the covenant. But we have not been faithful to it; and so He died, gave His all, His limbs, and became the preeminent servant of Yahweh on the cross. This was to the end that the new covenant between God and us might still stand, despite our infraction of it. The argument is very laboured- that the Lord's priesthood obtains our perfection and salvation- not simply our forgiveness. The Mosaic law and priesthood indeed delivered on what it claimed to offer- forgiveness for specific, confessed failure. But we need more than that if we are to live eternally. And that need is met in Christ. And moreover, there is all this laboured assurance that it is real and credible. His priesthood was begun with an oath made by God on His own eternal life, never to be changed- that the Lord was an eternal priest. And the new covenant, the simple promises to Abraham of eternal inheritance of the earth, were thereby confirmed and guaranteed. Why was there any need for a Divine covenant to in this way be "made sure"? Not for God's benefit, but for ours; we who tend to disbelieve the simple truth that we are being offered eternal salvation by grace. It is thereby made *to us* a "sure hope" (:19). Thus God "commended His love toward us"; not in one sense that it needed any commendation. For a Divine word ought to be enough. But to meet our tendency to disbelieve, it was confirmed through the death of Jesus. And we take the cup of the new covenant to remind us of this. He died "to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" which are the basis of the new covenant (Rom.15:8). Thus Heb. 6:18 reasons that we have two solid promises of salvation; the promise itself, and the oath that the promise is really true.

7:23 *And they indeed have been made priests many in number, because that by death they are hindered from continuing-* The eternal priesthood required for the Messianic Melchizedek priest could not be attained by mortal priests. Whereas their priesthood was ended by their death, the Lord's priesthood began with His death. Constantly, the contrast is between the Levitical priests and the Lord's priesthood. The differences and not the similarities is the core of the argument. Therefore when we read that they offered for their own sins and for the people's, the context is surely implying that the Lord didn't offer for His own sins- for He had none. If that had been better understood, and it is quite clear really when the idea of *contrast* rather than similarity is grasped- then much false reasoning about the Lord dying to somehow atone for the sin of His own nature would then have been stillborn.

7:24 *But he, because he abides for ever, has his priesthood unchangeable-* The eternal priesthood of the Melchizedek priest meant that His priesthood can never be changed. He has obtained eternal redemption for us, and that can never be liable to any renegotiation. Our hope for eternity is therefore sure (:19) because the One who obtained it is immortal, and His work for us is in this sense eternal.

7:25- see on Heb. 2:3.

Therefore he is able to save for ever those that draw near to God through him, seeing he lives forever to make intercession for them- The Lord's intercession for us is eternal. We are in Him, and His drawing near to God in priestly service is therefore ours (see on :19 for 'drawing near' as priestly language). It is our desire to serve others and thereby serve God which is what propels us to draw near to God; and in this desire we shall be eternally empowered. See on :16.

The eternal nature of the Lord's priesthood is emphasized in the argument; He is consecrated for ever (:28), and His priesthood will last eternally rather than for a limited period of time, as was the case with the mortal priests. What does this mean? The Lord Jesus eternally intercedes for us, even after our death. The risen and exalted Lord is spoken of as being shamed, being crucified afresh, as agonizing in prayer for us now just as He did on the cross (Rom. 8:24 cp. Heb. 5:7-9). On the cross, He made intercession for us (Is. 53:11,12); but now He ever lives to make such intercession (Heb. 7:25). There He bore our sins; and yet now He still bears our sins (Is. 53:4-6,11). The fact that the Lord "ever lives to make intercession" for us (Heb. 7:25) is an allusion back to Is. 53:12, which prophesies that on the cross, Christ would make intercession for the transgressors. His prayer for us then, that we would all be forgiven (and see the prophecies of this in Psalms 22,69 etc.) was therefore His intercession for our salvation. His whole death was His prayer / intercession for us. But it was of His own freewill; He was not relaying our words then. And His intercession for us on the cross is the pattern of His intercession for us now. This ought to be a humbling thought. We will live eternally because He is the basis for that eternity. And in that sense, His priesthood for us is eternal. We will spend eternity always aware in gratitude that we are only 'here' because of Him. Our gratitude expressed at the breaking of bread meeting is therefore something which will eternally continue. So in that gratitude, we are experiencing part of the Kingdom life, living the life eternal now.

He made one mediatory offering for all time (Heb. 5:7; 7:27); therefore He has nothing to offer now. The High Priest going into the Holiest is also a type of Christ entering Heaven. He is in a sense permanently in the Holiest, He bears our names *always* before Yahweh; He ever lives, all the time, to make intercession for us, always. This of course opens up the interesting question as to in what sense the Lord will eternally intercede for us, once we are immortalized. Perhaps the 'eternal' nature of His intercession is relative to the temporary work of the Levitical priests who died, and refers to eternity only in a relative sense; see on :12. But the Greek for "intercession" does not of itself require the idea of reconciliation or mediation. Through the ministry of the Comforter, we do not need that even now (Jn. 14:16; 16:26,27). The idea can simply be that He will confer with the Father about us eternally; and that is how the word is used in Acts 25:24 and Rom. 11:2. This is a wonderful thought; that the Lord Jesus shall be talking eternally to the Father about you and me.

7:26 *For such a High Priest was fitting for us- holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners-* He was and is "harmless" in His priestly mediation; the same word is translated "simple" in Rom. 16:8. He was an intellectual beyond compare, morally and dialectically He defeated the most cunning cross-questioning of His day; and yet He was a working man surrounded by masses of daily problems. But He was and is "simple" in the sense of single-mindedly committed to His priestly work. We are on earth and God is in Heaven, and therefore our words should be few (Ecc. 5:2). Not few in the sense that we don't pray for very long, but few in terms of their simplicity and directness. The Lord warned us against the complicated prayer forms of the Pharisees; and asked us to *mean* our words of 'yes' and 'no' rather than use more sophisticated assurances. The heart is deceitful and so wicked we cannot plumb its depths (Jer. 17:9); and yet the pure in heart are blessed. This must surely mean that the "pure" in heart are those who despite the intrinsic self-deception of the human

heart, are nonetheless “pure” or single hearted in their prayer and motives and desire to serve God.

The Lord Jesus was in His life "separate from sinners". The Greek word very definitely means 'to actively depart from'- it's used about a partner walking out of a marriage. Yet the Lord is always pictured as mixing with sinners, to the extent that they felt they could come to Him easily, and actually liked to do this. So how was He "separate" from them in the way the Hebrew writer understood? Here again we see one of the profoundest paradoxes in this supremest of personalities. He was with sinners, then and now; His solidarity with us, the roughest and the most obvious and the subtlest of us, is what attracts us to Him. And yet He is somehow totally separate from us; and it is this in itself which brings us to Him.

It needs to be noted that the Lord Jesus had human nature, and yet was holy, harmless and separate from sinners, and attained 'perfection'. Human nature is not, therefore, an inevitable source of sin and separation from God. The Father is not made at us for being human; it's no sin to be alive.

The Jewish priesthood was defiled and not at all holy (Neh. 13:29, and often in Malachi); and the prophets record how often the priests did "harm" the people. There is a constant contrast with the Lord Jesus; who was unlike them and instead holy, undefiled and harmless. He therefore didn't have any sins to offer for, unlike them. They had moral "weakness" (:28), but the Lord was unlike those priests. The way they had to offer for their sins is therefore a contrast, and not a similarity, with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus- which is consistently presented as being the unblemished offering for *our* sins and therefore not at all for Himself.

And has been exalted higher than the heavens- The allusion is to the common Jewish idea of there being various "heavens". Paul doesn't specifically criticize the idea, but just states that whatever we understand about this, the Lord Jesus has been exalted higher. The Gospels take a similar approach to the wrong ideas about demon possession; the power of the Father and Son is infinitely greater than that of 'demons', however we wish to understand the term.

7:27 Who needs not to offer up sacrifices daily, like those high priests, first for his own sins and then for those of the people. For this he did once for all, when he offered up himself- "This he did once" is a contrast with how the old High Priest offered ["this"] daily [Jesus did it only "once"]. The reference to "first for his own sins, then for the people's" is as it were in parenthesis, a throw away comment, to indicate again the inferiority of the old High Priests who themselves were sinners and therefore needed to offer for their own sins as well as those of God's people. My own suspicion that Paul was the author of Hebrews is based upon the style of writing we have there which we see in Paul elsewhere- so often, a comment is made in passing like this example of commenting that the old Priests had to offer for their own sins too. This kind of style is typical of Paul, Ephesians and Colossians are full of this kind of thing- making an argument, but throwing in a comment in the midst of it, a kind of aside, which often phases the reader.

It is not the day of atonement which is in view here, because the contrast is with the "daily" offerings of the priests. A sincere priest would have offered daily sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. The Lord Jesus didn't need to do this; the parallels with the Levitical priesthood are by way of both contrast and similarity. They stood; He sits. They offered animals, He offered "Himself". But as He offered for "the people" so too did the mortal priests; but He did so once, whereas they did so daily. They offered for their own sins too; He did not. If the Lord in any sense had

needed to offer for His own "sins", He would have had to do so daily. But He offered only one offering, for us. That Christ died for *our* sins according to the scriptures is the clear emphasis of the entire Biblical revelation. "*This He did*" refers to His offering for the people, for us; and not for His own 'sins'. This point is underlined in the next verse, which notes that the priests were morally weak, whereas the Son of God is perfect and shall be forever, unable to sin.

7:28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever- See on :27. Sin brings death, so the eternal priest appointed by the word of God's oath in Ps. 110:4 had to be not only eternal but also sinless. There could therefore be no other candidate for this priest than the Lord Jesus. The contrast between the moral weakness of the priests and the perfection of God's Son is further reason to understand "*this He did*" in :27 as referring solely to His sacrifice for "the people". The Lord's 'perfecting' was in the supreme moral perfection He achieved on the cross (see on 5:8,9). That acme of utter perfection, attained within a body covered in blood and spittle, dying in agony on a tree trunk, tormented by flies and barking dogs on a hill outside Jerusalem on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, 2000 or so years ago... has as it were been set in stone eternally. The perfection attained is "forever". Our far weaker spiritual growth will likewise be eternally set in stone.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 8

8:1 Now in the things of which we are talking, the chief point is this- This is language appropriate to a transcript of a talk or sermon; see on 13:22. Yet despite this, the letter to the Hebrews has a very clear structure; and this is actually the central point of the letter in terms of structure.

We have such a high priest who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens- The way the Lord *sits* rather than *stands* is emphasized, and is another connection with Stephen who saw the Lord standing, passionate in His defence (see on 1:1). The personal existence of God is taught here clearly enough; Jesus is at His right hand, and He has location, rather than being an abstraction or puff of 'spirit'.

8:2 A servant of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man- The Lord Jesus is actively working in Heaven for us. The allusion is to priestly 'service', which was always focused upon bringing others to God and enabling their service. The "true" tabernacle doesn't suggest the Mosaic tabernacle was untrue; but it was but a figure of the ultimate, 'true' Heavenly reality. We note that in His life, the Lord was a servant. A servant of all, the suffering servant. But who we are now is who we shall essentially be. He will again come forth and serve us at the Messianic banquet. And in this life, He is now also a servant in the true tabernacle, which effectively refers to the church. He is indeed the same yesterday, today and for ever. He is active now- serving us. The human priests were serving a copy of the true tabernacle; but the Lord Jesus serves in the true tabernacle (:5).

There is great emphasis in Ex. 26 that the tabernacle was "one", joined together in such a way that taught the lesson of unity. The spiritual tabernacle, the believers, was "pitched" by the Lord God- translating a Greek word which suggests 'crucifixion' (Heb. 8:2). Through the cross, the one, united tabernacle was pitched. To tear down that structure by disuniting the body is to undo the work of the cross. Yet the Greek for "pitched" is literally 'pegged'. This continues the idea of our having the certain

hope of salvation as an anchor of the soul. There is a grounding and stability for the person who has that sure hope.

8:3 *For every high priest being appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, it is therefore necessary that this high priest also have these to offer-* The train of thought about offering gifts and sacrifices is somewhat interrupted until 9:9, creating a parenthesis which is typical of Paul's style. The argument is that He did offer, but one offering- of Himself, and not of endless gifts and animals (9:27,28; 10:12). He was not so much offering the gifts of others, but offering Himself. And yet we can also read this as meaning that He also has something to offer, because that is what being a priest is about. Seeing His offering was once and for all, what He has to offer would therefore be our prayers. "Now has he obtained a more excellent service". But He is a 'servant'; that is repeatedly emphasized. He is active and not passive.

8:4 *Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, seeing there are those who offer the gifts according to the law-* Clearly this was written whilst the Jerusalem temple was still functioning, before AD70. Because His mediation was a one-off act, the Lord would not be a priest if He were now on earth. He is given the title of priest, as He is given the title "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), even though He is not now a man. And the Lord was from Judah, not Levi. Paul is stressing the two different kinds of priesthood, and by noting that there were still Aaronic priests operating, he is implying that their service is worthless compared to that of the Messianic Melchizedek priest.

8:5 *Who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, even as Moses is warned when he is about to make the tabernacle. For He said: See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain-* The "pattern" is therefore taken by Paul to imply that the tabernacle system was a copy or reflection of the heavenly tabernacle (9:23,24), with the priests reflecting the work of the Angels; hence *elohim* is used of both priests and Angels. Judaism even called the tabernacle 'the heavenlies', but Paul's point is that it was only a "copy and shadow" of them, and the Lord Jesus is dealing with the ultimate realities which were only dimly reflected in the tabernacle system. The priests 'served' the copy of these things; but the Lord serves us.

8:6 *But now has he obtained a more excellent service, as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted upon better promises-* The old covenant was mediated by Moses (Gal. 3:19); the Lord Jesus mediates the new covenant to us. That covenant was based upon the promises made to Abraham, but they were only mediated to us in Christ. Those promises envisaged eternal inheritance of the earth for Abraham and his singular seed, Jesus (Gal. 3:16). By baptism into Him we become part of the seed, and heirs according to those promises (Gal. 3:27-29). The new covenant is therefore based upon the promises to Abraham. Those better promises already existed, before the time of the law; but they were only mediated to us when we could become in Christ, part of the seed. And that required the Lord's death as a representative for all men. Now that He has mediated that covenant to us, He continues to serve those within that covenant.

The implication is that the Lord's 'mediation' of the New Covenant is ongoing. In this sense "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5 s.w.). We come to "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 12:24). "He is the mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 9:15). The New Covenant is therefore an ongoing experience; something is mediated in an ongoing sense. And that something is the Spirit. It is not simply about the future fulfilment of the land promises and eternal inheritance of the earth. It is about "blessing" which Acts 3:25,26 interprets as

the blessing of being turned away from sin, which in turn refers to the gift of the Spirit. The following quotation from Jer. 31 develops this; the new covenant is about God's operation upon human hearts through His Spirit. For to be offered eternity is only part of the picture; for man to live for ever, he must be transformed first. And this is all also implicit in the promises to Abraham which are the basis of the new covenant.

8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second- "Faultless" doesn't mean it was faulty of itself; the failure was that it could not bring perfection / salvation to men. I noted on :6 that the New Covenant is about the blessing of the Spirit transforming human hearts. The old covenant was not "faultless". But by implication, the new covenant is. Both covenants were inspired by God, and the law of Moses was "holy, just and good". So it is not as if there was a "fault" in the old covenant. But it is through the ministry of the Spirit that human hearts can be "established unblameable [s.w. "faultless"] in holiness" (1 Thess. 3:13 cp. Eph. 3:16). The old covenant could not do this. But the new covenant does.

Who was seeking a place for a second covenant? The reference may be to God, seeking salvation for us (see on :8); or to believers under the first covenant, who sought salvation and moral perfection but not finding it under the first covenant, searched for another. God didn't seek for a second covenant but for a place for it, a way in which it could operate for all men. And that place was in the work of His Son, the seed of Abraham who was the perfect Messianic priest, in whom all men could find a place and have the promises to Abraham's seed, the new covenant, mediated to them. It was God who sought for a man to empower this, and found Him only in Christ (Jer. 5:1 etc.).

8:8 For finding fault with them, He said- The ensuing quotation is from God's words in Jeremiah 31. So it would be God who was the one seeking a place for the second covenant, and who found fault with the old covenant- in that it could not bring about the human salvation He sought. But it could equally be that the "them" with whom God "found fault" were the Judah of Jeremiah's day, which would better account for the plural "them". The answer to the "fault" of the law being unable to bring salvation for sinful man was in the new covenant.

Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah- The mention of both the houses of Israel and Judah would imply that unity between God's people is achieved on the basis of them all being within the new covenant. The cup of the new covenant / testament is therefore the symbol of unity between the redeemed; to refuse it to those who are within the house of God's people is serious indeed, an undoing of God's intention of unity upon the basis of the covenant. The new covenant system of salvation was designed for sinners; those with whom God had "found fault". We note that this is the longest Old Testament quotation to be found in the NT, and Jeremiah 31 is again quoted in Heb. 10 and elsewhere. These words about the New Covenant are therefore to be given their due weight as utterly central to the Christian message. The idea is not that God would think up a new covenant. That already existed in the promises to Abraham. But the exiles of Jeremiah's time were intended to repent, and recognize they could not be justified by God through the old covenant. And so they were to accept the new covenant, which was there all along, but they had refused to accept its huge implications. And the same can be true for us who likewise knew those promises all along, but refused to accept their implications.

8:9 *Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in My covenant, so I paid no attention to them-* The old covenant between God and Israel was a two way agreement. God took the initiative in it, He took Israel by the hand. But they refused to remain within the covenant, so it was unable to save them. In order to save God's people, there therefore needed to be another covenant which could save them by grace. The promises to Abraham were just such a one-sided agreement, where God swore to Abraham, passing between the cut pieces of the covenant victim; whilst Abraham was not required to make any response. He just had to believe in God's love. Once the old covenant was broken by Israel refusing to remain within it, it was broken; and God therefore could not look toward them, seeing they had broken the connection between God and themselves. The idea of not continuing in the covenant uses the same word as in Gal. 3:10: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written: Cursed is everyone who does *not continue* to do all things that are written in the book of the law". Israel did not continue in obedience, so they did not continue in the covenant.

8:10 *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their mind and in their heart also will I write them, and I will be to them a God and they shall be to Me a people-* This new covenant was not "new". It was 'new for them', but it is the promises to Abraham- which had already promised "I will be their God". A new covenant was needed because Israel had not kept the old covenant, they had broken their covenant relationship (see on :9); God had "found fault" with them (:8). The covenant proposed here was to be written by God in human hearts rather than on tables of stone, to which obedience was demanded. God would "be to them a God" in that this was part of the promises to Abraham (Gen. 17:7,8) which are the "better promises" forming the new covenant (see on :6). This new covenant which was to be made with Israel has now been made with us in this life (cp. :13). The promises which comprised the new covenant were those made to Abraham; but they referred only to Abraham and his one singular seed (Gal. 3:16). Once the seed had come, we are able to be baptized into Christ so that all that is true for Him becomes true for us (Gal. 3:27-29). As the full and totally inclusive representative of all humans, the Lord Jesus thereby opened the way for the promises to Abraham to actually become the new covenant in practice for all who become in Him. The promise to Abraham and his Messianic seed [just two people] that "I will be their God" thereby becomes true for an entire people; "they [who are in Christ] shall be to Me a people". Entry into the new covenant therefore involves God writing upon our hearts, which is done through the work of His Spirit operating directly upon the hearts of all those baptized into the seed (2 Cor. 3:3 "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. Not in tablets of stone, but in tablets that are hearts of flesh"). The allusion to the stones of the old covenant is to show that the new covenant is indeed a covenant, but written on hearts and not tablets of stone.

Jer. 31:33 says " I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it". It is through the work of the Spirit upon the "inner man" (Eph. 3:16) that this is achieved. The same heart-swop operation is described in Ez. 36:25,26. Jer. 31:33 said that God would place His laws in Israel's heart; in Ez. 36 we read that He will place His Spirit in their hearts. It is the Spirit which makes us obedient to the word. Those within the new covenant today receive this same gift of the Spirit; not today in

terms of miraculous gifts, but the operation of God on the human heart which brings about the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to be "their God" (Gen. 17:-8-10).

8:11 *None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying: Know the Lord. For all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them-* Under the new covenant, we are in Christ. We relate to the Father as He does, being in Him. 'Knowledge' in Hebrew thought often effectively means 'relationship'. The relationship possible under the new covenant is not therefore dependent upon the teaching of men, but is a direct relationship with the Father. This kind of knowledge / relationship with God is on the basis that sin has really been dealt with and forgiven (:12).

If we know God in an experiential sense (and not just knowing theological theory about Him), we know that our sins are forgiven. We preach to others "Know the Lord!", exactly because "I will be merciful to their iniquities" (Heb. 8:11,12). It is our knowledge of God's mercy to us which empowers us to confidently seek to share with others our knowledge, our relationship, our experience with God. Forgiveness inspires the preacher; and yet the offer of forgiveness is what inspires the listener to respond.

8:12 *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will not remember against them-* As noted on :11, this forgiveness is the basis upon which those under the new covenant know / have relationship with the Lord. The sins of men will not be remembered under the new covenant; whereas there was a remembrance of sins made each year by the old covenant (10:3). So God's way of dealing with His sinful people with whom He "found fault" (:8) was to instill obedience to His principles into their hearts, and to not remember their sins. This is all the work of the Spirit. The "blessing" promised to Abraham, in the "better promises" which comprise the new covenant (:6), was of not only forgiveness but also in turning away human hearts from sin (Acts 3:25,26). This work of the Spirit is the only way to bring about human salvation, seeing that giving them laws and demanding obedience thereto just didn't work out in practice.

The idea is that there will be no lack of knowledge of God's ways because the sins of God's people have been forgiven. That experience and showcasing of Divine forgiveness will be the witness which is seen by all men. The knowledge of God will no longer have to be taught in theoretical terms because the experience of forgiveness is to know God. Being under the new covenant means that we will know Yahweh, on account of our sins being forgiven. We will be certain of their forgiveness, not just hoping for the best. So often the prophets use the idea of "knowing God" as an idiom for living a life totally dominated by that knowledge. The new covenant which we have entered is all about 'knowing' God. The knowledge of God elicits repentance, real repentance; and reveals an equally real forgiveness. It is possible for those in Christ to in practice not know God at all. Thus Paul exhorted the Corinthian church: "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34).

8:13- see on Ps. 102:26.

In that He said: A new covenant, He has made the first redundant. Now what is becoming redundant and growing old is ready to vanish away- The very concept of a new covenant means that an old covenant has been "made redundant". There is now no purpose in attempting to keep the Mosaic law, because it achieves nothing. The old covenant was "ready to vanish away" in that the temple was soon to be destroyed; but

there is also perhaps a reference here to how by grace, God allowed there to be a changeover period- even though the old covenant was ended on the cross. We see in this how sensitive and accommodating God is to human conservatism; whereas we tend to be terribly impatient with the slowness of others to change, finding their conservatism an irritation. He recognized the deep conservatism within human nature, and allowed this changeover period during which the old covenant 'became redundant'; even though it was replaced by the new covenant when the Lord's blood was shed to confirm that new covenant and bring it into operation. As soon as the new covenant was in operation, the previous covenant became 'old'. That happened in a moment, and yet Paul generously says that it is becoming or growing old, as if a process is in view. Likewise in 1:11, the same word used here for "becoming redundant" is applied to how the 'heavens' of the Jewish system were 'becoming old'. And yet the Lord had clearly warned of how the old and new wine cannot be mixed or confused and they are mutually exclusive. The allowance of a changeover period was by grace alone, and it could be argued that the Hebrew had abused it and were turning back to the "old" rather than progressively forsaking it as intended.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 9

9:1 Now even the first covenant had regulations for Divine service and an earthly sanctuary- The implication is that the second or new covenant also has a sanctuary and a structure for service. But that is all ongoing in Heaven, thus declaring the attempt at "Divine service" through the temple system to be redundant. The same word is used of how each believer is to do "service" to God in the new order, by presenting their own bodies as sacrifices, acting as both priest and offering (Rom. 12:1). The priests did God's "service" in the first tabernacle, i.e. the holy place (:6); we in Christ do His service in the most holy place, associated with heaven itself.

9:2 For there was a tabernacle prepared, the first section, wherein was the candlestick, the table and the bread of the Presence, which is called the Holy Place- The presentation of the Most Holy as being sectioned off by the Holy place is to emphasize how the tabernacle system did not give entrance into God's presence, but rather created barriers. It was the priests who served in the Holy Place who effectively stood between God and man, rather than enabling ordinary worshippers to come into the Most Holy place. However, it could be argued that the candlestick speaks of the church (as in Revelation), and the table and bread refer to the breaking of bread; as if after the laver [cp. baptism and the regeneration of the Spirit], we must pass through the experience of church life before we enter the direct fellowship with God in the Most Holy. This raises serious questions over the attitude that we can be 'out of church Christians', walking with the Lord in splendid isolation because of various crotchets of interpretation or past hurts. Perhaps the term "bread of the presence" is used to suggest a connection between the holy place (church life now) and the presence of God in the Most Holy place.

9:3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies- The Holy and Most Holy places are presented as two distinct tabernacles or tents. The old and new covenants are presented in :1 as the first and second covenants [although the promises to Abraham forming the new covenant were in fact given before the Mosaic legislation, although that new covenant was only ratified and brought into operation for men through the Lord's death]. The flow of thought is presumably that the new or second covenant is to be associated with the second tabernacle, the Most Holy place, in which believers in Christ are

now located. We are therefore described often in Paul's thought as "the heavenlies", sitting in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3; 2:6). The rending of the veil into the Most Holy at the Lord's death made the same point- the way into the Holiest was now opened.

9:4 *This had the golden altar of incense-* This could be translated "censer" [as AV]. The censer was only in the most holy place on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:12), so perhaps that is the situation Paul is presenting here (see on :5). The incense altar was in the holy place, not the holy of holies (Ex. 31); and so "censer" is likely the correct translation option, although that was only in the most holy on the Day of Atonement. The argument will develop that we are now with the Lord Jesus in the Most Holy, for we are "in Christ"; and so Paul takes a picture, as it were, of the situation as it was on the Day of Atonement, the only time when the high priest entered the Most Holy.

And the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was a golden pot holding the manna and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant- It has been complained that the golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod were not within the ark, but "before the testimony" (Ex. 16:34; Num. 17:10). I suggest that "the testimony" referred to the tables of the covenant, which were within the ark (Ex. 25:16). However, Israel were not obedient to this, for in Solomon's temple "there was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone" (1 Kings 8:9). The actual temple system never matched up to what it was supposed to be anyway, and Paul appears to be making this point. That manna symbolized the Lord Jesus, as did the budding rod, with its message of resurrection of the Messianic "rod". But Judaism was without the awareness of these things.

9:5 *And above it were cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat-* The reference may be to the shining forth of the *shekinah* glory from between those cherubim on the Day of Atonement, which is the situation being described here; see on :4.

Of which things we cannot now speak in detail- This sounds similar to the comment on 5:11 that Paul could not speak as he could have done about some things because of the immaturity of the audience. But the Greek could also imply that he was running out of time and so had to skip talking about the cherubim- which would be appropriate to a spoken address (see on 13:22).

9:6 *Now these things having been thus prepared, the priests went in continually into the first tabernacle, performing the services-* The 'continual' entry is in contrast with the way the Lord Jesus entered once- and not into the Holy but the Most Holy place, and remains there. The Holy Place is called the "first" tabernacle, associating it with the first or old covenant (:1; see on :3).

9:7- see on Jn. 12:24.

But into the second only the high priest went, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people- As noted on :6 and so often in Hebrews, Paul is comparing and also contrasting the Lord's priesthood with that of the Levitical priests. Indeed, most of the points of contact are in terms of dissimilarity rather than identity. And the difference here is that the High Priests were sinners and needed to atone for their own sins as well as the peoples; whereas the clear emphasis of Scripture is that "Christ died for *our* sins", and His work was and continues to be for our forgiveness and salvation rather than His own. Likewise the Lord did not enter once / year, but once for all- and remained there. So the points of contact with the Levitical High Priests are in the dissimilarity rather than similarities. See on 7:27,28.

9:8 *The Holy Spirit indicating that the way into the Holy Place was not yet made manifest whilst the first tabernacle remained-* As noted on :3, the Holy place is associated with the

"first" covenant and the Most Holy with the new or second covenant (:1). The Holy Place is therefore presented here as a barrier to entry into the Most Holy; and the priesthood are therefore framed as standing between God and man rather than as a conduit whereby men could come to God's presence. That first tabernacle no longer "remained", according to Paul's logic; the Mosaic system was over. The tearing of the veil at the Lord's death showed in visual terms what is being explained here- the way into the Holiest was made open to all.

9:9 (*Which is symbolic for the present age*)- The idea may be that the present age, that of the Christian dispensation, was symbolized or pointed forward to by the arrangements of the tabernacle. It was all a *parabole* ("symbolic"), a parable to be interpreted. But now that age had come, they are of no practical value apart from as symbols of the reality we are now in.

According to this system, both gifts and sacrifices were offered which could not make the worshiper perfect as relates to the conscience- This is parallel with the thought of :8, that the tabernacle system was actually a barrier between God and man, stopping men coming into the Most Holy, the presence of God. No worshiper could come into the Most Holy, the presence of God, because all within him would cry out that he was imperfect; his conscience wouldn't allow him to seek to enter, even if it were legally possible. The "system" in Christ enables our complete forgiveness and cleansing; we are counted as "in Christ", as righteous as He, thereby cleansing the conscience and allowing our entry into the very presence of God. The Lord's teaching about the Comforter speaks of similar things; through the sanctifying work of the Spirit in our hearts, we can come directly to God without mediation (Jn. 14:16; 16:26), to the extent that the Lord's physical absence is not felt and we live as in His very personal presence.

9:10 *Being merely foods, drinks and various washings, earthly ordinances imposed until a time of reformation*- The inadequacy of the rituals in allowing man to come into the Most Holy place of itself implies that there had to be a "time of reformation". The word for "reformation" is found again in 12:13: "Make straight ['reformed'] paths for your feet", lest any stumble. The idea is of making a path straight and direct (LXX Jer. 7:3,5). The way of Judaism caused men to stumble; there was no direct path into the Most Holy. No amount of ritual could cleanse the conscience; a radical reformation was required, a straightening out of the path between God and man.

9:11 *But Christ having become a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation*- The "good things to come" may be from the perspective of the old covenant; the tabernacle system was parabolic of the good things to come (:9). And they had now come, Paul is saying; the Greek can be rendered "the good things realized", or "come to pass". It was as if the good news was too good to believe; the Hebrews preferred to shrink back from the good things because the goodness of them was too demanding. And that is the attraction of legalism; it allows us to feel still connected to God, but the reality of the good news, of salvation by pure grace, has passed us by. As the High Priest passed into the Most Holy, the Lord Jesus has passed into Heaven itself (4:14). This greater tabernacle was pitched by God and not man (8:2), not of "this creation", made with the material things of this world.

9:12 *Nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, he entered in once for all into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption*- The Lord not only entered once and then left, as the priests did; He entered and remained, "once for all". And the Most Holy is Heaven itself. As noted earlier, the scene here is the Day of Atonement, when goats were offered for the sins of the people and a bull calf for the sins of the High Priest (Lev. 16:6,15). The plural is because these animals were offered each year. The redemption achieved by the Lord was "eternal", not temporary. Paul appears to be quoting here from the midrash of Jonathan ben Uzziel on Gen. 49:18; ben Uzziel would have been contemporary with Paul: "Jacob said, when he saw Gideon the son of Joash, and Samson the

son of Manoaah, who should be redeemers; not for the redemption of Gideon am I waiting, nor for the redemption of Samson am I looking, for their redemption is a temporal redemption; but for thy redemption am I waiting and looking, O Lord, because thy redemption is "an everlasting redemption". The redemption in view is clearly of others rather than of Himself; for the Lord was the redeemer of God's Israel (Lk. 1:68; 2:38). He gave His life as a redemption for many (Mt. 20:28); He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from our sins (Tit. 2:14). That redemption worked out in redeeming us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). The AV defines the eternal redemption as "for us"; and the Cambridge Bible comments: "The 'for us' is rightly supplied; but the middle voice of the verb shows that Christ in His love to us also regarded the redemption as dear to Himself". So the inference that the Lord 'obtained for Himself' our eternal redemption doesn't mean that He obtained redemption for Himself plus for us; rather does the Greek mean that He obtained our redemption for Himself, He wanted it to be His. The allusion may be to the language of a man 'redeeming' a wife for himself, just as God redeemed His people for Himself. But this does not mean that He redeemed Himself.

The implication of Lev. 16:14,15 is that the High Priest went beyond the veil twice during this ritual- once to atone for his own sins, and once for the sins of the people. But Heb. 9:12 labours that the Lord did this only once, and thus entered Heaven itself- for *us*, for our sins. Because the point of contrast is that He had no personal sins to atone for. So the idea that the Lord offered for Himself and then for us is actually the opposite of what Heb. 9:12 is teaching. The "type" was by way of contrast and not similarity. Those who have failed to appreciate this have gone further after this wrong turning, and ended up constructing theories of 'atonement for human nature' which are foreign to the scriptures.

9:13 *For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, could sanctify to the cleansing of the flesh-* The ashes of the heifer were sprinkled in the water of the laver to create water used for cleansing (Num. 19:1-10). The laver speaks of the baptism into Christ which leads to the regeneration of the Spirit (Tit. 3:5). The Lord's blood makes our baptism into Him have meaning far beyond the cleansing rituals of the tabernacle system. Our very conscience can be cleansed (:14). "The cleansing of the flesh" refers to some surface level 'cleansing' which did not touch the conscience; the contrast is between the flesh and the heart or conscience. They experienced forgiveness on a technical level, but remained with a bad conscience, knowing they were likely to sin again, and with no means of feeling that sin had not only been removed but that they would surely be saved and washed in their inward parts. The individuals such as David who came to such a realization in Old Testament times did so through their faith in God's grace rather than through the legal processes of the law of Moses. The sanctification was not a sham, however ("how much more..." ; :14). But there was internal cleansing of the spirit, even though forgiveness was granted on one level. The defilement that was cleansed or sanctified was ritual defilement; but the defilement of the spirit and conscience was not addressed by the sacrificial system. But the Lord's priesthood enables that too to be addressed, through the ministry of the Spirit in human hearts. Those who deny the work of the Spirit are in effect in the position of those who were technically forgiven and cleansed from legalistic defilements by the Mosaic sacrifices.

9:14 *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God-*

"Without blemish" seems to be saying that the Lord had no sin to personally atone for, unlike the human priests who were blemished.

As noted on :13, ritual defilement and legalistic infringements could be cleansed by the Mosaic sacrifices, but the sacrificial system did not address the spirit or conscience. The work

of the Lord is on the conscience, on the spirit through His Spirit. His sacrifice is therefore described here as having been one of the Spirit; His Spirit or mind was and is eternal, in that the mind He achieved by the end of His mortal life has been eternally preserved (see on 5:7-9), and is given to His people eternally. The Mosaic sacrifices had to be repeated, and related to the flesh ("the cleansing of the flesh", :13). The Lord's sacrifice pertained to the Spirit, and was eternal rather than of only temporary consequence. He did not offer an animal, but Himself; as the animal was to be "without blemish" in the flesh (Lev. 1:10), the Lord was "without blemish" morally, in His Spirit. The animal had no choice in being offered; the Lord "offered Himself" as an act of conscious volition. He was *spiritually* without blemish whereas the animal sacrifices were only unblemished in the *flesh*. His cleansing of our spirit / conscience was *dia* or on account of His spirit. And His spirit is eternal; for He is now immortalized, His personality, mind, spirit, character lives on eternally, both in Himself and ultimately in us to whom He gives His Spirit. He is a priest who operates now according to the power / spirit of an endless life (7:16).

The Lord offered Himself on the cross "through the eternal spirit" in that it was the Spirit of God, understanding from His word what God really wanted, what He is really like and thereby demands of us, which led the Lord Jesus to the cross. And why the odd phrase "the eternal spirit"? Surely to show that this same Spirit operates today, and if we follow it, will lead us likewise to the same death of the cross. These things are challenging to the very core of our being, the very fabric of our self-understanding. We who cower in the dentist's chair, who fear and avoid pain, who would sooner die than have a surgery without anesthetic... are called to die with Jesus, the death of the cross. God was manifested in the flesh of Christ, but now Christ is living "in the Spirit", thus justifying God's righteousness (1 Tim. 3:16). He was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by (on account of) the Spirit", the Spirit-man within Him (1 Pet. 3:18). Thus Christ's sacrifice was acceptable by reason of his "eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14); his perfect spiritual character was what enabled his physical blood and death to win our salvation. His resurrection was due to his "spirit of holiness" (Rom. 1:4). We can only relate to Him now as a spiritual being. We can not now know Him after the flesh. Now his mortal flesh has been destroyed, He is "the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 R.V.); He is called "the Spirit" in Revelation because the spiritual character He developed in his mortal life is now what He is.

Cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?- The "dead works" are those which can be turned away from by baptism into Christ and forgiven (6:1). The contrast is with how the sprinkling of blood and water cleansed the flesh, getting technical forgiveness for legal infringements, but could not cleanse the conscience or spirit of the offerer. 1 Pet. 1:2 states that the sprinkling of the blood of Christ is to be associated with our sanctification by the Spirit, referring to the internal cleansing of the heart by the gift and operation of the Spirit there. As explained in Romans 1-8, we are "in Christ", counted as Him, with His righteousness imputed to us; and therefore we can be confident that if He returns today or we die, we shall surely be saved. The bad conscience regarding our previous "dead works" is totally removed; and on this basis we can do priestly service in the Most Holy place. We are not to simply rejoice in our own redemption, but to realize that our cleansing is so that we may serve. The mention of "the living God" would suggest again the function of the Spirit; He is alive and interactive with us, and we are to therefore serve the God who is Spirit in spirit (Jn. 4:24).

The Greek word translated "conscience", *sun-eidesis*, means literally a co-perception. It implies that there are two types of perception within the believer- human perception, and spiritual self perception. The conscience that is cleansed in Christ, that is at peace, will be a conscience that keeps those two perceptions, of the real self and of the persona, in harmony. What we know and perceive humanly, is in harmony with we spiritually perceive. Our

conscience, our co-perception, our real self, makes sense of the human perceptions and interprets them in a spiritual way. So, a young man sees an attractive girl. His human perception signals certain things to his brain- to lust, covet, etc. But his co-perception, his conscience, his real self, handles all that, and sees the girl's beauty for just simply what it is- beauty. Job before his 'conversion' paralleled his eye and his ear: "My eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it" (Job 13:1). He was so sure that what he heard was what he saw; he was sure that his perceptions were operating correctly. But later, he comes to see a difference between his eye and his ear. He says that he had only heard of God by the ear; but only now, he says, "my eye sees You" (Job 42:5). He had heard words, but, he realized, he'd not properly 'seen' or perceived. Finally, he had a properly functioning 'conscience', a co-perception. What he saw, was what he really heard.

Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience. It's therefore unreliable (1 Cor. 4:4). And yet there is Bible teaching concerning the need to live in accordance with our 'conscience', and the joy which is possible for the believer who has a clear conscience (e.g. Acts 24:16; Rom. 14:18-22; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:21). This must mean, in the context, the conscience which God's word has developed in us- it cannot refer to 'conscience' in the sense of our natural, inbuilt sense of right and wrong; because according to the Bible, this is hopelessly flawed. The fact the "conscience" is "cleansed" by Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 9:14; 10:22) proves that the Biblical 'conscience' is not the natural sense of right and wrong within our nature; for our nature can never be 'purged' or 'cleansed', the believer will always have those promptings within him to do wrong. The cleansed, purged conscience refers to the new man that is created within the believer at baptism. This new 'conscience' is not just a sense of guilt which is invoked on account of not living an obedient life; it is also a conscience which positively compels us *to do* something, not just threatens us with a pang of guilt if we commit a sin.

We have a conscience which in God's eyes is cleansed of sin, knowing that our sin has been overcome once and for all, and that we have access to this through baptism. Our hearts were purified by that faith (Acts 15:9); we were cleansed from the conscience of sins (Heb. 9:14); all things became pure to us (Tit. 1:15; Rom. 14:20). This is a good conscience, Biblically defined. When Paul said he had a pure conscience before God, they smote him for blasphemy (Acts 23:1,2); there is an association between a clear conscience and perfection (Heb. 9:9; 10:14). A clear conscience therefore means an awareness that in God's eyes, we have no sin. Thus Paul's conscience could tell him that he was living a life which was a response to his experience of God's grace / forgiveness (2 Cor. 1:12). The conscience works not only negatively; it insists that we *do* certain things. It may even be that the goads against which Paul was kicking before his conversion were not the pricks of bad conscience, but rather the *positive* directions from God that he *ought* to be giving his life to the service of His Son. Whilst we may still have twinges of guilt, and sins to confess, from God's viewpoint the slate is clean, and has been since our baptism. It is impossible to believe this without some kind of response. We are purged in our conscience so that we might serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).

However I suspect that the idea is that we have attained such a forgiveness that we now have no more conscience of sins. This would explain why David and Paul could speak and write of how they were relatively innocent and of a good conscience, when they had both sinned grievously at earlier points in their lives. Forgiveness is one thing; and God granted forgiveness in the Old Testament. The Mosaic rituals repeatedly stated that the sinner was indeed forgiven. And we must give this its due weight. But receipt of forgiveness is one thing; salvation and psychological cleansing from guilt are other things. And it is these things which were achieved for us in the Lord's death. The day of Atonement, which is in view

throughout this chapter, signalled that there was some other kind of forgiveness and cleansing available, far beyond the regular forgiveness of specific sins. And that looked ahead to the Lord's work which we now experience.

9:15 *And because of this, he is the mediator of a new covenant; that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance-* The Lord's ability to cleanse even the conscience of believers through His total eradication of sin is what makes Him the mediator of the new covenant, even though that new covenant was comprised of the promises made to Abraham and his seed [the Lord Jesus] of eternal inheritance of the earth. By association with the representative sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, we can become "in Him", we become the seed, and thereby the promises to Abraham and Jesus are made to us. His sacrifice thereby enabled us to receive the promise of eternal inheritance- the promise made to Abraham. His death was also the basis for the salvation of those who sought forgiveness under the old covenant; for the blood of animals of itself could not take away sin. It was only effective insofar as it pointed forward to the Lord's future sacrifice.

It must be remembered that the High Priest of the Old Covenant did not offer up the prayers of the people. Yahweh's ears were ever open to the cry of the individual Israelite, without an intercessor. Moses mediated the Old Covenant in the sense that he obtained it and relayed it to Israel; his mediation was a one-off act. This is the basis of the NT passages concerning the mediation of the New Covenant through Christ; He did this through His death and resurrection (Gal. 3:19,20; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Christ was the mediator of the new covenant so that the sins committed under the old covenant could be forgiven; thus His mediation is not in the relaying of our words to God, but in the sealing of the new covenant through His own blood. The mediation between God and man by the Lord is paralleled with His giving Himself as a ransom on the cross (1 Tim. 2:5,6). This is the sense in which He is the mediator of the new covenant; He mediated it *once*, not in an ongoing sense.

9:16 *For where a will is of power, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it-* Paul is playing on the meaning of the word translated "testament" or "covenant"; it also means a will, a set of promises which become actual after the death of the one who made the promises. I have commented elsewhere that whilst Paul's reasoning is true enough as it stands for us as Christians, viewing it retrospectively from our position, there are times when it would appear that he is rather forcing a point. For the obvious objection would be that it was God who made the new covenant, not Jesus; His death is not to be seen as the death of God, leaving us without Him to receive what He has left behind for us. But this kind of apparently forced logic would have been acceptable within the paradigm of Rabbinic midrash. The point becomes more logical however when we consider the argument that the old covenant or "will" was ordained with the shedding of blood, as if it would only come into true effect when someone died. And as explained in :15, the forgiveness offered under the old covenant was only finally effective when the Lord died. For the blood of animals of itself could not take away sin.

The death of the covenant victim was to act as a warning for what would happen to those who broke the covenant. Thus "The men who transgressed my covenant... I will make like the calf which they cut in two" (Jer. 34:18 RSV). In the account of a Babylonian covenant it was written: "This head is not just the head of the goat... it is the head of Mati'ilu... If Mati'ilu breaks the oath, then as the head of this goat is cut off... so shall the head of Mati'ilu be cut off". Thus the dead animal was seen as a representative of the person who entered the covenant. The death of our Lord, therefore, serves as a reminder to us of the end for sin. We either put sin to death, or we must be put to death for it. Gal. 3:15; Heb. 9:16 and other passages liken the blood of Christ to a covenant; and yet the Greek word used means definitely the last will and testament of a dead man. His blood is therefore an imperative to us

to do something; it is His will to us, which we must execute. Thus His death, His blood, which is also a symbol of His life, becomes the imperative to us for our lives and living in this world. Note how blood is a symbol of both life and also death (Gen. 37:26; Num. 35:19,33; Lev. 20:9). Both His death and His life form a covenant / testament / will for us to obey- in both baptism and then in living out the death and life in our daily experience. We cannot be passive to it.

9:17 *For a will is of force where there has been death; it does not have power while he that made it lives-* The new covenant as given in Genesis 15 also required the shedding of animal blood to ratify it; but it only came into force in the death of the Lord Jesus, thereby enabling all men to become part of Abraham's seed and share in the promise of eternal inheritance made to him (:15). Now the Lord has died, the promises to Abraham of eternal inheritance, the new covenant, is "of force". Paul uses the same word about the solidity of this hope in Rom. 4:16: "It is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure [s.w. "of force"] to all the seed". If it were not of grace through faith, it would have to be on the basis of works. And our human weakness would leave us with no sure hope, knowing we would never be perfectly obedient or do enough in order to make the promise of salvation "of force" or "sure". The same idea is carried in the word *elpis*, "hope"; not a hope for the best at judgment day, but a solid, certain knowledge of the future. Paul connects the ideas in 3:6 and 6:19, saying that we are to hold fast the confidence of the hope "firm", "of force" (s.w.), unto the end. This solidity of hope, this confident sense that our salvation is sure, "of force", is lacking in many who name the name of Christ today. They still sense that they must attain the new covenant by some form of works. But if we are focused upon the meaning of the Lord's death, then we can feel the "force", the sureness, of the promise of future salvation and inheritance of the earth. The prophetic word which has been made "more sure" (s.w. "of force") is surely a reference to this same wonderful truth- that the prophetic word to Abraham of salvation for his seed has been made "more sure", "of force", by the Lord's death (2 Pet. 1:19). The idea is not that predictions of future events were proven true; but rather that the word of salvation has been made sure, and we ought to thereby make our calling and election "sure" (s.w.; 2 Pet. 1:10).

9:18 *Therefore even the first covenant has not been dedicated without blood-* Salvation and forgiveness was possible for those who lived under the old covenant on the basis that the covenant was of power in these ways on account of the Lord's blood, to which the blood of animals pointed forward.

9:19 *For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people-* This brings out the link between blood and law-giving; the people were sprinkled with blood as they heard the Law read to them. The new covenant in Christ's blood results in the laws of God being written on our hearts, in our consciences (Heb. 8:10). Then Heb. 10:14-16 goes on to say the placing of the laws on our hearts in this way is in fact a "witness" to how His blood sanctifies us. We can't be passive to His sacrifice; the conscience elicited by it, the writing on our hearts, is what propels us forward to live a sanctified life. The language of blood, water, scarlet and hyssop is full of reference to the circumstances surrounding the Lord's death on the cross. It was to this that the Mosaic dedication and cleansing rituals pointed forward, and it only had power on that basis.

9:20 *Saying: This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded for you-* At the breaking of bread, it's as if Christ is sprinkling us with His blood, it's as if we are Israel assembled together, re-entering the covenant each time we break bread. No wonder we are asked to assemble ourselves together (as far as possible) to remember Christ (Mt. 26:28 =

Heb. 9:20). We have elsewhere made the point that Hebrews is full of appropriate material for a breaking of bread exhortation (see on Heb. 13:22), which we believe it to have originally been. The language of the inauguration of the covenant is clearly applied here to the breaking of bread, for the allusion is to Mt. 26:28: "For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins". Does something happen when we break bread? The connection surely suggests that the covenant is again made with us, not simply celebrated. We again face the huge comfort of knowing that the new covenant, total blotting out of sin, removing all conscience of sin, has been made with us. We are no longer like Israel experiencing the pattern of failure and forgiveness; more than that, conscience of guilt for sin has been removed, and like David and Paul we can speak and feel as those whose sin has been dealt with.

Far back in Mosaic ritual, the voice of command was associated with the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat; the blood of the lamb was a command to respond (Ex. 25:22), and God's presence and voice came from over the blood sprinkled mercy seat. Hence instead of reading of the *laws* which were commanded, we read of "the blood of the covenant which God commanded"; the book of the law was sprinkled with that blood to show the connection between the blood and the book. To eat His flesh and blood (in evident anticipation of His coming sacrifice and the memorial meeting) was to eat *Him* and His words (Jn. 6:53,54,63). His words were all epitomized in His offered flesh and blood. In His death and sacrifice (which "the blood of Jesus" represent), we see His very essence: He Himself. On the stake He poured out His soul unto death (Is. 53:12), and yet in His life He poured out His soul too (Ps. 42:4). The cross was an epitome of who He really had been for those 33 years. To know Christ is to know His cross (Is. 53:11). See on Heb. 12:25.

9:21 *Moreover the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry he sprinkled in like manner with the blood-* The vessels of the ministry which were used to achieve some level of sanctification were only of power by reason of the blood sprinkled upon them; and that blood of itself was just red liquid. It was only meaningful in that it pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice. The point was that even if the Hebrews wished to continue participating in the temple rituals, they were to realize that they had only ever had any meaning on account of the blood of Christ.

9:22 *And according to the law, I may almost say-* This is again language appropriate to a verbal exhortation rather than a letter; see on 13:22. The "almost" is because there were allowances for the very poor to not offer blood sacrifices.

All things are cleansed with blood; and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission of sin- The cleansing and remission was not therefore through ritual of itself, but on the basis that the rituals were as it were smothered in the blood which pointed forward to that of the Lord Jesus. This may seem a fine difference, but it is significant. People with all their dysfunctions and conscious and unconscious sense of sin come to perform various rituals, and then emerge from the rituals feeling better and somehow cleansed. But this is mere religion, the psychology of religious ritual. The cleansing and remission offered under the old covenant was for real, but it was only for real in that the blood looked forward to the future sacrifice of the Messiah.

9:23 *It was necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these things-* Because ritual of itself could not sanctify sin, the whole ritualistic framework had to be doused, as it were, in the blood which pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice.

But the heavenly things themselves had better sacrifices than these- "Sacrifices" may be an example of Paul thinking in Hebrew whilst writing in Greek. We may have here an

intensive plural, whereby the plural is used to refer to one great singular item- in this case, the one great sacrifice, that of the Lord on the cross. The tabernacle was a copy, a shadow, of something greater. It was a shadow of us. God dwells in the tabernacle of human hearts, rather than in any physical structure. That point was made within the Old Testament, and in the New Testament we are repeatedly portrayed as the tabernacle / temple / dwelling place of God. The better sacrifice which cleansed us, even our conscience, was the Lord's. Thus there is a parallelism between verses 23 and 24:

v. 23	v. 24
The patterns of things in	The holy places made with
	hands
the Heavens	the tabernacle
The Heavenly things themselves	Heaven itself... us

9:24 *For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are only copies of the true ones; but into Heaven itself-* See on :23; the things in Heaven are us who are cleansed in Christ. It is stressed in Heb. 9:24; 8:2 that this Heavenly temple was made by God not by human hands. The Kingdom of Christ [which is essentially His people, those over whom He has Kingly dominion] is symbolized as a stone cut without hands (Dan. 2:44). We are the ones in heavenly places now (Eph. 1:3) who are cleansed by the Lord's sacrifice. Likewise Abraham looked forward to the Kingdom in terms of a city "whose builder and maker is God"; and God, we are told, has prepared that city for Abraham and his seed (Heb. 11:10,16). The coming down of that city/temple from Heaven in Rev. 21:3 is the fulfilment of Abraham's hope. The city/temple from Heaven has foundations (Rev. 21:14), just as Abraham expected (Heb. 11:10). The Lord has entered into God's actual presence, Heaven; and we are with Him there, cleansed, confident and unashamed before the presence of His glory. And this shall come to a literal fulfilment when at the last day we are presented "faultless before the presence of His glory" (Jude 24).

Now to appear in the actual presence of God for us- The language of Romans 8 about His intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered is to be connected with Hebrews 5 speaking of the Lord groaning with strong crying and tears on the cross. The point being that the intensity of His prayer there, struggling for every breath, is the same essential intensity with which He mediates for us now. He died "for us", and yet right now He appears "before the face of God for us" (Heb. 9:24 RV). Thus there is a connection between His death and His ongoing mediation "for us". We must struggle with Him, framing and offering our words in the full realization of the agonizing effort He is willing to make to intercede. The Greek translated "appear" meaning to exhibit openly. We are openly exhibited to God by the Lord Jesus, he reveals our inner spirit, our essential desires, to the Father; for we are "in Him". His appearance in God's actual presence is our appearance there.

We note the connection of thought between this reference to the presence of God, and the statement that the breaking of bread is an experience of the "bread of the presence".

Romans is full of legal language, of interceding, pleading, finding a favourable verdict etc., and refers this to the judgment and also to the cross. But Romans 8 uses these very ideas in relation to prayer, for in coming before the throne of grace now on account of the Lord's sacrifice, we come in essence before judgment. Coming before the throne of God in prayer (Heb. 9:24; Ps. 17:1,2) is the language of the judgment seat. If we become before His throne and are accepted, it follows that this is a foretaste of the outcome of the judgment for us, were we to be judged at that time. Our boldness before the Father in prayer will be the same

attitude we have to Him at the judgment throne (1 Jn. 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14 all use the same Greek word).

9:25 *Nor must he offer himself often, as the high priest enters into the Holy Place year by year with blood not his own-* The Lord entered once, into Heaven itself, with His own blood; and remained there, rather than nervously slipping in and out once / year as the High Priest did.

9:26 *Or else he must often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once at the end of the ages has he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself-* "The foundation of the world" surely refers to the beginning of the Mosaic system; the "end" of that world is the end of the Mosaic system at the Lord's death. He sacrificed not animals, but "Himself".

On the cross, the Lord Jesus was 'manifested', shown as He really and essentially is (Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:19,20; 1 Jn. 3:5,8; 1 Tim. 3:16). But the same word is also used about the final manifesting of the Lord Jesus at His return (Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2). This explains the link between the cross and His return; who He was then will be who He will be when He comes in judgment. There He endured the spitting and hatred of men in order to save them. And the same gracious spirit will be extended to all His true people, whatever their inadequacies.

The Lord's sacrifice "put away sin"; the same word has been used in 7:18 about the "disannulling" of the law. The whole concept of sin has been disannulled in that the law has been disannulled. In this sense His death "made an end of sins" (Dan. 9:24- perhaps Paul has this passage in mind here). For those in Him, sin is no longer a barrier between God and man; we stand "in Him" before God's very face / presence, counted as the sinless Lord Jesus.

9:27 *And inasmuch as it is appointed to men once to die and after this comes judgment-* The contrast and parallel to this statement is in :28, speaking of the Lord Jesus appearing at His second coming to reveal salvation rather than judgment. Throughout this section, Paul has in view the Day of Atonement (see on :4). Judaism spoke of the annual entry of the High Priest into the Holiest as his 'death', and his return to the people as his resurrection and judgment. Verse 28 will explain that the Lord Jesus actually died, to bear our sins Himself rather than them being figuratively placed upon a scapegoat to bear them, and the equivalent to His emergence from the Most Holy is His return from Heaven to earth with the good news of our salvation. The allusion to the High Priest would account for the otherwise odd usage of the word "appointed", which is appropriate for the High Priest and also for the Lord Jesus (s.w. 1:2; 3:2).

9:28 *So Christ also, having once been offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him-* As explained on :27, this is an allusion to the second coming of Christ with the good news of our salvation, which paralleled the emergence of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement from the Holiest, with the news of God's pardon. The High Priest emerged to a humbled, repentant Israel on the Day of Atonement, having confessed their sins and afflicted their souls through fasting, waiting for their High Priest to appear and pronounce upon them the blessing of forgiveness. The Spirit is using this as a type of us expecting the second coming of our Lord; the motivation for our enthusiasm should be our earnest need of ultimate forgiveness and reconciliation with God. David likewise speaks of waiting and watching for the Lord in the context of asking for forgiveness (Ps. 130:5,6). And we could possibly infer that the Lord's second coming is dependent upon Israel's humbling and repentance.

The contrast is with a worried Israel awaiting the appearance of the High Priest on the day of atonement. They hoped he had obtained atonement for them- but they didn't know.

And there was always the fear he had failed in his mission and lay dead within the sanctuary. There is a Jewish tradition that a rope was tied to him in order to extricate his body were he to be slain there. The contrast is with us- not awaiting the Lord's appearance with the same sense of uncertainty. Our sins are dealt with. He has obtained our salvation. And we eagerly, therefore, await His appearing to give us that salvation in literal terms. We are not awaiting a yes / no decision, uncertain as to what it will be. We are to be certain that in Him is "yes".

The focus of the Lord at His return will not be to "deal with sin". He did this in His death. Any necessary judgments upon a sinful world will not be His prime interest; rather does He return in order to give us salvation. This was and is His focus, like His Father, taking no pleasure in punishing sin. But the AV is literally correct here: "Without sin unto salvation". The phrase "without sin" is exactly that used in 4:15 of how the Lord had all our temptations but was morally "without sin". The High Priest emerged from the Holiest on the Day of Atonement and pronounced the forgiveness. The Lord Jesus will emerge from Heaven and as it were just stand there, "without sin". His moral perfection achieved in mortal flesh is of itself the guarantee and statement of our own forgiveness and salvation.

If we understand something of the 'mechanics' of the atonement, and grasp something of the fact that they were outworked in a real, historical man, we will see that the final realization of the redemption achieved at the cross will be when Christ comes back. If we understand something of the atonement, we will earnestly look for the second coming, when the redemption achieved on the cross will be brought unto us (cp. 1 Pet. 1:13). An enthusiasm for the second coming, spurred by a realization that the bringing of salvation then is an outworking of the cross, will lead to a loose hold on the things of this life.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 10

10:1 *For the law having only a shadow of the good things to come, not the reality of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those that draw near-* The law was treated by Judaism as the reality; they couldn't get beyond the ritual, and see that it was something temporal, pointing forward to a greater and more personal spiritual reality. The Hebrews were attracted by the religion of it all, just as many Christians can apparently not see beyond the "mere religion" of their supposed spirituality. There was no perfection offered; there was only a temporary covering over of legal infringements which had to be renewed each Day of Atonement. The Lord's sacrifice can perfect believers in that by identity with Him, we are counted as perfect and without sin; perfect righteousness is imputed to us. 'Drawing near' uses the same word elsewhere used about coming near to God, drawing near right before His throne (4:16; 7:25; 10:22). To draw near to God's presence in the Holiest was declared intrinsically impossible by the Mosaic tabernacle.

10:2 *Else would they not have ceased to be offered?*- The recurrent nature of the sacrifices of itself indicated that they did not take away sin permanently, and therefore the worshippers were left with an abiding awareness or consciousness of their sins.

Because the worshipers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins- Heb. 10:18,26 states that Christ only made one sacrifice for sin, implying that the sins of those in Christ were atoned for at one moment in time. He will not make another sin offering each time we sin, and therefore we should not sin wilfully, because that assumes that he will once again sacrifice for sin. Thus we will be crucifying Christ afresh (Heb. 6:6). The sacrifice of Christ can make us perfect in God's sight, so that "once purged" we should have "no more conscience of sins" (Heb. 10:1,2). This does not refer to "conscience" as the guilty streak within us. Our spiritual man ought to have no more guilt for our sins, which are now forgiven. But if we allow sin to be the governing principle in our lives, we can no longer be reckoned as sinless (Rom. 6:12; 1 Jn. 3:8).

10:3 *But in that sacrificial system there is a remembrance made of sins year by year-* All the sacrifices offered to obtain forgiveness were somehow deficient if once every year there needed to be the ritual of atonement performed on Yom Kippur. So it worked out that instead of the awareness (:2 "consciousness") of sin being removed, in fact it was heightened by bringing sin to remembrance.

10:4 *For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins-* Sin brings death for the sinner; the blood had to represent the death of the sinner. So it needed to be human blood, representative of human sinners; and not that of animals who are not under the law of God. God is not a pagan deity who is apparently placated by animal blood.

10:5 *Therefore when he came into the world, he said-* The quotation from Psalm 40 is of words first thought and spoken by David in reflecting that there was no sacrifice which could be offered to deal with his sin in effectively murdering Uriah and committing adultery. All he could offer God was a broken heart, and a desire to humbly serve Him in whatever days he might be given by grace. The Bathsheba Psalms all have further reference to the attitude of the Lord Jesus on the cross; the brokenness of David at that time, physically and psychologically, pointed forward to that of the Lord in His time of dying. The purpose of this is to teach us to what extent the Lord Jesus identified with hopelessly fallen man especially at the time of His dying; whilst Himself never having sinned. The reference to David is evidence

enough that the words of this passage do not demand an incarnation of some Divine Spirit into a body waiting on earth to receive it, as Trinitarians claim. The language of Psalm 40 originally applied to David's feelings after his sin with Bathsheba. It is interpreted as being appropriate to the Lord's feelings when He "came into the world".

"Came into" is the very word which has been used in this section about the Lord's coming into the Most Holy, representing Heaven itself (6:20; 9:12,24,25). The reference could be to the Lord's beginning of His priesthood in Heaven, rather than having any reference to His birth or death on earth. But "into the world" is the phrase so often used in John's Gospel for the Father sending His Son into the world at the start of His ministry at age 30 [not necessarily at His birth]. And the same phrase "came into the world" is used of how "I am come a light into the world" (Jn. 12:46) and how the Lord "came into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth" (Jn. 18:37). That witness began to be given at age 30, which was when the Lord "came into the [Jewish] world". "The world" in John's Gospel nearly always refers to the Jewish world, as it does in this context in 9:26; and the Lord came into that world when His ministry to them began at age 30. We would therefore interpret this as meaning that the Lord began His ministry with the understanding that God had never wanted the animal sacrifices of themselves, but rather required a representative human being to perfectly do God's will. And this He dedicated Himself to doing in the ministry which culminated in the final doing of God's will by dying on the cross. The death of the cross is so often spoken of as the Father's "will".

Sacrifice and offering You did not want, but a body did You prepare for me- God did want sacrifices, but not for the sins David had committed concerning Uriah and Bathsheba. The Greek word "body" is also translated "slave" (Rev. 18:13). The idea cannot be that a body was prepared on earth, and some Divine Spirit incarnated it and the body became known as 'Jesus of Nazareth'. As noted above, the primary reference of the Psalm 40 quotation is to David after his sin with Bathsheba reflecting that sacrifices were not appropriate, and all he could do was to offer himself as the humble servant of Yahweh for the rest of his days. In any case, reading this as meaning that the 'Spirit Jesus' came down from Heaven and lived inside a specially prepared body is reading too much in to the words. Jesus began as an egg within Mary, which divided and re-divided until it became a foetus, then a child and thence "the man Christ Jesus". Jesus 'was' the body; He didn't somehow enter into a body which was prepared somewhere on earth. I therefore suggest that we read "body" as "slave" or "servant". And this is in fact what the Hebrew text implies in Psalm 40; Paul is quoting here from the Septuagint, but the Hebrew reads: "My ears You have digged / bored" (Ps. 40:6). The allusion is to how a servant could choose to remain within his master's house as a permanent slave because he so loved his wife and family and his master; and in this case his ear was bored through and nailed to an upright piece of wood (Ex. 21:6). This clearly hinted at the crucifixion. The Lord Jesus was the slave who willingly decided to devote Himself permanently to the service of the Master's household, demonstrating it by His crucifixion; His ministry for us is therefore eternal, unlike that of the Levitical priests. Paul nearly always quotes the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text, but the sense here is essentially the same, although the readings differ. The idea is that God didn't want dead animals, but a totally dedicated servant / slave who would perfectly do His will and devote himself to the permanent service of His household. And that person was the Lord Jesus, typified by the repentant David. Phil. 2:7,8 along with the prophecies of the suffering servant makes it clear that the Lord was supremely a slave / servant in His death on the cross.

10:6 *In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure-* God did require them and was pleased they were given, but He had no desire for them in response to David's sin. David is everyman, worthy of death because of our wretched failure, with no animal sacrifice or ritual to save us. See on :5.

10:7 *Then said I: Behold, I come (in the roll of the book it is written about me) to do Your will, O God-* The will of God is specifically associated with the Lord's death on the cross (e.g. Mt. 26:39). The entire scroll of the Pentateuch [the "roll of the book" known to David at the time of Psalm 40] implied the death of a perfect human sacrifice who would complete God's will for human salvation in totality. And Paul is applying these thoughts of David to the Lord Jesus as He began His ministry [or perhaps specifically when He died, or when He began His priestly service on entering Heaven; see on :5].

10:8 *First he said: Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor did You have pleasure in them (all of which are offered according to the law)-* Paul perceives that firstly, there was the statement that God did not desire animal sacrifices of themselves in order to remove sin; and secondly, the Lord Jesus came to do God's will, in a way which animals simply could not do. This division into first and second is pressed into a similarity with the first and second covenants, as noted on 9:1. God's desire was that sacrifice should be offered under the Old Covenant, but this could not take away sin of itself. What He desired far more ['not A but B' can mean 'not so much A as B'] was the sacrifice of the One who did His will perfectly.

10:9 *Then he said: Behold, I come to do Your will. He takes away the first, that he may establish the second-* As noted on :8, the "first" statement is associated with the first covenant, the law of Moses. The doing of God's will by the perfect sacrifice establishes "the second", i.e. the new covenant; and by doing so, the first covenant is made old (8:13), or as stated here, 'taken away', or literally 'slain / killed'. This is how totally the old covenant had been taken away. The second or new covenant was "established" in that as explained above, it was based upon the promises to Abraham which already existed, but which were mediated or brought into operation by the Lord's sacrifice. Thereby, men and women could become "in" the seed of Abraham, and the promises which were originally to only Abraham and his singular seed thereby were made to all within the One Messianic seed. These promises, this second or new covenant, was 'established' by the Lord's death; and thereby the "first", Mosaic covenant was done away. To return to that was therefore to reject the Lord's work and to shy away from the wonder of salvation now made so sure and established.

"Establish" is literally 'to make to stand up'; the same Greek word is used in :11 about the standing up of the priests. It is used nowhere else in Hebrews. There is no semantic connection, just a usage of the same word a sentence later, although in different contexts. I would suggest this is the kind of thing which happens in verbal language usage, when we speak out loud. And it is more evidence that Hebrews is the transcript of an address (see on 13:22).

10:10 *By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all-* The "will" of God refers to God's will that none should perish but all should be saved (Mt. 18:14; Jn. 3:16; 6:40). That will lead to the giving of His Son; and yet the Son had to freely fulfill that will of His own volition. The incredible will of God for human salvation was demonstrated publically by the offering of the Lord's body. This "once and for all" declared the will of God to save us, ending for all time any doubt or niggling suspicion that He is somehow indifferent to human

salvation and is simply leaving us to make our own decisions without any passion or will from His side. The Lord's death was therefore His "will" (Mt. 26:42). The doing of God's will by His Son is parallel with the finishing of His work (Jn. 4:34), coming to a climax in His last words from the cross: "It is finished". Yet we too are to play our part in the doing of that will- in reaching out to save others by the grace of the Lord Jesus (10:36; 13:21). "The offering of the body of Jesus" alludes to how the offering of animal bodies could not save of itself; but again it was the life and person of the Lord Jesus which saves, rather than simply His body, which was like any other human body.

10:11 *And every priest indeed stands day by day serving, and offering often the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins-* This contrast between the priests *standing* in service and the Lord *sitting* at God's right hand is emphasized. I suggested on 1:1 that Paul is writing to the Hebrews with constant allusion to the martyrdom of Stephen. He saw the Lord standing at God's right hand- when usually, the Lord sits. But He was [and can still be] caught up in the passion and urgency of our human situations. The way the sacrifices were repeated ["the same sacrifices"] demonstrates how they were not ultimately effective. I have noted throughout chapter 9 that Paul has the rituals of the Day of Atonement in view. The allusion here would be to how the scapegoat apparently 'took away sins'; but the sacrifices had to continue to be offered. So there was something wrong with the scapegoat ritual; it was only effective insofar as it pointed forward to the ultimate bearer of sins, which Isaiah 53 presents as being the suffering servant on the cross, the "body" or "servant / slave" prepared instead of the ritual sacrifices (:5).

10:12 *But he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God-* See on :12 for the significance of the Lord sitting. The one sacrifice for sins for ever means that there is now no more consciousness of sin as a barrier between God and us (:2). This is a far more wonderful truth than simply meaning that the Lord offered one sacrifice for sins and therefore no more animals need to be killed. Note that it was when the sacrifice was offered that the Lord sat at the right hand of God. His sacrifice therefore included both His death and resurrection. See on :14.

10:13 *From that time forward expectantly waiting until his enemies be made the footstool for his feet-* In Acts 2:35 there is an appeal for the Hebrews who crucified the Lord to repent. They were His "enemies"; but once they became a footstool for His feet, then He would return. Therefore Peter appealed for their repentance, apparently understanding being 'a footstool for His feet' as meaning they would put themselves at His feet in obeisance. The Lord's footstool is the place where His worshippers come (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Is. 66:1-3). The Father was willing to "make" His Son's enemies, those responsible for His death, into His worshippers. But they had to do their part, in repentance and acceptance of the activity of His Holy Spirit. Heb. 10:13 adds the detail that the Lord Jesus is eagerly looking for [AV "expecting"] His former enemies to become His footstool- and then He will return. This is why witness to Jewish people is so deeply significant in God's program. The Lord's victory over sin means that sinners, His "enemies", would be made the seat and basis of His praise.

10:14 *For by one offering he has perfected for ever those that are sanctified-* As noted on :12, the Lord's "one offering" included both His death and resurrection. He saw His resurrection as His being "perfected" (Lk. 13:32 s.w.). By becoming "in Christ", all that is true of Him becomes true of us. We are sanctified by being in Him, counted as having His sanctity / righteousness / holiness. And thereby we are perfected as He

was when He cried "It is finished" or perfected (Jn. 4:34). We are "perfected" only in prospect; just as the Lord achieved God's will on the cross but we must also do that will (see on :10). The Lord prayed that because He had perfected God's work, so we should be "made perfect in one" (the same words are used- Jn. 17:4,23). His death enabled those who become "in Him" to be counted as perfect as Him; but His death also empowered the gift of the Spirit to transform / mature / 'perfect' us in practice into who we are by status. This is the thought developed in the following verses, just as it is in Romans 8, which goes on from speaking about our sanctification by the cross to explaining the work of the Spirit in our hearts. And here too in Hebrews 10, those who are sanctified are also perfected. A process is in view, of maturing and developing us through the Spirit; parallel to the process of *making* us His former enemies to be the footstool of His feet (:13).

10:15 *And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us. For after saying-* The inspiration of this message by the Spirit is mentioned because the teaching is going to be about the operation of the Spirit in our hearts; see on :14. The covenant promised to Israel in Jeremiah is testified "to us".

10:16 *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and on their minds I will write them-* As noted on :14, the Lord's sacrifice enables us to not only be forgiven, but to be perfected / matured, and to be "made" His footstool. This process of sanctification and maturing is achieved by the work of the Spirit in our hearts. The context of the Jeremiah quotation is God's acceptance of Israel's continued disobedience and plan to insert His laws into their hearts; to not only forgive them (:17), but to change them. It is the Spirit which sanctifies in the heart; the sanctification of the Spirit is something we must allow to be done to us rather than seeking to make ourselves clean by rituals (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). By resisting this sanctifying power, we are despising the gift or grace of the Spirit (10:29). No amount of ritual obedience can change our hearts; we must allow the Lord's Spirit to do this. "Sanctify" in Greek is a form of the word "Holy"; the Holy Spirit is in essence the Spirit or power which makes our spirit holy / sanctified. To understand this is fundamental to understanding the function of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

10:17 *Then is added: And their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more-* The forgiveness of sins is in addition to the work of the Spirit in human hearts, changing us to be like the Lord whose righteousness is counted to us. Hence Paul notes that this "is added", forgiveness is a separate promise to the sanctifying or transformation of human hearts. And this speaks exactly to our need as sinners; we need not only forgiveness but also the power to change so that we are not endlessly knocking on Heaven's door for the forgiveness of the same sins. Sins are "remembered no more" not in the sense that God 'forgets' them, for the Bible is full of historical accounts of human sin which has been forgiven. The sense is rather that He will not remember sin against us. Here is the final answer to all fears about ghosts from our past. Those sins will not be remembered against us.

Sin was completely overcome by the Lord's victory; "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever (in their conscience) them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14 cp. 9:9). "Their sins and iniquities [there seems no hint that this only refers to pre-baptismal sins] will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). If we sin wilfully after knowing this, there is no more sacrifice for sins- because that sacrifice was only ever made once (Heb. 10:26). At our baptism, our conscience was cleansed of all sin. We need to meditate upon that lifeless body of the Lord and what it meant. "A covenant is of

force over dead [victims or sacrifices]... it is never held to be of force while he who is the appointed [sacrifice] is alive" (Heb. 9:17 Bullinger). Over that body the personal covenant to each of us (Gen. 17:7) came into real, living operation.

The Lord Jesus made *one* sacrifice for all sins for all time, and therefore we don't need to offer any more sacrifices or use a human priesthood; we are already totally forgiven of all our sins. There is further evidence, apart from the reasoning of Hebrews, that all our sins, past and future, were forgiven at Calvary:

- On the cross, sin was ended, iniquity reconciled, everlasting righteousness brought in (Dan. 9:24). One sin offering was made for all time.

- We must forgive one another even as God for Christ's sake *has* forgiven us (Eph. 4:32); not waiting for our brother to repent before we forgive him, but forgiving in advance, in prospect, even as we were forgiven. This takes this issue out of the realms of theology into the painfully practical.

- Our sins were / are forgiven by the blood of Christ- not by our repentance or words of prayer. "God's forgiveness is not just a wiping clean of the slate [from hour to hour]... if it were, prayer would be immoral- a mere incantation to bring about a magical result: and we need to be continually wary of the pagan conception which would reduce it to such a level". These words are so true. Whenever a twinge of guilt arises, we rush off a quick prayer for forgiveness- and then, at the end of the day or the week, we are left with a doubt as to whether our spirituality is valid or not. If this is our experience, we are all too similar to Israel of old; offering the sin offering (cp. praying for forgiveness), feeling guilty, coming to the day of Atonement (cp. the breaking of bread), still feeling guilty, realizing that as the sin offering couldn't cleanse sin, neither could the sacrifice at that feast, offering more sin offerings... It can become the ritual of a bad conscience, stumbling on because there seems no other way to go. But our sins (yes, yours, that snap at your wife, that curse as you spilt your coffee) really were forgiven through the Lord's work on the cross; we really do have access to this through *really believing it*- and therefore expressing our faith in baptism. Our prayerful response to failure should be to confess it (1 Jn. 1:9), and also profess our faith in the redemption already achieved for us.

All our sins were forgiven when the Lord died for us; both past and future. By baptism we identify ourselves with this work, and we are thereby in a position where we have "no more conscience of sins" (Heb. 10:2,22), knowing that all is forgiven, and only if we fall from grace will this become untrue. Thus YLT speaks of "*the* conscience" in the NT, as if it is something specific which we have, rather than an occasional twinge of guilt. We have this Biblical conscience "toward God"; this is how He sees us (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Pet. 2:19; 3:21). Thus we may have a guilty feeling about something, we may doubt our salvation, but our conscience in God's eyes is pure; we are still cleansed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we have a clear conscience, God will punish those who persecute us (1 Pet. 3:16 RSV). 1 Pet. 3:21 teaches that baptism saves us not because in itself it means that we are free from the deeds of the flesh ("putting away the filth of the flesh" uses words which elsewhere carry this connotation), but because it gives us a good conscience in God's eyes- according to the Biblical definition of conscience.

10:18 *Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin required-* As noted on :17, forgiveness of all sin was achieved in one offering. No further sin offerings are required. The logic of this not only meant that the Hebrews should not be offering sin offerings in the temple any more; but interpretations of Ezekiel's

temple prophecies which require future sin offerings in the Kingdom age must be suspect in the light of the reasoning here. We note however that whilst in Jerusalem with the Hebrew Christians, Paul did apparently offer animal sacrifices (Acts 21:24); and he suffered hugely for doing so. We could read this as Paul seeking to be all things to all men; or perhaps in his zeal to by all means be reconciled with the Hebrew Christians, he departed from his own principles when he ought not to have done so.

10:19 *Therefore brothers, having boldness to enter into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus*- The High Priest nervously entered the Holiest for a few moments on the Day of Atonement; but we can enter "boldly", a term often used to characterize the early Christians. The only way any man can be so "bold" is through believing in the Lord's total forgiveness and further, that we are counted righteous by status. It was the High Priest alone who entered the Holiest, representing the Lord Jesus. And we are in Him. All that is true of Him becomes true for us.

In the light of ten chapters of detailed exposition of the meaning of the blood of Christ, *therefore let us...*, Paul triumphantly drives home (Heb. 10:19-25). And he speaks of how we must transform our lives:

- Let us enter boldly "into the holiest by the blood of Jesus". This is only possible through a deep knowledge of sin forgiven. Our prayer life should be a positive and upbuilding experience: "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience". Reflection on the atonement, believing it all, will result in a positive and unashamed faith.
- "Let us hold fast... without wavering". If the belief of the cross is imprinted upon our minds, reflected upon not for a few fleeting minutes on Sundays but often throughout each day, we won't waver. The natural tendency to blow hot and cold in our spiritual endeavours will be vanquished beneath an unceasing wonder at what was achieved. It is only sustained reflection upon the cross which can, in an almost mystical way, impart an unceasing verve of inspiration.
- "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching". Again the doctrine of the atonement and that of the second coming are linked. As we realize more and more clearly that very soon the final outworking of the cross will be achieved in the actual physical granting of redemption to us, so we will be inspired to more and more earnestly seek the welfare of our brethren. If we believe in the atonement, we will naturally seek to break bread. Whether it means summoning the courage to meet with those we naturally would rather not meet with, bringing the wine to the meeting, we will be motivated to rise up and serve in these ways by the eternal and personal truth of the cross.

The smell of the incense passed through the veil, and into the Most Holy Place, where the presence of God Himself was symbolized as being over the blood-stained cover of the ark. The simple wonder of it all is that the words of our prayers really can penetrate to Heaven itself; and even further, we are as it were "there" in the Holiest, in Christ. In Christ, the veil itself has been done away, and we can with boldness enter into that Most Holy Place and personally have direct fellowship with God (Heb. 9:7-13; 10:19). Our heart can touch the heart of God. It's a priceless wonder to know and experience this.

Under the Law, the provision for Nazariteship encouraged the average Israelite to enter into the spirit of the High Priest by imposing some of the regulations governing his behaviour upon them. *All* Israel were bidden make fringes of blue, in conscious imitation of the High Priest to whose spirit they all were intended to attain (Num.

15:38). But we are bidden now to "come boldly unto the throne of grace (cp. the mercy seat in the Most Holy)... boldness to enter into the holiest" (Heb. 4:16; 10:19): to do what only the High Priest could do under the Old Covenant. This must have been a huge challenge for the Jewish believers to rise up to. The context of Heb. 10 encourages us to enter the Holiest and "consider one another". The High Priest entered the Holiest in order to make atonement for Israel, not just to bask in the fact he was allowed in there. And so with us. The marvellous fellowship with the Father which we are permitted in Christ, the entry into the Holiest, is not just for the sake of it; it is so we can do something for others. I am not suggesting, of course, that in any way we replace the one and only High Priest, the Lord Jesus. But because we are *in Him* we therefore in some ways share His honours and His work. The idea of eating the bread of the sacrifices would likewise have appeared strange in a first century context: it was as if the whole brotherhood (and sisterhood) were being invited to see themselves as priests. But in His last message, the Lord went further: He promised that those who overcome will eat of the hidden manna, concealed in the Most Holy: as if to say that we will ultimately rise up to and exceed the glory of the High Priests who saw that bread once a year. See on Jn. 10:9.

10:20 *By the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh-* The Lord Jesus inaugurated the "new and living way" for us *dia*, on account of, "his flesh" (Heb. 10:20). It was exactly because of "the flesh" of the Lord's humanity that He opened up a new way of life for us. Because He was so credibly and genuinely human, and yet perfect, the way of His life becomes compellingly the way we are to take, and enables every man to become "in Him". Once we grasp this, we can better understand the anathema which John calls down upon those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" (2 Jn. 7-9). We are cleansed by an ever 'freshly slain' sacrifice (Heb. 10:20 Gk.). The cross is ongoing; the Lord's blood is "new", fresh, not coagulated, unlike the blood sprinkled each Yom Kippur which was dead and dried.

On one level, the atonement can be logically explained. On another, it cannot be. The veil, an eloquent symbol of the flesh of Jesus, was made of mixed fibres, something which was otherwise forbidden under the Law. This perhaps reflected how the Lord's nature and the atonement God wrought through Him was and is in some ways contradictory, to human eyes.

Through His death, the veil was torn open, so that we might enter into the Holiest "by the blood of Jesus, by the way which He dedicated for us... through the veil, that is to say [the sacrificing of] his flesh" (Heb. 10:19-22 Gk.). This assumes that the followers of Jesus are already in the position of the High Priest standing in the Holy Place, but through what He opened through the cross, each of us must now go through into the Most Holy. And what was the purpose of the High Priest's entry? To obtain forgiveness *for others*, to mediate *for them*, just as the Lord Jesus did on the cross and continues to do for us. His cross compels us to not merely passively contemplate our own salvation, but to go deeper into the very presence of God in our ministry *for others*. Yet the High Priest had to cleanse himself meticulously; access had been limited to the Most Holy as a result of inadequate preparation by some in the past (Lev. 16:1,2). The Lord's death opened up the veil, for us to pass through with the utmost effort made by us in personal sanctification, in order to further God's glory in the salvation of others. We cannot simply refuse to enter, turn away from the torn veil.

To do so is to turn away from what the cross has achieved, and to place ourselves outside its scope. We must go forward, go onwards into the presence of God to replicate in essence the Saviour's work, with the awed and humble spirit of the High Priest entering the Holiest on the day of atonement. He would surely have carefully analysed his motives, as to *why* he was passing through that veil, and whether he was sufficiently personally sanctified for the work he was doing. He would have been comforted by knowing that his motives were solely for the glorification of his God in the redemption for his people which he was seeking to obtain.

10:21 *And having a great priest over the house of God*- This is an allusion to priesthood as it was at the time of Melchizedek and not of Moses, where a family ["house"] had a priest-head. Although as explained above, we are "in Him" and stand with Him as High Priest in the Holiest, in Heaven itself, in another sense we are His family members and He is our great priest over us.

10:22 *Let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water*-

There is a clear NT theme: that the believer always has a good conscience (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Tim. 1:5,19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 9:14; 10:22; 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16); this clear conscience is a gift from the time of baptism (Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 3:21; Heb. 9:14 cp. 6:1; Rom. 6:17), when "our bodies [were] washed with pure water". It was not external things which are sprinkled, as they were under the law, but the innermost recesses of the human heart. Our bad conscience about sin is totally removed; because of our fullness of faith in the Lord's work for us. If a believer loses that good conscience, he has fallen from grace. The Hebrews were losing that good conscience and beginning to worry about their sins to the point of wanting to return to ritual and sacrifices as a way to deal with their bad conscience. Those who leave the faith have a conscience which is wounded (1 Cor. 8:12), defiled (1 Cor. 8:7; Tit. 1:15), seared (1 Tim. 4:2). It's hard to find a consistent Biblical definition of conscience. "Conscience" in the Biblical sense often refers to how God sees our conscience, rather than how we feel it. Therefore only rarely does the Spirit speak as if "conscience" is something which is good one moment, and bad the next; it is something which we have on a permanent basis. Thus to say "I watched TV last night with a good conscience, but I had a bad conscience that I didn't give out any tracts today" isn't really using "conscience" in its Biblical sense. Paul repeatedly emphasizes that he has *always* had a good conscience (presumably, from the time of his baptism, when he stopped kicking against the goads, Acts 9:5).

The good conscience is Biblically defined in Hebrews 9, 10. Here the writer is basing his argument on how those under the Old Covenant still had a guilty conscience after their sacrifices, because the blood of animals could not take away sin; the yearly Day of Atonement required them to confess their sins once again. Their conscience was not made perfect (Heb. 9:9). In his overpowering way, the writer drives his logic home: not only is our conscience cleansed by the one sacrifice of Christ, but we are in a more exalted position than the OT worshippers; we are in the very position of the High Priest who on that Day of Atonement entered the Most Holy; *we* can enter the Holiest with *boldness* (cp. the nervousness of the Priest) because our consciences are cleansed with Christ's blood. And because of this, "let us draw near" (Heb. 10:22), the language the LXX uses about the priestly serving of God; now *we* can do the priestly work, because our consciences are cleansed. We are not like the OT believers, who had a bad conscience because of their sins and needed to offer an annual sacrifice for them, as a result of their conscience. We, by contrast, have no more conscience of

sins. According to this Biblical definition of conscience, the conscience is cleansed, and we partake of that cleansing by baptism. At and in that sacrament, we make a pledge to keep that good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21 NIV); perhaps we need to point this out more to baptism candidates. We are once and for all forgiven. Our emphasis must be on confession of failure, not feeling guilty and rushing off a quick prayer, as if this will get us forgiveness. We have been cleansed and covered, we are in the new covenant of grace. Only by breaking out of this can we lose the gracious position in which we stand: we have a conscience which is free of guilt, if we truly believe in the power of the cross and our relationship to it through baptism.

10:23 *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope so that it does not waver. For He who promised is faithful-* Given the allusion to water baptism in :22, the confession of hope may refer to some statement made then- to the effect that 'I really believe all my sins have been dealt with and that I shall definitely be saved if the Lord returns today or I die; I believe God is faithful to His promises of forgiving and saving me'. This was the Christian "hope" or *elpis*; not a hope for the best at judgment day, but a solid confident expectation of future salvation. And that public confession was to be continued, at a time when in Jerusalem the Hebrew Christians were being mocked and persecuted by the Judaists. We continue professing / confessing our hope "that it waver not" (Heb. 10:23 RV). It doesn't waver for us, exactly because we preach it. There is a great personal benefit in publicly stating our faith to others.

10:24- see on Acts 15:39.

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works- We are with the Lord Jesus, ministering in the Most Holy. And that work was essentially about the welfare of others. Our work with others therefore isn't a cold-hearted witness, or a theological debate; it is a *seeking* of glory to the Father; we exhort one another, *considering* how we may provoke to love (Heb. 10:24). But let me ask: do you *consider* how you might encourage your brethren, or those in the world around you; what words to say, what to do or not to do...?

In the cross, we see self-humbling that we might be exalted. And we respond by likewise humbling ourselves, that others may be exalted. In practice this means guiding our words and example so that others are exalted, not speaking of our own achievements, *considering each other* as to how we may provoke them to righteousness (Heb. 10:24; earlier in 3:1 Paul speaks of *considering* the Lord Jesus, and this leads on to considering each other). As the Lord considers us and our unique situations and how to lead us to the best service, so we should consider each other.

10:25 *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the habit of some is; but rather encouraging one another, and so much the more, as you see the day drawing near-* The Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem initially 'assembled together' in the temple courts, but with growing opposition from the temple system it seems they stopped doing this and instead returned to the temple system. This explains the need to assemble because the day is drawing near, and in the AD70 context this referred to the destruction of the entire temple system. The individual believers were the new temple, and they should therefore assemble themselves, rather than within the physical temple.

The connection between the last day, both of AD70 and the second coming, and assembling together is brought out by the allusion to the Passover. Gathered around the slain lamb, the memorial of their salvation, in their various homes, the command was clear: "None of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning" (Ex.

12:22). This is surely an eloquent picture of the ecclesia of the last days, highlighting the urgent need to remain within the ecclesia, and to centre our fellowship around our Passover Lamb.

Not assembling ourselves together is of course not a good thing. If we love our brethren, we will seek to be physically with them. There can be no doubt that we must struggle with our natural selfishness, our desire to go it alone. But is this actually what Heb. 10:25 is talking about? A glance at the context shows that forsaking the assembly is paralleled with the wilful sin which shall exclude us from God's salvation, a treading under foot the Son of God and reviling the blood of the covenant- what had to be done by Christians who 'repented' of their conversion and returned to the synagogue, the sort of blasphemy that Saul was making Christian converts commit.

This is not really appropriate to someone who fervently believes in the Lord Jesus, but for whatever reason, doesn't 'make it out to meeting' on Sundays? The context seems to speak about a wilful rejection of the Lord Jesus. And this of course is the very background against which Hebrews was written. It was a letter to Hebrew Christians who were beginning to bow to Jewish pressure and renounce their faith in Christ, and return to Judaism. "The assembling of ourselves together" can actually be read as a noun- not a verb. Those who 'forsook' 'the assembly together of us' would then refer to those who totally rejected Christianity. The same word "forsaking" occurs in 2 Pet. 2:15, also in a Jewish context, about those who "forsake the right way". So I suggest that forsaking the assembly refers more to turning away from Christ and returning to apostasy, than to simply not turning up at church as often as we might. The writer laments that "some" were indeed forsaking the assembly (Heb. 10:25). But that Greek word translated "some" recurs in Hebrews to describe those "some" who had forsaken the ecclesia and turned back to Judaism: "Take heed... lest there be in *some* [AV "any"] of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (and returning to Judaism- Heb. 3:12)... lest *some* [AV "any"] of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13)... for *some*, when they had heard, did provoke [referring to the earlier Hebrews in the wilderness who turned away from the hope of the Kingdom- Heb. 3:16]... *some* of you should seem to fail [like the condemned Hebrews in the wilderness- Heb. 4:1]... lest *some* fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). In fact, right after the reference to the "some" who forsake the assembly, Heb. 10:28 speaks of "*some* [AV "he"- but the same Greek word in all these places for "some"] that despised Moses' law". Clearly, those Hebrews in the wilderness who turned away from the spirit of Christ in Moses and the hope of the Kingdom, are being held up as warnings to that same "some" in the first century Hebrew ecclesia who were turning back from the Hope of the Kingdom. I'm not in any way saying that we needn't bother about our ecclesial attendance. Far from it! But I also feel it's not right to insist that if someone doesn't attend an ecclesia, for whatever reason, they are therefore guilty of the wilful sin and certain fiery condemnation of which Hebrews 10 speaks for those who forsake the assembly. In fact, the passage has almost been abused like that- as if to say: 'If you don't turn up on Sunday, if you quit meeting with us, then, you've quit on God and His Son'. This simply isn't the case.

10:26 *For if we sin wilfully after what we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins-* The wilful sin in view is that of :25, forsaking the Christian assembly for that of the temple, seeking justification by sacrificial rituals and the Jewish, anti-Christian priesthood rather than by faith in the amazing priesthood of the Lord Jesus which has been explained in such compelling

terms so far in Hebrews. "The knowledge of the truth" here refers in the context to the knowledge of forgiveness and salvation; it's parallel to the "knowledge of salvation" (Lk. 1:77). The "truth" is the ultimate, surpassing reality- that we are saved, by grace, and can look forward to that great salvation being revealed at the last day. There was only one effective sacrifice for sins made- by the Lord Jesus. As explained earlier in this section, that sacrifice does not need to be repeated, and the killing of animals for forgiveness was effectively trying to crucify or sacrifice the Lord Jesus again. The idea is not that there is no opportunity for repentance; that is always possible. Rather, the idea is that those who forsook the sacrifice of Jesus for the ritual sacrifices of Judaism were mistaken in thinking that those sacrifices could gain forgiveness. If they trusted in them, then they would not receive forgiveness.

10:27 *But a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries-* For those trusting in Christ, there was no longer a conscience of sins. They had all been dealt with in the Lord's sacrifice, and they could be bold in their approach to God. Those who now trusted in animals sacrifices could never have their conscience of sin cleansed, as the sacrifices had to be continually offered; and so they could only look ahead to future judgment with fear rather than boldness. And they could only expect the condemnation of fiery destruction for their sins; they would be counted amongst the Lord's enemies or adversaries because they had refused His program of making His enemies / adversaries His worshippers (see on :13). The temple system was the adversary or satan of the Lord Jesus, and would meet its appropriate end.

10:28 *A man that set at nothing Moses' law died without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses-* By turning away from the Lord's sacrifice, they were despising God's ultimate "law", which is in His Son. There could be no compassion for those who stated they didn't want it because their ritual obedience was enough. The return to the temple system by the Hebrew Christians was public, and not on the word of two or three who had observed secret sins.

10:29- see on Mk. 15:15; Heb. 12:17.

Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, shall be considered those who have trodden underfoot the Son of God and have counted the blood of the covenant (with which they were sanctified) an unholy thing, and have insulted the Spirit of grace?- Treading underfoot God's son and blaspheming His blood was the kind of thing Paul had tried to make the Hebrew Christians do under pain of torture. These blasphemous statements were required of those who had left Judaism for Christianity and now sought to return to the temple system and the legal protection of Judaism within the Roman empire. To turn away from such great salvation and blaspheme it could not be treated with neutrality by God. There was going to be a terrible consequence for it. The Lord's work had not only attained forgiveness, but had shed forth the gift ("grace") of the Spirit to transform human hearts so that they did not continue in sin. To turn away from the Lord Jesus was to insult and obstruct that Spirit.

As "the cross" means more than the impalement which epitomized it, likewise "the blood of Christ" means far more than the red liquid. These concepts found their physical epitome in the crucifixion process, but there is so much more to these things than the physical. The blood of the covenant, the Son of God and the Spirit of grace are bracketed together in Heb. 10:29. The Lord *was* His blood. The pouring out of blood from His side, the trickles down His cheeks from the crown of thorns, quickly drying in the hot dust beneath... this was *Him*. We take the wine in memory of *Him*; not just His blood. And He *is* the Spirit of God's transforming gift or grace, which

aims to change us into how the Lord Jesus actually is. By Himself He purged our sins (Heb. 1:3); and yet this purging was through His blood (Heb. 9:14). He was His blood; His cross was the essence of all He was.

10:30 *For we know Him that said: Vengeance belongs to Me, I will reward. And again: The Lord shall judge His people-* Judgment and punishment for sin have been dealt with for all those who are in Christ, as Paul has argued in this section and also in Romans 1-8. Those who now turned away from all this would therefore have to face judgment.

David asks God to judge him *now* (Ps. 26:1; 35:24; 43:1; 54:1). He wasn't so afraid of the future judgment; He knew that it will only be the pronouncement of how we have now lived. He had a good conscience, and so He asked God to show how He felt about him right now. "The Lord shall judge the people [at the last day; this is quoted in this connection in Heb. 10:30]: judge me [i.e. now], O Lord, according to my righteousness" (Ps. 7:8).

10:31 *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God-* This may well refer to Angelic punishment at the last day, as the hands of God is Angelic language, and "the living God" may well carry the idea in Hebrew of 'God of the living ones', i.e. the Angel-cherubim. But God is a living God in that He is alive in our lives through His risen Son.

What is written about the toughness of God's condemnation may seem awful. But actually, the condemnation and judgment of God is far softer than that of man. It was men who created the concept of eternal torment, not God. It was men who created Auschwitz and similar perversions of 'judgment'. It is truly written in the context of God's final condemnation that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). But David said that he would prefer to fall into the hands of God rather than into the hands of man (2 Sam. 24:14). To fall into the hands of God is thus a figure for judgment / condemnation by Him. Fearful as it is, it is actually far milder than the judgment of men. This is how cruel our judgment of others can be; this is how awful is human condemnation of each other. It is worse that God's. No wonder that the Lord established "Judge not..." as a foundation principle for His true people.

10:32 *But call to remembrance the former days, when you were first enlightened. You endured a hard struggle, with sufferings-* The earliest Hebrew Christians, baptized in their thousands by Peter, were persecuted. But that was all in vain if they now returned to the temple system. The "sufferings" were a sharing in the crucifixion sufferings of Christ (s.w. 2:9,10). And His resurrection life by the Spirit had lived in the Hebrews who had participated in the sufferings. The awful persecutions they endured were orchestrated by Paul himself. He wrote of what he personally was aware of. Their return to Judaism was effectively a statement that Paul had been correct in persecuting them; and so Paul is personally involved in the argument in this sense.

10:33 *Partly in that you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly in that you became companions of those who were so treated-* Suffering is therefore not only in what we personally experience, but in our fellowshiping with the sufferings of others within the Lord's body. For in Him, if one member suffers, all the others do (1 Cor. 12:26). The early Christian converts were made a theatre, a "spectacle", openly revealed for their Christian faith; and what Paul did to them in this way he himself experienced (s.w. 1 Cor. 4:9). To come out in open solidarity for someone publicly mocked for their faith was in effect to suffer what they did. But to avoid that, the Hebrew Christians had become secret believers, hiding

their light under a bucket; and now they had taken the logical next step, which was to return to the darkness of Judaism.

10:34- see on Mt. 5:7; Heb. 4:15.

For you had both compassion on them that were in bonds, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your own property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an enduring one- It is tragic that believers who suffered so much could then revert to the very temple system which had so persecuted them. But this is a feature of our natures. We become like that which we hate the most and have suffered from the most, like Israel worshipping the idols of the nations whom they believed had defeated them. The giving of property to the poorer believers may therefore have partly been because property was being confiscated from Christians anyway. These verses in Hebrews 10 give us vital information about the persecution of the Hebrew Christians which the Acts record doesn't mention, just like the Acts record doesn't mention Paul's final privations in prison, of which we learn in 2 Tim. 4.

The manuscripts followed by the AV add: "Knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven...". They had once understood what Paul has earlier explained in this chapter; that believers "in Christ" are "in heaven", in the Holiest, their spiritual man ["in yourselves"] was in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). But they were turning away from that faith and understanding.

The early Christians "joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] property" by the state. There was a *joy* felt amongst them because of their loss. This is a totally counter-instinctive feeling- to be *joyful* because you lost or gave away 'possessions'. The Philippians likewise gave out of a deep *joy* at giving away; the abundance of their joy resulted in their liberality (2 Cor. 8:2). And let's not think that the early church were necessarily all dirt poor. The Christians of Heb. 10:34 had property which was plundered- and still they gave support to the poor saints in Palestine (Heb. 6:20).

The more we grasp that it really is God's will that we will be there in God's future Kingdom, the more strength we will have to resist seeking for material things in this life. By being sure that we will be there, the Kingdom becomes our treasure, where our heart is, rather than any material treasure in this life (Lk. 9:34). The RV of Heb. 10:34,35 brings out well the same theme: "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your *possessions*, knowing that ye have your own selves for a better *possession*" (RVmg). Who we ourselves will be turned into is our better possession, "a better possession and an abiding one" (RV). And this compensates for the loss of material *possessions* in this life. Therefore the writer urges them to not cast away their confidence in the receipt of this reward at the Lord's return (:35). The more humbly confident we are in receiving the Kingdom, the less the loss of possessions now will mean to us. Hebrews also associates the hope of the Kingdom with the characteristic of patience in the small things of this life. Hence Job, when he lost his hope, could exclaim: "What is mine end, that I should be patient?" (Job 6:11 RV).

Who we ourselves will be turned into is our better possession, "a better possession and an abiding one" (RV). And this compensates for the loss of material *possessions* in this life. Therefore the writer urges them to not cast away their confidence in the receipt of this reward at the Lord's return (:35). The more humbly confident we are in receiving the Kingdom, the less the loss of possessions now will mean to us.

10:35 *Therefore do not throw away your boldness, which has great reward-* This is the "boldness" which can only come from believing that our sin is totally dealt with

in Christ, and that we can boldly enter beyond the veil right now, into the Holiest of fellowship with God Himself (:22). This was being thrown away by those who returned to the temple system of sacrifices for sins. Later Paul uses these words about Moses, bidding us follow his example of bold faith in the future reward (11:26).

10:36 *For you have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, you may receive the promise-* They were lacking the vital characteristic of patient endurance in faith that the great salvation would really be true for them. They had done the will of God, which was to believe in His Son and commit to Him in baptism (Jn. 7:17). 'Receiving the promise' is the language of Abraham receiving the promise of eternal inheritance at the Lord's return, which Paul has said is the promise of the new covenant (see on 9:15). But that will only come true for those who have patiently endured in faith as Abraham did.

10:37- see on Eph. 3:8.

For yet a very little while, and he that comes shall come and shall not delay further- This reflects Paul's belief that we should live as if the Lord's return is imminent. He also sensed that the fact the Lord had not yet come is because of a "delay". 2 Peter 3 speaks of this delay, mentioning that Paul had also written of it- presumably referring to this passage, thereby adding another argument for believing Paul was the author of Hebrews. The delay, according to Peter, was so that more could be saved, and also because of the lack of spiritual maturity amongst those who had believed. For when the spiritual harvest is ripe, then the sickle will be put to it in the Lord's return.

This verse is generally a quotation from Hab. 2:3 about the fulfilment of the prophecy about Babylon's destruction. Paul saw this as having the same fulfilment as the return of Christ to earth. The Lord's return would be the destruction of Babylon; so by "Babylon" Paul understood the Jewish system which was about to be destroyed. And Revelation speaks of it likewise. The Lord did not return in the first century, because various preconditions were not met. But His coming will also be the destruction of the latter day Babylon, to which believers of our age will be tempted to associate themselves in order to avoid persecution.

The "little while" is a quotation from the LXX of Is. 26:20, which suggests that there will be a "little while" of final tribulation for the believers from which they may be preserved, just prior to the Lord's coming. Potentially, that was how close the second coming could have been in the first century.

10:38 *But My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My soul will have no pleasure in him-* This is a quotation from a prophecy about the Lord Jesus personally, "My righteous one", who would overcome the wicked Babylonians, whom Paul in :37 has associated with the temple system. But as explained throughout chapter 10, all that is true of Him is true of us. We are in Him, in the Holiest. But as the Lord had the possibility of failure in His mortal life, so do we. The Father's soul had pleasure in Him because of His faithfulness unto death (Is. 53:10). But there was the possibility He could "shrink back", just as there is for all those in Him. All the assurances of salvation mentioned in the argument so far are true of believers at the current moment in time; but it's not a case of once saved, always saved. We have to abide in Christ, patiently endure in faith.

The 'shrinking back' was in recoiling from the wonder of salvation by grace through faith, and returning to trust in the temple system for salvation. The same word is used of Peter shrinking back from these wonders because of Judaist pressure (Gal. 2:12).

10:39- see on Mt. 27:5.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls- The shrinking back at the day of judgment is spoken of in 1 Jn. 2:28- the rejected will be ashamed from before Him at His coming, they will literally slink and shrink away in shame. But "we make the answer now", living out the essence of judgment day now. The Hebrews who were shrinking away from the wonder of real salvation in Christ would shrink away from Him in condemnation at the last day. It is faith in Christ and in God's saving grace which saves us, which 'preserves' us in the sense of preserving our present state of being saved in Christ. And Paul now goes on in chapter 11 to speak of how this kind of faith was held by the Old Testament heroes.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction about invisible things-* The context of this discourse about faith is to be found in chapter 10. The Hebrew Christians were abandoning faith in Jesus as Christ and returning to the visible, concrete things of the temple system for their salvation and justification before God. All the examples of faith now given are to be understood in that context. As noted on 1:1, this discourse is based upon Stephen's in Acts 7, which would have been a mainstay of Hebrew Christian faith.

Yet the definition of faith here is deeply relevant to our materialistic age which seeks for science to prop up faith, and demands that spiritual understanding be inline with observable phenomena as defined and understood by contemporary science. The definitions of faith given here preclude any appeal to science as 'proving' God's existence or the truth of His word. Science cannot prove faith nor underpin it, for faith is assurance in "invisible things". The "things hoped for" are those of chapter 10- the "hope" of the Christian is not a hope for the best at judgment day, but a solid conviction that our sin has been dealt with and we can confidently anticipate the promise of eternal inheritance at the last day. The complaint that science conflicts with faith is misplaced; for faith is not about observable things. The whole thrust of 'apologetics' is therefore seriously misplaced. No amount of archaeological evidence or historical support or the intricacies observed in the natural creation can provide faith. A generation of Christians raised on this kind of thing is now wilting in faith, confronted by scientific evidence which brings these things into question. Perhaps they never had the faith spoken of here in Heb. 11:1.

Faith is the assurance that the hope of salvation shall come true for us. Issues such as how God created the world are not in view here. "Assurance" is the word used of our "confidence" in salvation in 3:14. The argument may appear logically faulty, at first blush- faith itself is the confidence, whereas we would expect faith to have some kind of basis. Faith comes by hearing the Gospel; when confronted with the message of salvation, there is a power within the message itself which compels faith. This is all the stuff of the Spirit, and the secular mind recoils at such statements. But the few thousand former atheists I baptized in the former USSR all came to faith not through scientific 'evidence' nor the argumentation of apologetics; but from being confronted with the Gospel of itself. Thus indeed, the basis for faith is faith- which appears a circular argument to the literalist and the materialist, but millions of transformed lives are a far greater witness. And the man who structures his life and thinking on the sole basis of rationalism, empiricism and literalism is not a happy chappy. Indeed, there is no such person. Faith is the "conviction" or "evidence". The evidence for faith is faith. Yes, it is therefore a leap in the dark. But so in fact is every position held, for nobody is a pure rationalist or literalist, believing only what is before their two eyes. The

ultimate thing "not seen" is our salvation, which we hope for patiently (Rom. 8:24,25; Mt. 13:17; 2 Cor. 4:18). Noah saw by faith what could not be seen- his salvation from the flood (:7). Elsewhere in the New Testament, faith is predicated upon connection with the Lord Jesus; the Son is the only way to the Father, and it is through or on account of the Son that we believe on the Father (1 Pet. 1:21). Any claim to 'believe in God' which is not predicated upon faith in Jesus is therefore not real faith in God as Biblically defined. To believe is to trust; not simply to intellectually accept that there is likely to be some higher power. The 'belief' in God of non-Christian religions and philosophies is not therefore Biblical faith in God. Faith in Him comes from hearing His word, which is about Jesus.

11:2 *For on account of their faith, the elders had witness borne to them-*

The various translations all suggest that God has already judged those "elders" who have died in faith: "gained approval" (NASB), "received approval" (NRSV), "were commended" (NIV), "were attested" (NAB), "obtained good report" (KJV), and "obtained a testimony" (Rheims). The idea is that God's acceptance of a person is directly related to their faith / trust in His salvation of them. Believe it, and He will give it to you. We are invited to think that God has already judged them. So the purpose of the future judgment seat will be for our benefit, and not for Him to gather information and form a judgment.

These "elders" may not refer to those of whom we shall go on to read. I suggested on 1:1 that the Jerusalem church is being addressed here, and that the Hebrew letter is shot through with allusions to Stephen, their martyr. And nowhere is that clearer than in Hebrews 11, which is based upon Stephen's witness in Acts 7. The same word for "had witness borne" is translated "of good report", concerning the elders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:3). "Elders" is the word repeatedly used about the "elders" of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4). The founding elders of the Hebrew congregation in Jerusalem were therefore publically commended for their open faith in the Lord Jesus and resistance of the temple system; and the Hebrew audience were to follow their example rather than quitting Christianity and returning to Judaism.

11:3 *By faith we understand that the ages have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which appear-* This is no reference to the world being created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. The *ages (aion)* were prepared according to God's word, the Gospel; but we only perceive history from that perspective "by faith". Revelation puts this truth in a different way by saying that the Lamb opened the seals of future history through His sacrifice. The structure of all history revolves around His work as explained in the Gospel, "the word of God". The things which are now seen are not the things of faith, which cannot be seen (:1). In the context of this chapter and its position within the letter, the things which are seen referred to the temple system (see on :1). Those things were not created out of the reality of Christ which had now appeared. Understood properly, this is actually a strong case against the personal pre-existence of the Lord Jesus. They were not made out of Him, He who appeared or was manifest in His life and death, but pointed forward to Him, as a shadow, rather than being the very reality from which He came and would have therefore been subservient to.

The previous context in Heb. 10 speaks of faith as trust in salvation, "to the saving of the soul". He who trusts in the work of the Son, has eternal life (Jn. 6:47). There is something of that faith in salvation in all those mentioned. Faith comes by hearing the word of God, i.e. the Gospel; there is something in the message which elicits faith in it, if we are humble to it. The "faith" exemplified in Heb. 11 is specifically faith / trust in salvation, that in the face of death, God will save, specifically by a future bodily resurrection. And faith means belief that God can create out of nothing. This is supremely the case with the resurrection of the body, but it also applies to all action by God in response to human faith. Abel though dead, had a faith that still speaks- his faith in the blood of the sacrifice gave him hope of resurrection. Enoch

was saved from death by his faith; Noah by faith prepared the ark and so saved his household from death; Sarah's womb was dead and her husband "as good as dead" but by faith she gave birth to Isaac; they all died in faith without receiving the promises now, but believed they would receive them despite their death; Abraham received Isaac back by faith in resurrection from the dead; by faith Jacob as he was dying, blessed his sons believing that death was not the final end; Joseph as he was dying, gave orders for his bones; Moses was saved from death by faith, and through his faith he saved Israel from death in Israel, saved the firstborns, and saved Israel at the Red Sea; Rahab's faith saved her from death with the rest in Jericho; by faith some escaped death by the sword; by faith some women received their dead by resurrection; by faith in a future resurrection, some endured torture (looking to gain a better resurrection). This perhaps is why faith is introduced as trust that God can make things out of nothing. He can resurrect the dead. And all the examples of faith involved faith in just such a resurrection. The hope they all had, by faith, was in a future, tangible reality upon this earth: a city (11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14); homeland (11:14); country (11:16); and kingdom (12:26-28).

11:4 *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect to his gifts; and through it he, though being dead, still speaks-* As noted on :1, the examples of faith in this chapter relate to faith in the invisible rather than the visible, concrete things of tabernacle ritual; and to faith in the Lord's sacrifice. It was by faith in that future sacrifice that Abel offered a blood offering, because he believed the principle of 9:22, that without shedding of the Lord's blood there could be no remission of sins. God bore witness to this faith by sending fire from Heaven to consume his sacrifice, rather than the vegetable sacrifice of Cain. That witness was not a recognition of his *obedience* but of his righteousness. Given the strong message of imputed righteousness in chapter 10, we are left to assume that through faith in the Lord's future sacrifice to cover him, Abel was counted righteous just as Abraham was, and just as we are. In that sense he "still speaks" to us by way of example.

Heb. 11:4 speaks of God bearing witness, giving a verbal testimony, to Abel's sacrifice, and that through that witness Abel is as it were still speaking to us, in that to this day God is still speaking / testifying to that acceptable act of service performed by Abel. Abel, through the account of him in Scripture, "is yet spoken of" (Heb. 11:4 AVmg.) in the Biblical record. Isaiah was prophesying directly to the hypocrites of the first century, according to the Lord in Mk. 7:6 RV. God says that He 'watches over My word to perform it' (Jer. 1:12 RV). Thus God didn't just write the Bible as we write words, and forget it. He remains actively aware of all His words and consciously fulfils them. This is another window into the way in which the word of God can be described as a living word. There is an active quality to the words we read in our Bibles.

Who we are is in reality our judgment. After death, our works "follow us" to judgment (Rev. 14:13). According to Jewish thought, men's actions followed them as witnesses before the court of God, and this is the idea being picked up here. There is a great emphasis in Hebrews 11 on the way that each man has a "witness", "testimony" or "report" as a result of his life (Heb. 11:4,5,14,39). Because of this the dead are still spoken for, in that God keeps and knows that testimony, and it speaks for them (Heb. 11:4 AV mg.). They are 'alive', not personally in conscious form, but in the memory and testimony of God. We note that throughout the Genesis account, Abel never speaks. Cain does. But Abel speaks through his actions and faith in the blood of the lamb, meaning that his blood, his life record, speaks louder than any words he uttered in his life.

11:5 *By faith Enoch was snatched away so that he should not be killed; and he was not found, because God had taken him away. He had witness borne to him, that before his being snatched away he had been well pleasing to God-* Paul wrote this to Hebrew Christians under persecution, believing that the second coming was at the doors, and soon they too would be

snatched away to safety from persecution (1 Thess. 4:17). Paul was urging them to believe as Enoch did, and to be confident of final salvation as well as preservation in this life. He was "well pleasing" in that he believed (:6). Perhaps the example of Enoch is chosen because his ancestor was Cain, who did *not* please God, in contrast to Abel who has just been mentioned (:4). The point would be that we can break out from our surrounding environment, we are not inevitably, genetically tied in to any spiritual situation, but there is available to us the radical power of new creation in the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17). There is no reason here to believe that Enoch was snatched away to Heaven or immortality, for the wages of sin is death; and Enoch was not perfect. The Lord Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and receive immortality (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

The "witness borne to him that he had been well pleasing unto God" is courtroom language. Could it not be that his representative / guardian Angel in the court of Heaven had made this testimony to God Almighty?

11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him. For he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those that seek after Him-* Our faith in God is a seeking after Him. To believe / trust in Him is to seek Him. Whilst this may be a Hebraism for worship, it is all the same true that faith is not a finding of God, an arrival at a point where we have all our questions answered and all intellectual struggles resolved. That position, which is only theoretical, would not be one of faith but of simplistic dogmatism and literalism. Our faith is not simply in Him, but in the fact that we really shall receive the promised salvation or "reward".

There are a few NT references to the Yahweh Name. One of them is in Heb. 11:6: he who comes to God must first [most importantly] believe that *He is* [a reference to He who is who He is, and will be who He will be], and that therefore, as an intrinsic part of who He is, *He will be* a rewarder of His people. Surely the point is that it's not just knowing the Name theoretically, it is to believe it- that He who is, really *is* in our lives. Who God *is*, i.e. His Name, is an imperative to believe Him and be like Him. If we are His sons and daughters, who He is becomes quite naturally the law of our being. Thus we should love our enemies, because God makes *His* sun [cp. 'our' goodness] to rise on both His friends and enemies. As we reflect on the massive power that every moment works to move the sun and earth around each other, so every moment we have an imperative to love.

This is why belief in God cannot be merely an intellectual act occurring within certain brain cells. Belief means action in some way. Belief *and* the act of baptism are necessary for salvation; but some NT passages speak as if faith alone saves. This is reconciled by understanding that faith, true faith, includes works. James reasons that there is no distinction between true faith and works. They are part of the same nexus. Thus when we read in the NT of belief in Christ, the normal construction with a dative case was dropped and instead a preposition is used with the verb- belief *into* Christ is the idea, with implied reference to baptism *into* Him and an active life *in Him* as a result of our belief. To be brethren in Christ is not to just believe Christ or God, but to believe *into* them in practice. R.T. Lovelock comments: "The NT writers felt the importance of this utter trust in God so strongly, that they originated a new construction in their language to emphasise the concept and force it upon the attention of their readers".

11:7 *By faith Noah, being warned concerning things not seen as yet-* The unseen things were of judgment to come for sin, and of salvation through the ark into a new world, typical of God's future Kingdom on earth. The same word for "warned" is used of how we are not to refuse the Lord's warning voice today (12:25).

Moved with Godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith- Noah's fear of judgment to come was because he too was a sinner, and he feared judgment. He was in the position of those Hebrews who had a fearful looking forward to judgment because they had refused the sanctifying, saving work of the Lord Jesus (10:27). But he did something about it- he built the ark and entered it, understanding something of how Peter understood it- that it represented the Lord Jesus.

Noah is one of several examples in Hebrews 11 of where the faith of a third party can save others; it was by his faith that he saved his family. And as with Abel, we see that the idea of imputed righteousness was around far before Abraham. Righteousness was imputed to him because he feared condemnation for his sins. He believed that the salvation system offered him would work, and did what was required to enter it and remain within it. And thus he was counted righteous. This was done for him without the offering of sacrifice or participation in any ritual; he accepted salvation in the ark and did what he could to build it. This was of course highly relevant to the Hebrew Christians seeking to return to sacrifices and ritual.

Noah's response was not to smugly reflect how that soon he would be vindicated for his separation from the world, i.e. for his own personal righteousness. Instead he took seriously God's warning that sinners were to soon be destroyed. Noah was, of course, a sinner as we all are. He therefore must have cried out to God in faith, asking for God to count him as if he were righteous, so that he would be saved from the coming judgments against sin. This is how he had righteousness imputed to him. He showed his faith that God really had justified him by doing something physical- his faith led to the 'works' of building the ark; as our faith likewise leads us to baptism into Christ.

Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world; the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees (Mt. 12:27). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

11:8- see on Gen. 12:4.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed- This statement itself is an example of imputed righteousness. The Greek implies that *as soon as* God called Abram, he got up and left Ur. But a closer examination of the record indicates that this wasn't absolutely the case. It is stressed that both Abram and Sarai left Ur because "Terah *took* Abram his son... and Sarai his daughter in law" (Gen. 11:31). Abram had been called to leave Ur, separate from his family and go into Canaan. But instead he followed his father to Haran, and lived there (for some years, it seems) until his father died, and then he responded to his earlier call to journey towards Canaan. The Genesis record certainly reads as if Abram was dominated by his father and family, and this militated against an immediate response to the call he received to leave Ur and journey to Canaan. At best his father's decision enabled him to obey the command to

leave Ur without having to break with his family. And yet, according to Heb. 11:8, Abram immediately responded, as an act of faith. But it was a moment of faith.

For some unrevealed reason, perhaps the invasion of the area by hostile tribes, the workings of providence made Terah take the decision to leave Ur. Because 'Canaan' would have been relatively unheard of (Abram "went out, not knowing whither he went", Heb. 11:8 AV) and uncivilized compared to Ur, it is possible to speculate that Abram had told Terah about the promise he had received. Terah then may have decided that such a promise ought to involve *him* as Abram's father, and decided to go with Abram. Terah must have had a very high level of motivation to leave cosmopolitan Ur for uncivilized Canaan. "Terah *took* Abram" certainly implies that some unrecorded circumstances took the decision out of Abram's hands; he had to leave his own country, because his father had ordered a mass emigration of the family. How hard it must have been for Abram to make sense of all this! He had been told to leave his family and country, and travel to a land God would show him. At that point in time, he was unaware that that country would be Canaan. How God would lead him was unexplained. But he believed God, and "when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed" (Heb. 11:8). Therefore when his father announced that they were emigrating to Canaan, Abram would have realized that this was a Divine prod to obey the call from God to get up and leave. Unlike the rest of Terah's unrecorded family, who would have mocked such a crazy plan, Abram willingly submitted. But how was he to leave his kindred and father's house? For they were coming with him! Indeed, Terah "took Abram". Thus Abram had faith in God's promise, yet may have balked at the command to leave his country and family. Providentially arranged circumstances then resulted in his aging father taking him, implying some degree of compulsion, and leading him out of his native country. Whilst not fully understanding how he could leave his father's household whilst they looked set to be accompanying him on this journey to a strange land, he went ahead in faith. It is emphasized that *God* "brought out" (s.w. to lead, pluck or pull out) Abram from Ur (Neh. 9:7; Gen. 15:6,7). The calling came through Abram's hearing of the word of promise, and providentially arranged circumstances encouraging his faithful response to it.

And left for a place which he was to receive for an inheritance afterwards. And he left not knowing where he was going to- The promise of inheritance was of "eternal inheritance" (9:15), the same promise made in the new covenant to us. Detailed information or knowledge about the future Kingdom was not required; he didn't know where he was going to. And contrary to the apparently solid, permanent location of Judah in Palestine at the time, this was not the receipt of the promised inheritance. Abraham's faith or trust was in that he did not understand the details; he just said yes to God as far as he understood God.

11:9 *By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as yet not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise-* Abraham had been an urban dweller, both in Ur and Haran; not a bedouin. He became a wandering herdsman and tent dweller by faith in the promises to him. The chronology provided in Genesis actually allows for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to have all lived together at some point in the same encampment. "A sojourner" refers to the way Abraham recognized he was "a stranger and a sojourner" in the land (Gen. 22:4) and therefore needed to buy a burial plot there for his wife.

11:10 *For he looked for the city which has the foundations, whose builder and maker is God-* The urban dweller who by faith lived as a nomad always hankered after a solid city- but not Ur. He overcame the desire to return to the city of his roots by focusing instead upon the future Kingdom of God, called her "the city". This was relevant for the Jerusalem Church who are being addressed here, tempted as they were to return to the stability of the temple

city. The "architect" (Gk.) of the future city was God; recalling how the ages of human history were "framed" by God (:3). The foundation of God's work is the doctrine of the Christ (6:1); He is also portrayed as the "foundation" in 1 Cor. 3:11 and Eph. 2:20. Abraham perceived that his future seed would be the foundation of his own eternal city. Again we see that it is faith in Christ which was the basis of the "faith" of Abraham and others mentioned here.

11:11 By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed when she was past age, since she counted Him faithful who had made the promise- The seed of Abraham was only realized by faith, despite so many reasons to disbelieve. If faith were based upon rational evidence then she could never have come to such faith.

This personal nature of the promises resulted in a mutuality between God and the patriarchs, as it can between Him and all Abraham's seed. God's present judgment of us is actually related to how we 'judge' God to be. There's a mutuality between God and man in this business of present judgment. This theme is played on throughout Hebrews 11. Sarah "judged" God as faithful, and He 'judged' her as faithful (Heb. 11:11); she counted Him as trustworthy and He counted righteousness to her. As Abraham "was offering up Isaac" (RV), with the knife raised, he was "accounting" God to be capable of performing a resurrection, just as Moses quit the riches of Egypt, "accounting the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:17,19,26 RV). And yet God 'accounts' us to be faithful, imputing righteousness to us. Through these acts and attitudes of faith, "these... had witness borne to them through their faith" (Heb. 11:39 RV). It was as if their lives were lived in the courtroom, with their actions a constant presentation of evidence to the judge of all the earth. Our judgment of God to be faithful thus becomes His judgment of us to be faithful.

"Even Sarah herself" is clearly making a point, holding up a flashing light over this particular example. There is every reason to think, from the Genesis record, that Sarah not only lacked faith in the promises, but also had a bitter, unspiritual mind. The account alludes back to Eve's beguiling of Adam when it records how "Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (Gen. 16:2) in acquiescing to her plan to give her a seed through Abram marrying his slave girl. The whole thing between Sarah and Abraham seems wrong on at least two counts: firstly it reflects a lack of faith in the promise; and secondly it flouts God's ideal standards of marriage. Sarai seems to have recognized the error when she bitterly comments to Abram: "My wrong be upon thee" (16:5). Her comment that "the Lord hath restrained me from bearing" (16:2) would suggest that she thought she hadn't been chosen to bear the promised seed. Yet because of her faith, says Heb. 11:11, she received strength to bear that seed. Hagar was so persecuted by Sarah that she "fled from her face" (16:6). God's attitude to Hagar seems to reflect a certain amount of sympathy for the harsh way in which Sarah had dealt with her. These years of bitterness and lack of faith came to the surface when Sarah overheard the Angel assuring Abraham that Sarah really would have a son. She mockingly laughed at the promise, deep within herself (18:15). Yet according to Heb. 11:11, she rallied her faith and believed. But as soon as Isaac was born, her bitterness flew to the surface again when she was Ishmael mocking. In what can only be described as unrestrained anger, she ordered Hagar and Ishmael out into the scorching desert, to a certain death (humanly speaking). Again, one can sense the sympathy of God for Hagar at this time. And so wedged in between incidents which belied a deep bitterness, lack of faith and pride (after Isaac was born), the Spirit in Heb. 11:11 discerns her faith; on account of which, Heb. 11:12 implies ("therefore"), the whole purpose of God in Christ could go forward. See on Gal. 4:30.

Because of Sarah's faith, "therefore sprang there...so many as the stars of the sky in multitude" (:11,12). Those promises to Abraham had their fulfilment, but conditional on

Abraham and Sarah's faith. Gen. 18:18-20 says that the fulfilment of the promises was conditional on Abraham teaching his children / seed the ways of God. Those promises / prophecies were "sure" in the sense that God's side of it was. Rom. 4:18 likewise comments that Abraham became "the father of many nations" precisely because he *believed* in this hope. Yet the promise / prophecy that he would be a father of many nations could sound as if it would have happened anyway, whatever. But it was actually conditional upon Abraham's faith. And he is our great example exactly because he had the possibility and option of *not* believing in the hope he had been offered. The promises to Abraham form the new covenant, of which Paul has had so much to say in Hebrews. And yet the realization of it depends upon faith, just as it had earlier depended upon the faith of Abraham and Sarah, no matter how fragile that faith was.

"Faith" in Hebrews 11 often refers to faith in Christ, the seed of Abraham. Perhaps we are to understand Sarah's faith that conception would occur as motivated by her faith that the promises of the great seed would have to come true through her as the legitimate wife of Abraham. So it was by her shadowy faith in Christ as the future seed that she sound the faith to believe that her old body could bear a child.

11:12 *Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude- innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore-* According to Heb. 11:12, God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled on account of his faith; God in some way allowed Himself to be potentially limited by Abraham's faith. Indeed, the promised world-wide blessing of all nations was promised only "because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:16,18). In this sense the covenants of salvation were partly due to another man [Abraham] being faithful [although above all our salvation was due to the Lord Jesus]. In this sense he is the "father" of the faithful.

Abraham was impotent, "as good as dead". The argument here is so similar to that in Rom. 4:19. Abraham believed his body could be empowered to do it, "without being weakened in faith", the same word translated "impotent" in Jn. 5:7. Abraham was physically impotent, perhaps even seriously ill and weak at the time the promise was given- but not impotent or weak in faith. The idea of the Greek is that Abraham didn't weaken in faith as he observed / considered his body. "Considered" in Rom. 4:19 means that he didn't fix his mind upon the fact his body was dead (i.e. impotent) and unable to produce seed. He wasn't obsessed with his state, yet he lived a life of faith that ultimately God's Kingdom would come, he rejoiced at the contemplation of Christ his Lord; and he filled his life with practical service. He wasn't obsessed with the fact that in his marital position he personally couldn't have children when it seemed this was what God wanted him to do; and this was very pleasing to God. Nor did he consider the "deadness of Sarah's womb". So often we allow the apparent weakness of others to become a barrier to our faith. 'She'll never change... she just isn't capable of that'. But Abraham not only believed that *he* could do it, but that the apparent obstacle of another's weakness was also surmountable by the word of promise.

11:13 *These all died in faith-* The point is that they continued believing until the end of their lives; they did not give up. And that was a necessary exhortation for the Hebrew Christians who were giving up their faith in Abraham's seed.

Not having received the promises, but having seen them, and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth- All the faithful went through the same process: persuaded - embraced - confessed to the world around them. Confessing was part of the natural response to belief of the promises. Hearing God's word in faith is associated with declaring it (Jer. 9:12). The confession of being a stranger was surely

that made by Abraham publicly to the local inhabitants of Canaan that he was a stranger and sojourner amongst them (Gen. 22:4).

When we read that the faithful 'saw' the promises although they didn't receive them, we are surely meant to understand that they 'saw' the *fulfilment* of the promises. This is the faith which sees that which cannot be seen in natural visible terms (:1). 'The promises' are so sure of fulfilment that the phrase is put by metonymy for 'the fulfilment of the promises'. And because of their utter certainty, we are to be strangers and pilgrims, and unworldly (Heb. 11:13,14). There is therefore an obvious link between doctrine and practice. A doctrine believed leads to us coming out of this tangled world and unashamedly speaking of our secular lives as not being what we really identify with. Believing the promises to Abraham involves open confession to the world around us.

11:14 *For they that say such things make it obvious that they are seeking after a country of their own-* Abraham made the statement that he was a stranger and sojourner in Canaan whilst he was actually there in the land (Gen. 22:4). Contrary to how Judaism reasoned, the literal presence of the Jews in Palestine was not the fulfilment of the promises, which spoke of "eternal inheritance". They were seeking a far greater fulfilment of the promises (:16).

11:15 *And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return-* Abraham was called to leave Ur and travel to Canaan, the land promised to him. If his heart had remained in his native land, as the heart of most immigrants and exiles does, God would have worked in his life to make it possible for him to return to it, and thereby reject God's covenant with him. The fact Abraham wasn't given this opportunity indicates his faith. It also shows that God gives us the opportunity to renounce our faith if that is what we want in our hearts (cp. Balaam).

11:16 *But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one-* As noted on :14, the physical presence of the patriarchs in Canaan was not seen by them as the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises. They looked for an "eternal inheritance" (see on 9:15). Their desire was for "a heavenly [country]", not in the sense that they desired to go to Heaven- for they were never promised that. They looked for the Kingdom of Heaven to come on earth, symbolized in Revelation by the city of heavenly Jerusalem coming to earth at the Lord's return. The "better" nature of what they sought connects with how Hebrews uses this word of the "better" things of the new covenant in contrast to the inferior things of the old covenant. The old covenant offered Israel a national homeland, but no "eternal inheritance" (9:15). It was life eternal, eternal inheritance of the promised land, which was promised in the new covenant; it was that which was so far "better" than the promise of the old covenant. "But now they..." raises the question as to who is in view. The "they" of :15 were the patriarchs; but they were long dead and unconscious. The "they" merges with us the Christian believers, identified with Abraham's seed by baptism into that seed (Gal. 3:27-29).

Therefore God is not ashamed of them- to be called their God- Right now, God is ashamed or not ashamed of us, according to our separation from the spirit of this world; and yet His not being ashamed of us will also be apparent at the final judgment. We have our judgment now, from His point of view. "To be called" is literally 'to be surnamed'. His Name becomes part of ours, in spiritual terms; the things of His Name and purpose become inextricably bound up with us, just as 'Abram' was changed to 'Abraham' by inserting the middle letters of the Yahweh name into Abram's name- see on Is. 44:5.

For He has prepared for them a city- This is the Kingdom on earth prepared from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34). It is called a city because Paul wants the Jerusalem Hebrew Christians to whom he is speaking to realize that the "Jerusalem that now is" was not the true city of hope; and neither was Rome. Heb. 11:13-16 contains some radical demands in

a first century context- to see the *true* city, when Rome was *the* city to be identified with; to be a non-citizen of any earthly state... how hard would that have been for Roman citizens to read, hear, and say 'Amen' to! This was particularly an issue for the Hebrew Christians, who were attracted to return to Judaism because the Roman legislation permitted it to exist as a recognized religion.

11:17 *By faith Abraham, being tested, offered up Isaac. Yes, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son-* The tenses here are important. Abraham was counted as having offered up Isaac; hence he figuratively received him back from the dead (:19). The language of effective resurrection in :19 leads me away from thinking that the mere act of placing Isaac on the altar was spoken of as Abraham having "offered up Isaac". Abraham had done it in his mind. God counts our intentions as if we have done them; hence in the matter of generous giving, the desire to give is all important and counted all the same as "giving" (2 Cor. 8:12). We too are asked to give up our children; not to Molech, but to God. For our children are God's children whom we raise for Him and trust Him to use them as part of a wider purpose which we have to trust Him for.

"Was offering up" invites us to play Bible television with this verse. We are taken back to Abraham there on Moriah. He who was remembering how he had laughed with joy at the promise of the seed, rejoicing to see Christ's day (Jn. 8:56), and naming the little boy "Isaac", 'laughter', to reflect his joy... was now fighting back those memories as he was offering up Isaac his son in sacrifice. "His only begotten son" emphasizes how this was all pointing forward to God offering His only begotten. Seeing Abraham had many other children, Paul may be rather forcing a similarity here, perhaps reasoning that Isaac was Abraham's only son by his legitimate wife Sarah.

11:18 *Even he to whom it was said: In Isaac shall your seed be called-* As noted on :17, we are asked to imagine Abraham's thoughts as he was offering up Isaac. He would have struggled to understand how this son of promise could be the path to the promised seed, if he had to now offer him. The faith displayed was therefore trust, trust that although we do not rationally understand, we believe that God's purpose will somehow work out. Again, faith is portrayed as not at all based on rational evidence or reasoning (see on :1).

11:19 *Abraham accounted that God is able to raise up, even from the dead. From where he did, figuratively, receive him back-* Abraham was driven to the conclusion that God would resurrect Isaac, so that the promises would be fulfilled. Faith in the Abrahamic promises likewise requires faith in the resurrection of his Messianic seed; a faith which the Hebrews were finding hard to maintain. Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac was counted as if he had done it; hence the arising of Isaac from the altar was effectively his resurrection. See on :17.

Abraham 'accounted' that God was able to raise Isaac; his faith involved an intellectual process. Israel were to hear / understand "the statutes and judgments... that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them" (Dt. 5:1). Understanding is related to obedience. See on Rom. 10:10.

11:20 *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things to come-* Yet the record of this in Gen. 27 doesn't paint Isaac in a very positive light. "Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). The AVmg. seems to bring out Isaac's superficiality: "Isaac loved Esau, because venison was in his mouth". This seems to connect with the way Esau threw away his birthright for the sake of food in his mouth. Esau was evidently of the flesh, whilst Jacob had at least some potential spirituality. Yet Isaac preferred Esau. He chose to live in Gerar (Gen. 26:6), right on the border of Egypt- as close as he could get to the world, without crossing the line. And he thought nothing of denying his marriage to Rebekah, just to save his own skin (Gen. 26:7). So it seems Isaac had some marriage problems; the record speaks of "Esau his son" and

"Jacob (Rebekah's) son" (Gen. 27:5,6). The way Jacob gave Isaac wine "and he drank" just before giving the blessings is another hint at some unspirituality (Gen. 27:25). Isaac seems not to have accepted the Divine prophecy concerning his sons: "the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23), seeing that it was his intention to give Esau the blessings of the firstborn, and thinking that he was speaking to Esau, he gave him the blessing of his younger brothers (i.e. Jacob) serving him (Gen. 27:29 cp. 15). Isaac didn't accept the sale of the birthright, and yet God did (Heb. 12:16,17). *And yet*, and this is my point, Isaac's blessing of the two boys is described as an act of faith; even though it was done with an element of disbelief in God's word of prophecy concerning the elder serving the younger, and perhaps under the influence of alcohol, and even though at the time Isaac thought he was blessing Esau when in fact it was Jacob. Yet according to Heb. 11:20, this blessing of Esau *and* Jacob (therefore Hebrews doesn't refer to the later blessing) was done with faith; *at that very point in time*, Isaac had faith. So God's piercing eye saw through Isaac's liking for the good life, through Isaac's unspiritual liking for Esau, through his marriage problem, through his lack of faith that the elder must serve the younger, and discerned that there was some faith in that man Isaac; and then holds this up as a stimulant for our faith, centuries later! Not only should we be exhorted to see the good side in our present brethren; but we can take comfort that this God is our God, and views our Christian hypocrisy in the same way as He viewed theirs.

Isaac blessed his sons by faith concerning things to come (Heb. 11:20). "Things to come" is literally "to come", and consistently this term is used in Hebrews about the things of the coming Kingdom of God. Abraham "would after", in the coming age, receive the eternal inheritance of the land (s.w. Heb. 11:8); our "continuing city" is "to come" (Heb. 13:14); the fire of judgment "shall" (s.w.) devour the condemned at judgment day (Heb. 10:27); we have only a foretaste of the powers of the world "to come" (Heb. 6:5); the world "to come" (Heb. 2:5) is that of the Kingdom, when we "shall be" saved (Heb. 1:14). The other examples of faith in Hebrews 11 are of faith in the future Kingdom and in the things of the Lord Jesus. So we are to deduce from this that Isaac's blessing of his sons was done with a perspective of the Kingdom within him- even though so much of his blessing was misplaced, wrong and unspiritual. And so often we see this in the NT comment upon Old Testament incidents, such as Sarah's angry words to Hagar, and her mocking reference to Abraham "my lord being old also...".

11:21 *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff-* The Hebrew for "bed" has the same consonants as "staff", and is translated "staff" in the Septuagint, which Paul generally follows over the Masoretic text. It may be that Jacob considered Joseph to be the special Messianic seed (which he was, in type), and this would explain why Heb. 11:21 adds the detail that at the end of his life, as he was dying on his bed, Jacob showed his faith (i.e. his faith in Christ, which is the theme of Heb. 11) by worshipping Joseph, propping himself up on the bed head with his last energy to do it (Gk.). He clearly saw in him a type of his future redeemer. He finally accepted the truth of Joseph's dream: that Jacob must bow down to his greater son- although he reached this humility, this bowing before the spirit of Christ, in his very last breath. It seems probable that meditation on Joseph's experience was what brought Jacob to Christ; he had managed to scheme and plot his way out of every other crisis, but the loss of Joseph brought him to his knees helpless.

11:22 *By faith Joseph, when his end was near, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel and gave commandment concerning his bones-* Joseph's faith was specifically in the promises to Abraham concerning the eternal inheritance of Canaan. By faith he looked to the day when Abraham's people would no longer be in Egypt but in Canaan, and he wanted his bones buried in the promised land to show his identity with that

future Kingdom rather than all the wealth of secular life in Egypt. And our lives too should be full of countless such acts of identity with the things implied in the promises to Abraham.

11:23 *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a goodly child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment-* "Faith" in Hebrews 11 generally refers to faith in the Abrahamic promises which comprise the new covenant, and in the promised, saviour seed of Abraham. It was this faith, rather than simply faith that God would save their darling baby boy, which led to Moses' parents hiding him. They perceived from babyhood that he was a child "fair to God" (Heb.); maybe they thought he would be the promised seed, or would at least typify that promised seed. So again it was their faith in the Abraham promises which motivated them. Again we note the salvation of a person as a result of the faith of third parties, just as the Lord forgave the sins of a man because of the faith of his friends (Mk. 2:5). Their faith in the promises meant that they did not fear the commandment to kill Moses; and their faith was passed on to Moses, who in maturity likewise did not fear the wrath of Pharaoh.

11:24- see on Acts 7:35.

By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter- "When Moses was grown, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens... when he was *full forty years old* it came into his heart to visit his brethren... by faith Moses, *when he was come to years*, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Ex. 2:11; Acts 7:23; Heb. 11:24). The implication seems to be that Moses reached a certain point of maturity, of readiness, and then he went to his brethren. We too have points of maturity we must reach before the Lord gives us our next task.

So at age 40, Moses came to a crisis. He had a choice between the riches of Egypt, the pleasures of sin for a season, and choosing rather to suffer affliction with God's people and thereby fellowship the reproach of Christ. He probably had the chance to become the next Pharaoh, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; but he consciously refused this, as a pure act of the will, as an expression of faith in the future recompense of the Kingdom. There are a number of passages which invite us to follow Moses' example in this. Paul was motivated in his rejection of worldly advantage by Moses' inspiration. And as in all things, he is our example, that we might follow Christ, who also turned down the very real possibility of temporal rulership of the world- for the sake of living the life of the cross, and thereby securing our redemption.

11:25 *Choosing instead to share ill treatment with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time-* "(Moses) refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; *having chosen rather* (Gk.) to suffer affliction with the people of God" (Heb. 11:24,25) suggests that there was a struggle within the mind of Moses, between the reproach of Christ and the approbation of this world, and he then decisively came down on the right side. If we are truly saints, called out ones after the pattern of Moses, this struggle between present worldly advantage and the hope of the Kingdom must surely be seen in our minds. For this reason Moses is held up so highly as our example and pattern.

Moses could have been the next Pharaoh; according to Josephus, he was the commander of the Egyptian army. But he walked away from the possibility of being the richest man on earth, he "refused" it, because he valued "the reproach of Christ" and the recompense of the Kingdom to be *greater* riches. Yet what did he know about the sufferings of Christ? Presumably he had worked out from the promises of the seed in Eden and to the fathers that the future Saviour must be reproached and rejected; and he saw that his own life experience could have a close association with that of this unknown future Saviour who would surely come. And therefore, it seems, Moses counted the honour and wonder of this greater than the riches of Egypt. Both Paul and Moses rejected mammon for things which are abstract and

intellectual (in the strict sense): the *excellency* of the understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross, and the Kingdom this would enable. Living when we do, with perhaps a greater knowledge of the Lord's victory and excellency, our motivation ought to be even stronger.

11:26- see on 10:35; Phil. 3:8.

Considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. For he looked to the greater reward- Even within Hebrews, the description of Moses' rejection of Egypt for the sake of Christ is shown to be our example: "Esteeming the *reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures (i.e. Pharaoh's treasures, which he could have had if he succeeded as Pharaoh) in Egypt... let us go forth therefore unto (Jesus) without the camp, *bearing his reproach*" (Heb. 11:26; 13:13). We should be even eager to bear 'reproach for the name of Christ' as Moses did (1 Pet. 4:14), knowing it is a surety of our sharing his resurrection. For Moses, "the reproach of Christ" was his having "respect unto the recompense of the reward". He therefore must have understood in some detail that there would be a future Saviour, who would enable the eternal Kingdom promised to Abraham through his bearing the reproach of this world. Such was Moses' appreciation of this that it motivated him to reject Egypt. His motivation, therefore, was based upon a fine reflection upon the promises to Abraham and other oblique prophecies of the suffering Messiah contained in the book of Genesis. Moses knew he could have a share in the sufferings of the future saviour and thereby share his reward, because he saw the implication that Messiah would be our representative. Yet those promises are the very things which Christians now say they are bored of hearing every few weeks on a Sunday evening. No wonder we lack Moses' desire to share Christ's reproach, and thereby reject the attractions of this world. The way Moses had "respect unto the recompense of the reward" is our example; for again, even within Hebrews, we are exhorted: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great *recompense of reward*" (Heb. 11:26; 10:35). The Greek for "respect" means to look away from all else; indicating how single-mindedly and intensely did Moses look ahead to the Kingdom; the knowledge of which was, in terms of number of words, scant indeed. All he had was the covenants of promise.

Moses fought with the temptation to just observe from a distance, but then he came out into the open, declaring that he was a Hebrew, rejecting his kind Egyptian foster mother, openly declaring that he was not really her son, as both she and he had claimed for 40 years. He would have borne the shame of all this, "the reproach of Christ" (Heb. 11:26). But he was not ashamed to call Israel his brethren, as Christ is not ashamed of us (Heb. 2:11 - one of many allusions to Moses in Hebrews). All this suggests that like Moses, our Lord came to a point where he "came down" from obscurity to begin his work of deliverance. The references to 'coming down' in John's Gospel allude to this.

It is possible that Moses appreciated that he was a type of Christ the future Messiah; he considered "the reproach of Christ" enough to motivate him to reject the attractions of Egypt (Heb. 11:26); he knew he was sharing the sufferings of the future, ultimate saviour, and the wonder of that alone was enough to motivate him to leave the attractions of this world- even the possibility of being the next Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth. The similarities between Jesus and Moses are too many to sensibly tabulate. There is ample opportunity to enter deeply into the attitude of Moses towards Israel, and it is this which perhaps most valuably deepens our appreciation of the love of Christ for us, and of our own liability to failure after the pattern of Israel.

Moses was willing to give both his physical and *eternal* life for the salvation of Israel (Ex. 32:29-32), that God's Name might be upheld. He so loved and respected God's character, His personality (all bound up in His Name) that he was willing to forego all personal blessings, even life itself, just because of the wonder of God. A less spiritually mature Moses had been motivated 40 years earlier by his respect of the recompense of the reward (Heb. 11:26). But now his motive is the glory of God's Name. Personal possession of the Kingdom *is* held up as a motivator in our lives; but surely, like Moses, we ought to progress towards a desire to see the achievement of God's glory, rather than being obsessed with personally finding our place in the political Kingdom.

11:27 *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the anger of the king-* But Moses *did* flee Egypt, because he feared the wrath of the King (Ex. 2:14,15). It seems that Moses had at best a mixture of motives, or motives that changed over time; yet God sees through his human fear, and discerns an element of calm faith within Moses as he left Egypt. This is a theme here in Hebrews 11; weak faith is counted as faith all the same. In similar vein, at the time of the burning bush, Moses seems to have forgotten God's covenant name, he didn't immediately take off his shoes in respect as he should have done, and it seems he feared to come close to God due to a bad conscience, and he resisted God's invitation for him to go forth and do His work (Ex. 3:5-7,10,11,18; 4:1,10-14). And yet at this very time, the New Testament says that Moses showed faith in the way he perceived God (Lk. 20:37). But it was a momentary faith, valid all the same. Moses fled from Egypt, not fearing the wrath of Pharaoh; he went in faith (Heb. 11:27). But the Exodus record explains that actually he couldn't keep this level of faith, and fled in fear (Ex. 2:14,15).

For he endured, because he saw Him who is invisible- *Hupomone* is generally translated "patience" or "endurance"; the idea is of the staying power that keeps a man going to the end. The meaning of *hupomone* grows as we experience more trials (Rom. 5:3; James 1:3). We find that the longer we endure in the Truth, the more we can echo the words of Peter, when the Lord asked him (surely with a lump in His throat) if he was going to turn back: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (Jn. 6:68). There is no third road in the daily decisions we face. Over the months and years, *hupomone* becomes part of our essential character; keeping on keeping on is what life comes to be all about, no matter what short term blows and long term frustrations we face. The longer we endure, the stronger that force is, although we may not feel it. Moses is described as having it at the time he fled from Egypt, even though in the short term his faith failed him at the time and he fled in fear (Ex. 2:14,15). Yet God counted him as having that basic ability to endure, even to endure through his own failure and weakness. *This* is what God looks at, rather than our day-to-day acts of sin and righteousness. See on Heb. 12:28.

Moses forsook the possibilities of Egypt not just for the reproach of Christ"; he was also motivated by the fact that "he endured (Gk. was vigorous), as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). It was *as if* he had seen the invisible God, as he later asked to. He had the faith that sees what the rational eye cannot see (:1). When the disciples asked to see God, the Lord said that the manifestation of His character which they had seen in him was the same thing (Jn. 14:8). Our experience of seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, with unveiled face like Moses, ought to be a *wondrous* experience. When Moses asked to physically see God, the Angel proclaimed the characteristics of God before him. So when we read of Moses *as if* seeing God at the time he decided to forsake Egypt, this must mean that he so appreciated God's Name and character, he so had faith in the future Kingdom which this great Name and character promise, that he left Egypt. The Lord Jesus fed for strength on the *majesty* of the Name of Yahweh (Mic. 5:4). Therefore an appreciation of the

Name of Yahweh is what will motivate us to forsake the attractions of this temporal world. This does not mean, of course, that simply pronouncing than Name in our prayers and readings is enough. We must develop an appreciation of God's righteousness, so that we read of His demonstration of grace, of mercy, of truth, of judgement for sin, and love it, revel in it, respect it. As Paul says, if we behold the glory of the Lord as Moses did, we will by that very fact be changed into the same image of that glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Yet such an appreciation needs constant feeding and development. It is tragic, absolutely tragic, that over the next 40 years Moses lost this height of appreciation, until at the burning bush he seems to have almost completely lost his appreciation of the Name. Whatever spiritual heights we may reach is no guarantee that we must inevitably stay there.

Several Old Testament anticipations of the crucifixion involve a time of great darkness when God Himself 'came down', in a way reminiscent of the theophany on Sinai. There God Himself in person in some form 'came down' to earth. Moses saw His back parts, but not His face; for no man can see the face of God and live. He saw the face of the Angel and spoke to him as a man speaks with his friend. Moses seeing the back parts of God could even mean that God Himself came down to earth. If He did this at the institution of the Old Covenant: how much more at the death of His very own Son? The reference in Heb. 11:27 to Moses as having endured seeing the invisible may lend support to this idea that Moses did in fact see the back parts of the God whose *face* cannot be seen by men. I submit that likewise He was there, almost physically, at the cross. The blood of the covenant was shed before Him, in His presence, just as countless sacrifices in the tabernacle had foreshadowed for centuries beforehand. See on Jn. 19:19.

11:28- see on 1 Cor. 10:10.

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the firstborns should not touch them- This is another example of how the faith of one party can save others. It would not be surprising if Israel were not all obedient to the command to daub their doorposts with blood; but they were saved by Moses' faith rather than their obedience.

Israel's deliverance through the Red Sea seems to be attributed to Moses' faith (Heb. 11:28,29; Acts 7:36,38). Yet in the actual record, Moses seems to have shared Israel's cry of fear, and was rebuked for this by God (Ex. 14:15,13,10). Yet in the midst of that rebuke, we learn from the New Testament, God perceived the faith latent within Moses, beneath that human fear and panic. we can as it were do the work of the Saviour Himself, if we truly live as in Him. In this spirit, *Moses'* faith in keeping the Passover led to *Israel's* salvation, they left Egypt *by* him (Heb. 3:16; 11:28); and when Aaron deserved death, he was redeemed by Moses' prayer on his behalf (Dt. 9:20). Israel were intensely disobedient to God from the time of their exodus from Egypt, even before their deliverance from the Red Sea (Dt. 9:24 = Ex. 20:5,6). Only because of Moses' faithful keeping of the Passover did the Angel which destroyed the firstborn (both Egyptian and Hebrew- see on 1 Cor. 10:10) not destroy the whole of Israel as God had initially planned. Moses faith was not simply that God would save His people in the moment of crisis; the faith spoken of in Hebrews 11 is faith in the promises to Abraham and in his promised seed. We can conclude that these things were what motivated Moses' faith.

11:29 *By faith they passed through the Red Sea as if on dry land, which the Egyptians in trying to do were swallowed up-* "By faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them (Israel). By faith *they* (Israel) passed through the Red Sea". Yet at this time Israel were weak in faith, they passed through the Red Sea cuddling the idols of Egypt, from the day God knew them they were rebellious against Him; so runs the refrain of the prophets. It seems that due to Moses' faith in the promises

about the salvation of Abraham's seed that Israel were saved by the Passover lamb, through his faith in these promises they passed through the Red Sea; his faith was so great, his desire for their salvation so strong, that God counted it to the rest of Israel. Thus "he (Moses, in the context) brought them (Israel) out" of Egypt (Acts 7:36,38). This points forward to Christ's redemption of us, and also indicates how quickly Moses' faith rallied. And yet just prior to crossing the Sea, God rebuked Moses: "Why do you cry unto me?"- even though Moses calmly exhorted the people to have faith (Ex. 14:15 cp. 13). Yet by faith he brought them through the Red Sea. Therefore as with his first exit from Egypt (he feared the wrath of the King, and then he didn't), his faith wavered, but came down on the right side. Again we see how the examples of faith quoted in Hebrews 11 are often of faith displayed in weakness.

11:30 *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days*- Whose faith? What faith? Was Joshua-Jesus' faith counted to the people? Or was their very weak, hope-for-the-best faith all the same accepted as faith by God's grace? The faith of Joshua was in the Abrahamic promises that the seed would inherit the land- and therefore he believed that seemingly insurmountable obstacles such as Jericho's walls would fall.

11:31 *By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace*- Her faith was in the promises to Abraham and their implications; things she may have heard in garbled form from her clients. She welcomed the spies ["with peace"] because she wished to identify with the people of the promised seed, and she later married into them and became an ancestor of the promised seed Himself. She believed not simply that Yahweh was more powerful than the local gods; she believed that Canaan would be given to Abraham's seed, and she wished to identify with that seed.

Rahab's faith was faith in God's grace. For Rahab was an Amorite and according to the law of Moses there was to be no pity or covenant with them- only death (cp. Dt. 7:2). Rahab had the spiritual ambition to ask that they make a covenant with her- she requests *hesed*, the common term for covenant relationship ("deal kindly with me", Josh. 2:12 cp. 1 Sam. 20:8). And the spies made a covenant with her. Grace, like love, finds a way. Remember that she was also aware of what Israel had done to their enemies on their way to Jericho- and she appears to allude to Moses' commands to destroy utterly and *not* make covenant with the peoples of the land (Dt. 2:32-37; 7:1-5; 20:16-18).

There are times when circumstances do change the appropriacy of behaviour which in more normal life we should practice. Take lying as an example. To lie is wrong. We should be truthful. Of course. But think of Rahab. She lied- and her lie and acts of deception are quoted in the New Testament as acts of faith! Further, Rahab implied that the Israelite spies were her clients- "there came men unto me" (Josh. 2:4) appears to be a euphemism- and she gave the impression that of course, as they were merely passing clients, how did she know nor care who they were nor where they went? Her male interrogators would've found it hard to press her further for information after she said that. So she not only lied but she gave the impression that the messengers of the Kingdom of God were immoral- in order to protect both them and her. Of course the way she left a red cord hanging from her window, as if almost inviting people to imagine the spies had been let down over the wall from her home on the wall, was a tremendous act of faith and witness by her, but she presumably kept to her story that they were her anonymous clients. For she was still living in her home when the city was taken. Her witness was thus an indirect one to those who wished to perceive it, but it was made within the context of a major series of untruths. The Hebrew midwives lied to the Egyptians- and were blessed for it. And we could give other examples. If we probe further, and ask why such lies were acceptable and even required, we find that often those lies were connected with saving life. To do anything that would cause the loss of human life when it is in our power to save it is dangerously close to murder.

11:32 *And what more shall I say? For time will run out if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-* "Time will run out" is another example of language appropriate to a sermon being given live; see on 13:22.

The Lord's idea of binding the strong man must surely look back to Samson. The language can't just be accidentally similar (cp. Jud. 16:21). This means that the Lord saw Samson as the very epitome of Satan, even though ultimately he was a man of faith (Heb. 11:32). Thus the Spirit doesn't forget a man's weakness, even though ultimately he may be counted righteous. The mention of all the names given here makes us reflect that all of them had weakness, quite significantly so; but their faith, weak as it was at times, was deeply impressive to God. The incomplete faith of men like Baruch was graciously counted as full faith by later inspiration (Jud. 4:8,9 cp. Heb. 11:32). The exploits later mentioned have relevance to Samson in particular, who killed a lion, escaped fire and killed many Philistines by his faith- so the Spirit tells us. Yet these things were all done by him at times when he had at best a partial faith, or was living out moments of faith. He had a worldly Philistine girlfriend, a sure grief of mind to his Godly parents, and on his way to the wedding he met and killed a lion- through faith, Heb. 11 tells us (Jud. 14:1-7). The Philistines threatened to burn him with fire, unless his capricious paramour of a wife extracted from him the meaning of his riddle. He told her, due, it seems, to his human weakness and hopeless sexual weakness. He then killed 30 Philistines to provide the clothes he owed the Philistines on account of them answering the riddle (Jud. 14:15-19). It is evident that Samson was weak in many ways at this time; the Proverbs make many allusions to him, the strong man ruined by the evil Gentile woman, the one who could take a city but not rule his spirit etc. And yet underneath all these weaknesses, serious as they were, there was a deep faith within Samson which Heb. 11 highlights.

11:33 *Those who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions-* This states that the likes of Abraham obtained promises by their faith. Yet the Old Testament record clearly enough states that the promises were just given to them by God, the calling of grace; they weren't requested by the patriarchs. Indeed, David was surprised at the promises God chose to make to him. Conclusion? God read their unspoken, unprayed for desires for Messiah and His Kingdom as requests for the promises- and responded. Their weak or hazy, vague faith was counted as faith. This was the case with the faith of Sarah and Abraham as noted earlier. See on :32.

11:34 *Quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens-* All these things have strange reference to Samson; see on :32. Perhaps he is the particular epitome of Old Testament faith which is chosen, because his faith was so weak. Paul is not appealing for perfection; he is teaching that God is eager to accept any faith in His promises as faith, and the Hebrews should not be influenced by the perfectionism of Judaism to think that weak faith was not acceptable. That encouragement is needed today by those who have been spiritually abused by the high bars and standards demanded of them by legalistic religion. Samson is listed amongst those who out of weakness were made strong. A character study of Samson must remember this about him. This could suggest that he was even weaker than a normal man; or it could be a reference to the way in which out of his final spiritual weakness and degradation he was so wonderfully strengthened (Jud. 16:28).

11:35 *Women received their dead by a resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection-* The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22); and thus Heb. 11:35 alludes to this incident by saying that through faith- in this case, the faith of Elijah, a

third party- women received their dead raised to life. The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Heb. 11 cites women receiving their dead back to life as an example of faith. Because of the faith and prayers of the women, a third party, their dead loved ones were at times resurrected. Lazarus being raised because of his faithful sisters Martha and Mary is the obvious example we know about, but the Hebrew writer may well have had his mind on unrecorded Old Testament examples too. Our faith in prayer in some sense limits God's ability. But "faith" in Hebrews 11 is specifically faith in the promises to Abraham which form the basis of the new covenant. The women mentioned therefore believed that the promises implied future resurrection; and yet they believed that those promises could have some present realization too.

Some were tortured "not accepting redemption" because their eyes of faith were upon the future resurrection implied in the promises to Abraham. By implication they accepted the true redemption of the blood of Christ rather than the pseudo-redemption offered by this world and the claims of Judaism and the temple cult. Again, the redeeming work of Christ is what fortifies men against the fake Kingdom and redemption of the anti-Christ anti-Kingdom of this world. There will be degrees of reward in God's Kingdom- a "better resurrection" for those who endured torture. The comfort is that those who did not endure- and there would have been many- may also be saved. But those who did will have a "better resurrection". This gradation of service and reward, some trading their talents better than others, is impossible for the legalistic mindset to cope with. But ranges of possible response to God's love, and appropriate eternal consequence for the choices made, is all the stuff of living personal relationship with God.

11:36 *And others were tested by mockings and whippings, yes, also by bonds and imprisonment-* These words are all used about the sufferings of Paul and his team, many of them witnessed personally by the Hebrew Christians. And of course Paul had himself done these things to the Hebrew Christians. So these anonymous "others" would bring the cloud of witnesses painfully up to date; for there is a chronological progression throughout Hebrews 11 to this point.

11:37 *They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tested, they were killed with the sword. They went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated-* The reference may be to various Jewish traditions about the fate of the prophets and some Jews during the time of the Maccabees. But the point of Hebrews 11 is that the faithful endured for the sake of their faith in the promises to Abraham, the same new covenant which was operative for the Hebrew Christians. So I personally doubt that the heroics of the Maccabees is paramount in reference here. I have noted throughout that it was often flecks of faith in moments of weakness which are being picked up here in the record. It was Jacob who wore animal skins- in deceit and weakness, but out of an enthusiasm for the promises to Abraham to be made to him. And thus he became destitute, afflicted and ill-treated by Laban. Perhaps John the Baptist is also in view; he is presented as a cameo of all the faithful (Heb. 11:37 = Mk. 1:6 and 1 Cor. 15:47 = Jn. 3:31).

11:38 *(Of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and the holes of the earth-* The "world" in John's Gospel and at times in Hebrews often refers to the Jewish world. The Jewish world had turned away from God and His Son, and the fact the faithful listed so far were largely Jews meant that the Jewish world was not worthy of them. This was another warning to the Hebrews not to return to Judaism and the Jewish world. It was faithless Israel who wandered in deserts; but for some, they did so in faith in the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, that at the end of their desert wandering there would be a promised land. David's wandering in deserts and mountains under persecution was

motivated by faith in the promise that somehow, God's Kingdom would be established in Israel and the ancient promises come true, as well as those given to him personally. The possibility of a reference to David is strengthened by the next phrase about living in caves and holes. For identical language is found in 1 Sam. 13:6 concerning Israel's pining away when under attack by the Philistines. Yet some did so in faith that the Abrahamic promises would be fulfilled, even though it seemed at the time that Philistine domination was never going to permit that. Likewise "The children of Israel made them the dens ('dry river channels') which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds" (Jud. 6:2). Some of the Israelites who fled to the dens and caves in Jud. 6:2 are described as heroes of faith because of their faith that somehow, enemy domination would and must end because of the implications of the promises to Abraham. And yet their domination by the Philistines was a result of their idolatry. They were idolatrous, and yet some had faith; and it was this faith which was perceived by God.

11:39 *And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, did not receive the fulfilment of the promise-* That witness, as noted on :11, was before God in the court room of Heaven. Judaism posited that the promises to Abraham and the new covenant had already been fulfilled because Israel were in their land and had the temple system. Paul is arguing that Christians are identified with the Old Testament faithful who did not consider that those things meant that the promises had been fulfilled. Seeing God keeps His promises, there had to come a far fuller fulfilment, of "eternal inheritance", implying eternal life.

11:40 *God having provided some better thing involving us, that without us they should not be made perfect-* All the believers are rewarded *together*, at the same time; the Greek for "without us" means 'at a space from'. Therefore there was no way that Judaism's claim that the promises had been fulfilled could be true. This verse may also teach that the number of 'the believers' is completed only by our development of faith- implying that the sooner this happens, the sooner the united perfection of the faithful can occur. God "provided" or planned this in advance; because the eye of faith can perceive how the ages of human history were structured by Him (:3). He is the "architect" of the city of God's Kingdom to come (:10). Being "made perfect" is therefore presented as the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham; and it is this moral "perfection" by imputed righteousness which the new covenant offered, according to how Paul has reasoned so far in Hebrews. Yet the literal realization of that in physical terms shall come only when the Lord returns. Then we shall be "made perfect", and not by offering animals now. It is the Lord Jesus, the seed of Abraham, who was "made perfect" by His sufferings (2:10; 5:9; 7:28). By being in Him, we too shall share that perfection; whereas obedience to the law made nobody perfect (7:19; 9:9). By status and in prospect, we have already been "made perfect" (10:14), the spirits or characters of dead believers have already been "made perfect" in God's record book (12:23), but the physical outworking of that shall be when all believers in imputed righteousness are "made perfect" by nature at the second coming.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 12

12:1- see on Rom. 14:8,9.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us- We are to run the race encouraged by all those who have held on to their faith previously- for that is what encouraged them in their day. The Hebrews were returning to legalism, offering sacrifices for sin rather than trusting in the Lord's work. And by so doing they were actually cumbering themselves with sin, and with 'weights' which hindered their running the race.

The race could imply that before each of us an individualized racetrack is set, and we are to run that race having laid aside every distraction. Ask God to reveal to you His intentions and specific plans for you. Likewise when Paul wrote of shedding *the* sin which doth so easily beset us, he may have been suggesting that we each have our own specific weakness to overcome. This is certainly a comfort to us in our spiritual struggles. We aren't alone in them. They were given to us. We aren't alone with our nature. The purpose and plan of God for us is articulated even through the darkest nooks of our very essential being. Understanding this should make us the more patient with our brethren, whose evident areas of weakness are not ours. The race is "set before us", and the same word is used of how the Lord Jesus ran His race looking at the joy "set before" Him (:2). The connection is in that the race and the joy are the same, they merge into one, the road becomes the destination, for those who have the solid hope of salvation ahead of them.

12:2 *Looking to Jesus the author and completer of faith, who for the joy that was set before him-* The race is to be run (:1) with our eye on "Jesus" as the finish point. Our ultimate aim is to become like Him; "we shall be like Him". The joy set before the Lord was to sit at the right hand of God, where He mediates for us. In chapters 8-10 the argument has been that as the Lord entered the Holiest and there does service for us, so we have also entered. Our joy ahead is to be His joy, to be as Him, in working for others to the Father's glory. Our efforts to do so in this life are designed to help us acquire a taste for that eternal way of being.

"Author" could be translated "prince / leader", but the translation "author" is valid; and it connects with Him being also the completer of our faith. Grace means that God and not ourselves takes the initiative. As noted on 11:1, true faith in God is predicated upon the Lord Jesus; it is encounter with Him which authors faith in us. And He develops, matures and completes it, if we let Him. All appeals to scientific 'evidence' [falsely so called] for God and the Bible are pointless and misdirecting us; for it is the Lord Jesus who authors and develops faith in our hearts, through the work of the Spirit which matures our faith. "Completer" is the same word just used in 11:40 of how we shall be "made perfect" at His return; but that point of faith reached at our death or His coming will have been developed by His direct action in our lives. Hebrews 11 speaks of how so many died in faith, the process of faith development continued unto the end of their days. In this we see the significance of old age; we may cease to have much significance in secular life, but the Lord's process of developing our faith continues unto the end. We must remember that the Lord's efforts to mature faith continue in the lives of all His people, including those whom we may consider too far gone in their falling away. Any efforts we make for them will have His blessing, and will be channels of His activity for them.

"Set before" can imply a vision, as if Christ saw something in front of Him as He hung on the cross. The spirit of Christ in Ps. 16:11 describes Christ looking forward to fullness of joy in God's Heavenly presence, because "at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore". Christ is now at God's right hand interceding for us. Therefore we suggest that the joy set

before Christ in vision as He hung on the cross was the joy of His future mediation for our sins as we repent of them and confess them in prayer.

“For the joy set before Him He endured the cross” may seem on first reading to mean that He did serve for a reward. Until we understand that the Greek word *anti* translated “for” really means ‘in place of’. With evident reference to the wilderness temptation to take the Kingdom joys without the cross, the writer is making the point that instead of the joy that the tempter of His own flesh set before Him, He endured the cross.

Endured the cross, despising the shame, and has been sat down at the right hand of the throne of God- The shame of the cross is a theme of the records. The reproach broke the Lord's heart (Ps. 69:20). It could even be that He suffered a heart rupture, a literal broken heart, some hours prior to His death- hence when His side was pierced, blood flowed out- and corpses don't usually bleed. It has been commented that severe emotional trauma is enough to cause such a rupture. He wasn't hard and impervious to it all. He knew who He was, and where He was going. To be treated as He was, was such an insult to the God of all grace. And He keenly sensed this. Heb. 12:2,3 parallels the Lord's enduring of the cross with His enduring "such contradiction of sinners against Himself". These mockings were therefore part of "the cross". The "cross" process began before His impalement; in the same way as some verses which evidently concern the crucifixion are applied to the Lord's earlier life. His was *a life* of cross carrying. And we are asked to live the same life, not just the occasional 'cross' of crisis, but a life embodying the cross principles.

There's significant Old Testament emphasis upon the fact that those who are truly on the Lord's side shall not be put to shame. It was prophesied of the Lord Jesus that He set His face like a flint, "that I shall not be ashamed" (Is. 50:7). Perhaps His lack of destructive anger was because He didn't let Himself be shamed by men, instead taking His self-worth and values from God's acceptance of Him. To avoid "anger" in the wrong sense, we need to avoid being wrongly shamed. And we can do this by ensuring we ourselves aren't led into shame, due to placing too great a value upon the opinions of men. Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God (Jer. 6:15). Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness. Thus Jeremiah recalls how his repentance involved being ashamed, and yet then being "instructed" (Jer. 31:19). It's through knowing this kind of shame before God that we come to a position where we are unashamed. Thus Joel begins his prophecy with a call to "be ashamed" before God for sin, and concludes with the comfort that in this case, "my people shall never [again] be ashamed" (Joel 1:1; 2:27). In this sense we can understand the comment that the Lord Jesus 'despised the shame' of the cross (Heb. 12:2). He 'thought against' it [Gk.], he refused to be shamed before men, even though naked and bedraggled and humanly defeated; for He believed that He was being 'lifted up' in glory from God's viewpoint. Paul could say that it mattered very little to him how men thought of him, for the Lord's judgment was all that mattered (1 Cor. 4:4); and the Lord Jesus gave somewhat the same impression, for He evidently "regarded not the person of men" (Mt. 22:16). If our value, validation, self-worth etc. are dependent upon men's opinions of us, then we're likely to be easily shamed; and this sets us up for all manner of anger feelings, and makes us the more easily woundable by those whose acceptance we crave. Quite simply- if God has accepted us, then don't let ourselves be shamed by men.

12:3 *Think on him that endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart-* "Think on Him" is the essence of true spirituality and Christianity; it is who we are when nobody is watching which is the litmus test of our faith. We need to repeatedly challenge ourselves with the question as to how much we are thinking on Him; whether we are truly Christ-centred or not. Thinking about issues vaguely connected

to our religion is not always the same as this mental focus upon Him which is so utterly critical. The apostasy of the Hebrews was most essentially a mental issue; they were growing weary and fainting in their minds (AV) in that they were losing their personal focus upon the Lord Jesus.

12:4- see on Col. 2:1.

In your striving against sin you have yet to resist to the point of shedding your blood- Sin is personified here, as it often is. Once that basic truth is accepted, it should not be difficult to appreciate that sometimes that personification is called satan or the devil, the great enemy.

We must balance ourselves against Him who endured such contradiction, and the more freely confess that we “have not yet resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin”. Only by a personal reconstruction and reliving of the cross, and a serious, sustained attempt to live out something of its spirit in our lives, will we come to a recognition of the depth of our own failure, our need for His grace, and an appreciation of what really was done for us. And if we realize all this, we will respond- mightily. As the forgiveness suggested by the sin offering led on to the burnt offering (with its message of dedication), so our desperation leads to our dedication (Lev. 5:7).

The struggle against sin in the Lord which led to blood alludes to His sweat as blood drops. It is a call for us to recognize this, and to have the picture of our Lord in Gethsemane as a motivation "lest we be wearied, and faint in (our) minds". Paul is saying: 'You've never got anywhere near that intensity. So don't get tired of the unending mental battle against your natural mind. Consider Him there' (Lk. 22:44). But, the implication is, we ultimately should. We bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal body (2 Cor. 6:10)- not just at resurrection, but now. And it is through this that we bear witness to the resurrected Jesus. He can be seen as alive because He lives in us. The disciples in Gethsemane slumbered and slept when the Lord had specifically asked them to struggle on in prayer. A stone's throw from them, the Son of God was involved in a height of spiritual struggle utterly unequalled. And they dozed off in the midst of their half-serious prayers. This incident is alluded to here in a powerful appeal to us: "Consider him that endured [as the kneeling disciples should have watched the distant Lord Jesus as an inspiration to themselves]... lest *you* be wearied, and faint in *your* minds [as they did]. *Ye* have not yet resisted unto blood [cp. the Lord's sweat as drops of blood], [in your] striving against sin". Time and again Paul alludes, sometimes perhaps even subconsciously, to the record of Gethsemane. He evidently saw in those garden prayers and the disciples' sleepiness a powerful cameo of our every battle and failure; and a strong, urgent plea for us to rise up and catch the fire of real spiritual struggle.

12:5 *You have forgotten the word of encouragement which reasons with you as with sons: My son, do not regard lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor become faint when you are reproved by Him-* This alludes to the idea of a living word by speaking of an Old Testament passage as 'reasoning' with us. We are a separate people. We have been redeemed from them by the precious blood of Christ. We are spiritual Jews. What God spoke to men like Jacob, He therefore spoke to us (Hos. 12:5; Gen. 28:15 cp. Heb. 12:5,6). All Scripture is recorded for *our* learning and comfort (Rom. 15:4). The exhortation of Prov. 3:11 “speaketh unto *you* as unto children...”. Hebrews 3 quotes Psalm 95 as relevant to all readers. The warnings there for its "today" were also be a warning for the first century "today", and yet likewise we can still take hold of the past word of God and relate it to the needs of our "today". We can fail to personalize God's word, in the sense of realizing that it speaks to us personally. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar what would happen to him unless he repented; and he wouldn't listen. When his judgment came, God told him: “O King Nebuchadnezzar, *to thee it is spoken*: The

kingdom is departed from thee" (Dan. 4:31). We have a way of reading and hearing, and yet not making the crucial connection with ourselves.

The quotation from Proverbs 3 is about how "my son" should accept discipline. But the "my son" passages in Proverbs were particularly relevant to the Lord Jesus. Prov. 3:4 speaks of the son growing in favour with God and man, and that is quoted about the Lord in Lk. 2:52. Here, a few verses later in Prov. 3:12, the "my son" is defined as "the son in whom [the heavenly Father] delights". That Son in whom God's soul delighted was the Lord Jesus. And so a passage specifically about the Lord is quoted here about us, implying we are in Him. And that is exactly the context here in Hebrews 12. The Lord's sufferings are to be seen as ours, and all are specific hard experiences are to be understood as in some way a fellowshipping of His sufferings.

12:6 *For the Lord disciplines those whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives*- The persecution of the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem is portrayed by Paul as the Lord's discipline. Their error was presumably in turning away from His Son and back to Judaism; and in resisting the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. But discipline should never be perceived as a withdrawal of love, and Paul emphasizes that point here. Despite their apostasy, the Father was in process of receiving [Gk. admitting, accepting] them as His adopted sons, and He was chastising them so that they would adopt the family likeness. This of course was quite against the spirit of Judaism, which assumed that Jewish birth was all that was needed to be in the Divine family. The emphasis may be upon *every* son receiving discipline and chastisement; for the Greek words are used about the Lord's chastening and suffering in His time of dying (Lk. 23:22; Mt. 20:19; Jn. 19:1). His sufferings then are ours today; and they are intended as part of our spiritual path to glory.

12:7 *Endure your sufferings as a father's chastening; it shows how God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom his father does not chastise?*- As noted on :6, the Lord's sufferings are to be ours. The Father's chastening of Him was not in the sense of correcting error, but in order to stimulate His spiritual growth. And so it is with our sufferings; they can of course be for correction, but there is no direct link between sin and suffering in the immediate term. The fact we experience sufferings which can be related to those of God's Son shows that we are indeed His children. And we can thereby take comfort that we are God's children.

12:8 *But if you are without chastening, of which all have been made partakers, then aren't you illegitimate children and not real sons?*- This is the error of the prosperity Gospel, the idea that God is the source of only positive experience. The idea is that if we don't experience God's chastening, we are not therefore His true children. We may appear His children, but we are illegitimate. The Hebrew Christians were being wooed by the temple system; their persecution from them and difficulties with the Roman authorities would apparently cease if they reunited with Judaism, which was a recognized religion under Caesar. But then they would be God's children only in appearance; in real spiritual terms, they would be illegitimate. Paul uses the same argument in the allegory of Galatians 4; the Jerusalem that now is were to be associated with Ishmael, the illegitimate son of Abraham, and not with Isaac, in whom the seed was called. "Partakers" is a major theme in Hebrews; we are made partakers in Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of the calling from Heaven (1:9; 3:1,14; 6:4). But these wonderful things involve likewise a partaking in the Lord's sufferings under God's good hand; and "all" the true children must partake of them.

12:9 *Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them respect; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*- The chastening of our natural fathers was to set us in the path of being normal responsible human

beings after the flesh. But all the same, a life no matter how well lived ends in death. God's chastening is so that we might develop spiritually, and live eternally. To submit ourselves to God means more specifically submitting ourselves to the gift of His righteousness and not seeking to 'get' righteousness by our own works; Judaism had failed to submit to God in this way (Rom. 10:3). We have been made subject to the Lord Jesus (Eph. 1:22; 5:24), made the footstool of His feet in status (10:13), but we must live this out in practice. Thus all things have been put in subjection under Him in prospect and in status, but now we see not yet all things subjected unto Him in practice (2:8). In :23 we will read of the spirits of just men perfected; their spirits, who they were in essence, had been perfected by the Father's work with them through the processes of chastisement throughout their lives.

12:10 *For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but He for our profit, so that we may be partakers of His holiness-* This was an appeal to the Hebrew culture of respect to fathers. The problem was that many of the Hebrew Christians had fathers who were or had been in their lives staunch Judaists. The call of the Gospel was to be in subjection to our heavenly Father more than to the fathers of our flesh. The discipline of human fathers is often *ad hoc* and at times inappropriate; here too severe, there too lax. But the hand of the heavenly Father is not like that; we can be guaranteed that every touch of His hand is for our eternal "profit". That word is associated with the work of the Spirit in human lives (Jn. 16:7; 1 Cor. 12:7), which is how in practice God chastises / operates in our lives.

Our chastening by God is so "that we might be partakers of His holiness". The ideas of sanctification and holiness are parallel (e.g. "sanctify yourselves... for I am holy", Lev. 11:44). It is the word of the Gospel that sanctifies (Jn.17:17), thus enabling us to be partakers of God's holiness. The message of the Gospel word is that event now has ultimate meaning, for it is the good news that God's chastening is preparing us to be sanctified / made holy so that we may do His work. Paul has previously argued that the goal of our spiritual journey is that we in Christ might enter the holiest to do God's service, for others to His glory. As noted on :8, we are partakers in the Lord and His sufferings, but our identity with Him means that we are both now and eternally partakers in His holiness, His righteousness imputed to us.

12:11 *All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit to those that have been exercised thereby- the fruit of righteousness-* There is a parallel between the action of the Gospel word upon a man and the effect of trials: "Chastening... yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11 AV). Yet "the word of righteousness... strong meat" leads to those who respond to the word of God "by reason of use (having) their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (5:13,14); and the word abiding in us also yields the fruits of righteousness (Jn. 15:4,7). The word of the Gospel enables us to make sense of "all chastening", and there is a synthesis between our life experience and that word, whereby we can be assured that there is no such thing as random event in our lives, but all chastening has a potential role to play in exercising us unto the fruit of righteousness. The "fruit of righteousness" is a term elsewhere used about the fruits of the Spirit filling our lives insofar as the gift of the Spirit works within believing hearts (Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11). Paul speaks of the work of the Spirit here in terms of the Lord's chastening, designed to bring forth spirituality in our spirit or character. To receive the Spirit, therefore, is no joyful thing in practice in that it will be associated with Divinely directed chastening.

12:12 *Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees-* The Hebrews were fainting in the Gospel race. Now if Scripture interprets Scripture at all, this just has to be an allusion back to feeble-kneed Moses, with his hanging-down hands being held up. And the apostle says: 'You are the one with feeble knees and hands, represented by

Moses in Ex. 17¹!. This allusion also critiques the Judaist view of Moses as the supreme icon of spirituality. But the quotation in full is from Is. 35:3, which urges the spiritually weak to be strengthened because the day of the Messianic Kingdom is very near. And this was so relevant to the Hebrew Christians. Paul again reasons as if the second coming was just around the corner; and it could've been in the first century. But God's people refused to heed the exhortations, and so that day was delayed until our last days.

12:13 *And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be disabled further, but rather be healed-* The unbelieving world is repeatedly characterized as walking in a crooked path (Lk. 3:5; Acts 2:40; Phil. 2:15 and often in Proverbs). Quietly starting every day right is part of our walking in a *straight* path, following the way of the cherubim, walking in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25); and by walking in that straight daily path we will not have opportunity to stumble. But the message here is not just personal; we are to make straight paths for our collective feet as a community, so that the lame may not be further stumbled but rather be healed. Church life in community so often ends up placing a cloud of legislation and legalistic conformities in the way of the stumbling, so that they are not healed but made to stumble further. The church should be a straight path between God's Kingdom and stumbling man; that is to be the repeated and simple focus of all collective activity. And by not doing so, we are going to be guilty of causing others to stumble, which nets condemnation.

12:14 *Follow after peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one shall see the Lord-* The idea of "peace" is of peace with God and each other on the basis of sin forgiven. This is the way to make straight collective paths for our communal feet (see on :13). If we are to partake in the Lord's holiness (see on :10), we are to seek it proactively. The idea of following after connects with the picture of following a straight path in :13. It is a lack of peace within the community which causes the lame to stumble further; and a focus upon holiness and holding in view the final end of 'seeing the Lord' will lead us to avoid making others stumble. Seeing the Lord is understood in Revelation in fairly literal terms; God Himself shall dwell upon earth, we will see His face, as Job and others hoped for. This is further evidence that we are to understand God as a personal being rather than as an abstraction.

12:15- see on 1 Jn. 2:28.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many are defiled- The bitter root refers to a poisonous plant growing up in the path to the Kingdom spoken of in :13 and :14. It is the responsibility of each of us, and not just the elders, to ensure that none fail of God's grace; and the Judaist menace was taking people away from that grace. The bitter rooted plant could lead to many being defiled, a term with cultic overtones. Defilement meant that the defiled could no longer serve in the temple cult, and the holiness / imputed righteousness which was to be followed after and attained by grace would then be made null and void. The quotation is from Dt. 29:18 LXX which speaks of a false teacher arising and inviting God's people to serve the idols of the world around them. This is how Paul presented the Judaizers with their appeal to the Jerusalem Christians to return to the apparent monotheism of the temple cult. It was no more than idolatry; and we noted on 1:1 that Paul was deeply touched by Stephen's address in Acts 7 and reflects it in his reasoning to the Hebrew Christians. Stephen too had by inference made this same point. And this is how Judaism should be seen by Christians today.

12:16 *Ensure that no one is an immoral or Godless person like Esau, who for one meal sold his own birthright-* The false teachers of :15 are associated with immorality; and this connection is seen throughout the New Testament warnings against false teachers. They were not simply intellectually mistaken. There was a moral issue too; Judaism was attractive even

to Gentile converts in places like Corinth and Ephesus because the idea of justification through a few rituals opened up the way to behave immorally in other areas of life which were outside the circumference of the rituals. The Hebrew Christians had identified with Isaac, the true seed; and thereby with Jacob too. It was Judaism which was the illegitimate seed of Abraham, associated with Hagar (Gal. 4), the illegitimate children of :8. By returning to Judaism they were selling their birthright for temporal benefit of the moment- the apparent safety from Roman and Jewish persecution. Judaism is here called "Godless", just like Esau, despite his public attempts to be pleasing to his father Isaac by choosing wives he thought might please them. Esau was the firstborn, but he threw this away. The Lord Jesus is the "firstborn" of all creation, a form of the same Greek word used for "birthright". The believers are counted as the firstborn who were saved by the Passover lamb (11:28), and thus are "the church of the firstborn" (:23). But they were giving away that birthright for temporal benefit, just as many do today in different contexts.

12:17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no conditions for a change of mind, though he sought it diligently with tears- Esau before Isaac, pleading with him to change his irrevocable rejection, is picked up here as a type of the rejected at the day of judgment. The implication is that Jacob at this time symbolized the saints; yet he was no saint at that time. If Esau's rejection by Isaac is indeed a picture of the rejection of the goats at the final judgment, Isaac there becomes a hazy prefigurement of our future judge. And yet the record presents a scene of both father and rejected son as shaken and helpless together, both dearly wishing it could be different (Gen. 27:33). The sadness of Isaac becomes a figure of the pathos and sadness of God in rejecting the wicked. Note how the LXX of Gen. 27:38 adds the detail: "And Isaac said nothing; and Esau wept". We are left to imagine the thoughts of Isaac's silence. Truly our God takes no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked (Ez. 33:11).

Esau's great and bitter cry for blessing is quoted here as typical of the attitude of all the rejected. He had earlier shrugged at the implications of selling his birthright, but now his self-rejection was being worked out in practice. The rejected argue back "When did we see you...?". Surely they wouldn't have bothered doing so, unless they were upset at their rejection, and desiring to see the verdict altered. Israel's passing through the Red Sea is a definite type of baptism, and their largely unsuccessful wilderness journey therefore becomes a pattern of failed Christian lives. Yet when they were told that they were unworthy to enter the land, obvious as it must have been to them, they repented and were willing to make any sacrifice to enter it (Num. 14:40-48). When they disobeyed God's word and fled to Egypt from the Babylonians, they then so wanted to return to their land [cp. the Kingdom]- but it was all too late (Jer. 44:14). Cain is another type of the rejected- instead of going as far away from Divine things as possible after his condemnation, he went to live on the east of Eden- where the cherubim were, guarding the barred entry to God's paradise (Gen. 4:16). The Hebrews were warned not to follow Esau's sinful example (Gen. 27:34), otherwise at the judgment they would experience what he did. In view of this, the weeping of the rejected at judgment may be as a result of desperate pleading with the Lord to change his mind. Earlier in Hebrews the point is made that "he that despised Moses' law died without mercy". The phrase "without mercy" is surely included to point out that the condemned would have earnestly pleaded for mercy, after the pattern of Cain, the foolish virgins pleading for entry... The next verse continues: "Of how much sorer punishment... shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God?" (Heb. 10:28,29), indicating that the sad picture of those condemned under the old Covenant, pleading for mercy, will be repeated at the judgment of those under the new Covenant.

And yet the impossibility of retracting the decision may not only refer to the finality of judgment day. The passage reads more comfortably as if Paul means that if they returned to the temple cult, there would be no way of coming back to Christ. And yet surely any sinner can always repent? Perhaps Paul is reasoning as in :12 (see note there) as if the Lord's return is around the corner. The temple cult was about to be destroyed as the Lord had predicted in the Olivet prophecy, and if now at the last moment the Hebrew Christians returned to it, then they were going to be destroyed in its destruction.

12:18 *For you have not come to a mountain that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest-* The new covenant means that we are not under the old covenant. We are not as Israel standing nervously before the mount Sinai as the covenant was given. The language of darkness, blackness and fire is all used elsewhere of condemnation at the last day. This was what the old covenant would lead to for sinful man. But the awesomeness of the scene there, however, looked forward to the even greater awesomeness of the things to which we stand related. The blood of Christ is as palpable as fire, and as real and actually demanding as words booming from Sinai. The mount "might be touched"- but on pain of death (Ex. 19:12), and :20 implies that some did touch it and die.

12:19 *And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words which they that heard them begged that no more words should be spoken to them-* The trumpet sound will be associated with the Lord's return and the summons to meet Him in judgment. But we can come boldly, knowing we are covered in His righteousness, not fearing our own sins and disobedience, knowing all sin has been dealt with. Israel there sensed their weakness and tendency to disobedience; they begged that the words of command would no longer be spoken to them, for they feared their own tendency to disobedience. This fear of sin and disobedience is not to be felt under the new covenant; instead we eagerly seek for progressive relationship with God through the revelation of His word to us, without fear of our spiritual inadequacy.

12:20 *For they could not endure that which was commanded- If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned-* Israel were disobedient even to the peripheral command not to touch the mountain; let alone to the actual content of the covenant. The old covenant therefore propelled men away from God rather than towards Him.

12:21 *And so fearful was the appearance that Moses said: I am exceedingly afraid and trembling-* Again there is the implication that Moses was not to be read as the acme of spirituality which Judaism presented him as. He himself sensed his own moral weakness as he climbed the mountain which would lead to death for any other being, human or animal, who touched it. There is no direct record of Moses saying what he here says; Paul may have been inspired to share this with us for the first time. But he reasons as if Moses' words were already recorded and known. We read in Ex. 19:16 that the people trembled; perhaps we are to understand that Moses as one of them, the sinful mass, trembled likewise, and said so before God. He as a sinner received the old covenant, trembling at his sense of moral failure. The contrast is thereby heightened with how the Lord Jesus, without sin, although also one of us, mediated the new covenant.

12:22- see on Jud. 5:19,20; Gal. 4:26; Eph. 2:19.

But you have come to association with mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels- Paul was writing to the Jerusalem Christians who were tempted to return to the temple cult on mount Zion. He is seeking to persuade them that the true Zion and Jerusalem is "heavenly", the community of true believers in the new covenant is a city waiting to come down from Heaven to earth as it were [as spoken of in Revelation]. But "the Jerusalem that now is" remained in bondage (Gal. 4).

The new covenant is associated with hosts of Angels, just as the old covenant was, but as explained in Heb. 1, they are under the control of the Lord Jesus and work for the guidance of those in the new covenant and not in the old.

12:23 *To the general assembly and church of the firstborns, who are enrolled in heaven; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect-* Just as :1 says we are surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses of former believers who died in faith, so we are associated with the heavenly church. There is no conscious survival of death, no immortal soul that goes to heaven after death. But through the Spirit, God is at work maturing or perfecting the spirits, the personalities, of His people; and on death, they continue to live on in His memory, as it were. Their names are in the book of life, "enrolled in heaven", and they have already been judged by God "the judge of all" His people, as being acceptable. If we abide in Christ, we can be confident of salvation should the Lord return now or we die. We are therefore associated with the community of God's true Israel, those who shall live eternally. We are all saved because of being effectively "in Christ", the firstborn (see on :16 concerning the birthright or right of being the firstborn). Only the firstborn was saved at the Passover. We are the church of firstborns, a paradox as it stands written. For there can be only one firstborn. A whole community can't be "firstborns". But we are, through being in Christ. We are the new priesthood; and the priests gave their lives to God in recognition of the fact that He had saved the lives of the firstborn at the Passover and Red Sea deliverance (Num. 3:12). Our deliverance from the world at baptism was our Red Sea. We have been saved. Those firstborns represent us, the ecclesia of firstborns (Heb. 12:23 Gk.). We are now being led towards that glorious Kingdom, when by rights we ought to be lying dead in that dark Egyptian night. The wonder of it all demands that like the Levites, we give our lives *back* to God, in service towards His children.

We are come *now* "to God the judge of all" (Heb. 12:23); God is *now* enthroned as judge (Ps. 93:2; Mt. 5:34 "the heaven is God's throne"). We are now inescapably in God's presence (Ps. 139:2); and 'God's presence' is a phrase used about the final judgment in 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10. Hence "God is [now] the judge: he putteth down one and setteth up another" (Ps. 75:7) – all of which He will also do at the last day (Lk. 14:10). So "The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now" (Mic. 7:4 Heb.). God isn't passive to human behaviour- right now "To every matter there is a time and a judgment (LXX *krisis*)" (Ecc. 8:6 RVmg.). He perceives our actions right now as critically important. And this should highlight to us the crucial importance of life and right living today.

Israel's exodus from Egypt on Passover night was a type of our exodus from the world at the second coming (Lk. 12:35,36 = Ex. 12:11). The firstborns represent us, the ecclesia of firstborns (Heb. 12:23 Gk.). Perhaps 90% of the firstborns failed to be delivered because they murmured (see on 1 Cor. 10:10), they allowed themselves to be distracted from the fundamental basis of their redemption: the blood of the lamb. What percentage will it be for the new Israel?

It's also possible that the "spirits" are the guardian Angels of the righteous (see on Dan. 5:23). We are associated with the hosts of Angels (:22). These Angels enrolled the names of the responsible at the beginning of the world, but they are capable of removal from the book. It is as if God informed the Angels of all those they would be dealing with during human history, and they subsequently have kept a record of the works of each of them as they guide them through life.

12:24 *And to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel-* Moses mediated the old covenant, shaking with fear because

of his moral weakness; whereas the Lord Jesus mediates the new covenant in an ongoing sense to all who believe, confident in His moral perfection. The blood of Abel spoke, crying out for vengeance from the ground (Gen. 4:10); but the Lord's blood is not so much a cry for vengeance as of victory and vengeance achieved. It is "the blood of sprinkling" in that blood sprinkling was used to sanctify priests and equipment for service in the tabernacle. It has been a repeated theme of Paul that the whole wonderful path of salvation is so that we might serve with the Lord Jesus in the Holiest, working for others to the Father's glory. And yet the blood of sprinkling recalls that sprinkled on the day of atonement upon the mercy seat.

The blood of Christ speaks a message, better than that of Abel. As we examine ourselves before His cross, reconstructing in our own minds the physicalities of His time of dying, we hear a voice from Him. It is a voice that shakes heaven and earth (Heb. 12:24,26). This is after the pattern of how the commanding voice of Yahweh was heard above the blood sprinkled on "the atonement cover of the ark of the Testimony" (Num. 7:89 NIV). It shows forth, as a voice, God's righteousness (Rom. 3:25,26 RV). The ark was made of shittim wood- from a root meaning 'to flog, scourge or pierce', all replete with reference to the cross. And it was there on that wooden box that Yahweh was declared in the blood sprinkled upon it. Note how there is an association between the blood of atonement and the throne of judgment in 2 Sam. 6:2 and Is. 37:16, as if we see a foretaste of our judgment in the way we respond to the Lord's outpoured blood for us. The Lord Jesus in His time of death is the "propitiation", or rather 'the place of propitiation' for our sins, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat... of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). The blood of Christ is therefore to be associated with the commanding voice of God, such is the imperative within it. Rev. 19:13 draws a connection between Christ's title as "the word of God" and the fact His clothing is characterised by the blood of His cross. Ps. 40:9 describes how the Lord Jesus accomplished God's will as the ultimate sacrifice, through the death of the cross. That death is foretold by the Lord, in the prophetic perfect, as 'preaching righteousness to the great congregation' [LXX *ekklesia*]. In living out the dying of the man Christ Jesus in our daily lives, we are making the witness of Christ.

12:25 *See you do not reject him that speaks. For if they did not escape when they rejected Him that warned them on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that warns from heaven-* The One who speaks ["warned" is not a good translation; the Greek means literally to preach or speak] is the Lord Jesus, personified as His blood in :24. The same word translated "reject" is that used in :19 of Israel rejecting the word of the old covenant. They rejected God's word because they feared the massing up of commandments to obey. They totally missed the point of relationship with God on the basis of His word. And the same fear of God's demands was to be seen in the Hebrews of the first century turning away from the voice of the cross of Christ. He there is indeed a voice speaking to us, demanding much of us- not in terms of obedience to legislation and commandments, but in asking us to believe that because of His work there, we shall surely be saved, our sins are no longer a barrier between God and us; and the joy and confidence arising from this should lead us to a life of total response and commitment. To turn away from the voice of the cross, as the Hebrews were doing, means there can be no escape, no place to run, at judgment day. The Lord had used the same word in saying that the Jews would have no way to "escape" condemnation (Mt. 23:33). The same word is also used in each of the accounts of the Olivet prophecy of how the Christians would "escape" from Jerusalem; it was those who remained dedicated to the temple who did not escape and were destroyed in AD70.

The events of the crucifixion are an epitome of who the Lord most essentially was and is. His soul was made 'sin' in that He "poured out His soul unto death" (Is. 53:12). The Hebrew

for "poured out" also means to make naked, to stretch out. The Lord bared His soul, who He essentially was, was displayed there for all to see; the wine was His blood which was Him, in the sense that the cross is who the son of God essentially was and is and shall ever be. "This is Jesus" was and is the title over the cross. There, for our redemption, He died (Heb. 9:15), He gave us *Himself* (1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14), His life (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45), His blood (1 Pet. 1:18,19; Eph. 1:7). His death, His life, His blood, these are all essentially *Himself*. The blood of Jesus speaks to us as if *He personally* speaks to us; He is personified as His blood (Heb. 12:24,25). This is the preaching (Gk. the word) of the cross. Paul makes the connection between the voice of Christ's blood and the earthquake that shook all things at the time of the Old Covenant's inauguration. The voice of that blood can shake *all things* with the exception of the Kingdom, which cannot be shaken. This is the power of the cross. Human words, platform speaking, magazine articles- all these are so limited, although our communal life is inevitably built around them. See on Jn. 6:51; Heb. 9:20.

12:26 *Whose voice then shook the earth, but now He has promised, saying: Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also heaven-* The voice of the cross is far stronger than the voice associated with the old covenant, which was so powerful it caused an earthquake which shook Sinai (Ex. 19:18). The voice of the cross made and makes all of heaven and earth to shake. The quotation from Hag. 2:6 speaks of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and its rebuilding in the Messianic Kingdom. But the restoration did not work out as it potentially could have done. The temple was not rebuilt according to the specifications of Ez. 40-48, and most of the Jews preferred to remain in Babylon. But the essence of the restoration prophecies comes true in the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus and His work. The implication is that the past destruction of the Jerusalem temple was the first shaking of the earth; but a shaking of the whole planet was coming, and the only thing left would be the Kingdom of God, that which cannot be shaken and destroyed, in the language of the image prophecy of Dan. 2:44. The language of 'shaking' connects with the Lord's prediction of the shaking of the heavens as a prelude to the destruction of the temple and His return in glory (Lk. 21:26 s.w.).

12:27 *And further: Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain-* The things made and visible were those of the Jerusalem temple cult. These too were to be shaken and destroyed; the only unshakeable things which remain are those of the Kingdom of God. As noted on 11:1, the things that are made, that are visible, referred to the immediately visible things of the temple cult; the eye of faith saw beyond them to the city which has foundations, the Kingdom of God to come on earth. "Yet once more" was being understood by Paul to mean that as the first temple was destroyed, so the temple which stood in the first century would also be destroyed as Haggai's prophecy had its fulfilment. But in the final fulfilment of these things, absolutely all things shall be shaken and fall, just as Sinai shook and the temple was brought to nothing. The only permanent thing which shall remain will be the solid mountain of God's Kingdom on earth. But this shaking of all things is on account of the voice of the blood of Christ; it is His victory on the cross which would remove the temple cult, and on account of His life [represented by His blood] all things on earth would be shaken to nothing so that His eternal Kingdom can be established, the fulfilment of the new covenant promises to Abraham.

12:28 *Therefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe-* The receipt of the Kingdom is ongoing in this life. But the language of receiving a kingdom is appropriate to the king of the kingdom, rather than the subjects. The same words are used in the Lord's parable about Himself going to the "far country" of Heaven "to receive for himself a kingdom and to

return" (Lk. 19:12). Yet again, language personally relevant to the Lord Jesus alone is used about all who are in Him. We recall how in chapters 8-10 Paul has argued that because we are "in Christ", we are also with Him in the Holiest, in Heaven itself, doing the work of the High Priest. The rest of this verse goes on to use language appropriate to the priesthood; doing pleasing service to God with reverence. This priestly service is essentially service of others, for the glory of God. And we do this 'having grace', the idea being that we do so motivated by gratitude (see GNB "let us be grateful"). Our eternity is not in question; as explained earlier, we should be humbly but totally confident that if the Lord comes or we die, we shall surely be saved by grace. We are "in Christ", and so we are in that sense in process of receiving the Kingdom. Whilst works shall not save us, it is also true that if we believe this great salvation, we cannot be passive. We shall in reverence do priestly service in deep gratitude, but with the "awe" or fear that comes from realizing the eternal future which we may miss. There is a comment in the next verse :29 about the reality of condemnation for some; and this leads me to understand the fear / awe spoken of in :28 in that context.

12:29 *For our God is a consuming fire*- The allusion may still be to how the old covenant was associated not only with Sinai shaking but a consuming fire coming down upon it (Ex. 19:18). Those who remained within the old covenant system were associated with this condemnation, because they simply could not be perfectly obedient to that covenant. By identifying with the temple cult, they would find in a literal sense that God consumed them in fire, for this was how many Jews perished within the temple in AD70. The same word is used of how the Lord at His return would "consume" the system which sat in the temple of God (2 Thess. 2:4). The Hebrew Christians were being warned ahead of time that if they returned to the temple cult, they would meet their end in the fire which would consume that temple, just as the first temple had been burnt with fire.

The quotation is from Dt. 4:24 "For Yahweh your God is a consuming fire"; this was spoken in the context of 'forgetting the covenant of Yahweh' (Dt. 4:23). This was in fact what the Hebrew Christians were doing; forsaking the new covenant for the old.

Is. 33:14 is being alluded to, which speaks of the sinners within the surrounded city of Jerusalem at Hezekiah's time: "The sinners in Zion are afraid. Trembling has seized the godless ones. Who among us can live with the devouring fire? Who among us can live with everlasting burning?". Note the reference to "trembling" too, which has also figured in this context in Hebrews 12. Zion, the temple mount and cult, was sinful and would suffer the condemnation of fire. Those who wanted to return to it were not being more righteous or obedient; they were sinning. Legalism, not trusting in the Lord's blood but in our own few works, is just that- sin.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 13

13:1- see on Lk. 12:42.

Let love of the believers continue- The shift towards legalism and Judaism was associated with a decline in love. For as with legalistic churches today, belief in justification by works and ritual breeds a distrust and dislike of anyone who doesn't think the rituals are important for salvation and even actively discourages them. And it was of course hard to show love to uncircumcised Gentile believers if one believed that circumcision was essential to have covenant with God.

13:2- see on Rom. 12:13.

Do not forget to show love to strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares- As noted on :1, the Hebrew Christians were prone to consider uncircumcised Gentile Christians as outside covenant relationship with God. The reference could also be to the itinerant spirit gifted prophets, cp. 2 Jn. 10). Paul is appealing to the Hebrew understanding that all people had representative Angels. By refusing Gentile brethren, they were turning away Angels. The only Gentiles in Jerusalem would have been associated with the Romans or Arabs. If there were believers amongst them, it is understandable that orthodox Jewish Christians were tempted to refuse them hospitality (Gk.). But by doing so they were leaving Angels out on the street. For each believer had a representative Angel.

The allusion is clearly to Abraham entertaining the Angels unawares. If they were the true seed of Abraham, then they would be eager to have Gentiles, strangers, under their roofs and provide them with hospitality. As Peter reminds us, it was considered illegal for a Jew to come under the roof of a Gentile. So the Hebrew Christians needed encouragement to allow Gentiles into their homes, and to realize that by not doing so, they would be going against the spirit of Abraham. Perhaps he was motivated to receive strangers by reflecting on the promises to him, that all Gentiles would be blessed through his seed.

But there is also an allusion to Lot unknowingly entertaining Angels, on the eve of Sodom's destruction; and Isaiah had portrayed Jerusalem as Sodom, as does Rev. 11:8. The hint was that they were living in the very last days or even moments before Jerusalem was to be destroyed; and they should be as Lot rather than the men of Sodom - Jerusalem.

13:3 *Remember those that are in bonds, as if you were bound with them; those that are ill treated, as being yourselves also in the body-* The Hebrews were tempted to return to Judaism because it saved them from persecution by the Roman and Jewish authorities. Judaism was a recognized religion within the empire, and adherents were free from army service. The Hebrew Christians were attracted by this, and were tempted to not identify with those who were imprisoned or persecuted.

If we are truly members of the one body, we will be affected by the sufferings of others in that body. The fact we are members of the one body of Jesus should exclude all self-centred feelings, in the sense that if one other part of the body suffers or rejoices, then we are to be affected by this. Heb. 13:3 tells us to "*remember* them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" (AV). We are to feel as if we are inside the body of our brethren. This is quite something. There is a purposeful ambiguity here. Whose body? The body of Jesus, or that of the suffering brother? Effectively, the one is the other. We can truly place ourselves in the place of others. The only other time the Greek word translated "remember" occurs is in Heb. 2:3: "What is man that thou art *mindful*

of him". Because of the almost senseless mindfulness of God for us down here on this speck of a planet, dust and water as we are... we must be inspired to likewise be mindful of our suffering brethren. "Those that are ill treated" is a Greek term found elsewhere only in 11:37; the suffering Christians in Jerusalem were in direct connection with the faithful of old who had likewise suffered for their faith.

13:4 *Let marriage be held in respect among all, and let the marital bed be undefiled. For fornicators and adulterers God will judge-* I noted on 12:16 that sexual immorality was an issue amongst those wishing to return to Judaism; they felt liberated to misbehave in other areas of moral life if they were technically obedient to ritual. The allusion to Jerusalem as Sodom in :2 (see note there) is continued here; Judaism and the temple cult was actually sexually immoral and would face God's judgment for this. We have here a classic case of where legalism doesn't curb sinful behaviour but actually encourages us. The grip of grace will teach us to deny such lusts, whereas legalism encourages those lusts. There may also be a swipe at the tendency for some Jewish false teachers to deprecate marriage (1 Tim. 4:3); and we noted on Ephesians and 1 Cor. 7 that the Judaists had encouraged the denial of marriage in order to indulge in sexual licence outside of it.

The adulterers who would be judged were those within the ecclesia and responsible. This is matched by 1 Pet.3:1-5 warning that the sisters were increasingly rebelling against their great prototypes of Eve and Sarah, unwittingly egged on by their unspiritual husbands. So many other New Testament passages imply a surge of marriage and sex related problems in the run up to AD70. The ecclesia of Israel was an adulterous generation; this was their main characteristic (Mt. 16:4). Looking around our sisterhood and brotherhood today there can be no doubt about the reference of all this to our last days. Add to this the parallels with Sodom and the times of Noah in this respect too.

13:5- see on Dt. 31:3; Josh. 1:5.

Be free from the love of money, content with such things as you have. For God Himself has said: I will in no way fail you, neither will I in any way forsake you- This again must be understood in the context of the Hebrew Christians wanting to return to Judaism. The economic discrimination against Christians in Jerusalem would have been significant, and surely contributed to the dire poverty of the Jerusalem church which Paul had sought to address through the Jerusalem poor fund. The Pharisees were covetous and materialistic (Lk. 16:14), and the Sadducees were famed for their love of money. The economic attractions of Judaism were to be resisted by faith that God would not fail to provide for His people. Paul demonstrates this by quoting the Father's words to Joshua-Jesus. So again we have a case of words specifically appropriate to the Lord Jesus being applied to all those who are in Him, just as the Lord's passage into the Holiest as supreme High Priest is applied to all in Him.

Heb. 13:5 combines quotes from Gen. 28:15; Josh. 1:5 and Dt. 31:16. Heb. 13:5 doesn't quote any of them exactly, but mixes them together. See on Rom. 11:26.

Those Old Testament promises are surely relevant to us: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said (to you, as well as Joshua), I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5 AV). Notice once again that the Old Testament scriptures are seen as alive and speaking directly to each of us in whatever generation. The message was that it isn't the actual possession of wealth that is condemned, but the way of life that seeks more than what we have been given. This is the real danger of materialism.

13:6 *So that with good courage we can say-* This is the word for "boldness" which is so characteristic of Hebrews; if as reasoned earlier we are bold before the very presence of God in the Holiest, we can be bold against all fears of human persecution.

The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What shall man do to me?- The quotation is from Ps. 118:6 "Yahweh is on my side, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?". Just as Scripture speaks personally to us (see on :5), so we can put the words of scripture in our own mouths. The context is relevant to those who wanted to trust in the apparent strength of the temple cult to save them from persecution: "It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to put confidence in man" (Ps. 118:8). The Psalm is clearly Messianic, stating that "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Ps. 118:22). So again, words directly personally relevant to the Lord Jesus regarding His enemies in Jerusalem become just as directly relevant to all those "in Him" in Jerusalem.

13:7 *Remember those that had the rule over you, those who spoke to you the word of God-* The past tense "had" invites them to recall the earliest leaders in Jerusalem such as Peter and Stephen. If as noted in 1:1 Paul is speaking or writing Hebrews with his eye on Stephen, this takes on powerful relevance. The outcome of his life and faith was death at Paul's hands, but with the sure assurance of salvation. The basis of authority within the pastoral structure is that those who 'have the rule' are those who taught the Gospel to those over whom they have authority. Paul elsewhere uses family language to express the same truth; elders / fathers in the church family are those who brought us to spiritual life by teaching us the Gospel. This is the basis for eldership in the local church; such positions of authority cannot be attained by a vote or simply by default or age itself.

Consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith- Elders are especially responsible. They can shut up, or open, the Kingdom to men. They watch "in behalf of" the souls of the ecclesia (Heb. 13:17 RV). Their very examples can influence the flock positively or negatively- for "like priest like people" is a Biblical idea. When the leaders "offered themselves willingly", so did the people (Jud. 5:2,9). Respect must be earned by elders, never demanded. Their way of life is the basis of their authority; in this sense, we have the choice whom to consider as our elders, whom we will respect and follow. Jesus taught as one who had authority, unlike the scribes (Mk. 1:22). Yet the Scribes had authority in terms of their position, and yet they were not respected; and hence they couldn't teach with authority as Jesus could.

In illiterate societies, or those with limited access to the Old Testament scrolls and the Gospel records, the direction in spiritual life was given by elders, by living examples. That is true today, but moreso in their early situation.

Amongst those tending towards returning to the temple cult, there was a tendency to despise those who had first taught them the Gospel and suffered at the hands of Judaism for doing so. This is also mentioned as a last days problem in 1 Pet. 5:5; 2 Pet. 2:10 etc. See on 1 Tim. 3:4.

13:8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever-* "For ever" is literally 'for all ages'. There will be many "ages" to come, as there have doubtless been many "ages" of previous creations already (Rom. 1:25; 9:5); but for our "age" alone was the only begotten Son of God given as a representative of *us*, the humans who live in this brief "age". God thus describes Himself as a first timer falling in love with His people; as a young man marries a virgin, so God marries us (Is. 62:5); Israel were as the

lines graven on a man's palm, with which he was born (Is. 49:16). Thus from absolute eternity, we were the great "all things" to Almighty God, the God of all, all past and future creations.

Past, present and future as stated here suggests Paul saw the three elements of the Yahweh Name supremely manifest in the Lord Jesus. Which is surely why 'Jesus' in the NT becomes the Name above every Name (Phil. 2:9,10; Eph. 1:21); for only 'Yahweh' was exalted above every other name (Neh. 9:5; Ps. 148:13).

The Jesus of history is the Christ of faith. The *same* Jesus who went into Heaven will *so* come again *in like manner* (Acts 1:11). The record three times says the same thing. The "like manner" in which the Lord will return doesn't necessarily refer to the way He gradually ascended up in to the sky, in full view of the gazing disciples. He was to return in the "like manner" to what they had seen. Yet neither those disciples nor the majority of the Lord's people will literally see Him descending through the clouds at His return- for they will be dead. But we will 'see' Him at His return "in like manner" as He was when on earth. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Jesus who loved little children and wept over Jerusalem's self-righteous religious leaders, so desirous of their salvation, is the One who today mediates our prayers and tomorrow will confront us at judgment day. Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His "brethren" straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It's as if He didn't want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God (Jn. 20:18). He appears to be alluding here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God". This allusion would therefore be saying: 'OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn't essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God'.

Significantly, both Luke and John conclude their Gospels with the risen Lord walking along with the disciples, and them 'following' Him (Jn. 21:20)- just as they had done during His ministry. His invitation to 'Follow me' (Jn. 21:19,22) is the very language He had used whilst He was still mortal (Jn. 1:37,43; 10:27; 12:26; Mk. 1:18; 2:14). The point being, that although He was now different, in another sense, He still related to them as He did when He was mortal, walking the lanes and streets of 1st century Palestine. Elsewhere I have pointed out that the fishing incident of Jn. 21 is purposefully framed as a repetition of that recorded in Lk. 5- again, to show the continuity between the Jesus of yesterday and the Jesus of today. It's as if in no way does He wish us to feel that His Divine Nature and glorified, exalted position somehow separates us from Him. When the Lord awoke, He would have immediately been aware of the carefully wrapped graveclothes and the anointing oil. He would have then realized the care shown to Him by His sisters. Some of the very first thoughts of the risen Lord were of His brethren. There was no gap between His mortal awareness of His brethren, and His feelings for them after resurrection.

The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are

interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory. It just isn't true that He came as a meek, gentle person, but will roar back as an angry lion. At His second coming, He will reveal " the wrath of the lamb" . Can you imagine an angry lamb? Yes, lambs can get angry. But it's a lamb-like anger. He came as the lamb for sinners slain, and yet He will still essentially be a lamb at His return. The Jesus who loved little children, sensitive to others weaknesses, desperate for their salvation, is the same one who will return to judge us. Even after His resurrection, in His present immortal nature, He thoughtfully cooked breakfast on the beach for His men (Jn. 21:9,12). And this is the Lord who will return to judge us. After His resurrection He was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke bread. The way He handled the loaf, His mannerisms, His way of speaking and choice of language, were evidently the same after His resurrection as before (Lk. 24:30,31). The Lord is the same today as yesterday.

"The Kingdom of God" was a title used of Jesus. He 'was' the Kingdom because He lived the Kingdom life. Who He would be, was who He was in His life. At the prospect of being made "full of joy" at the resurrection, "therefore did my heart rejoice" (Acts 2:26,28). His joy during His mortal life was related to the joy He now experiences in His immortal life. And this is just one of the many continuities between the mortal and the immortal Jesus. Pause for a moment to reflect that the Lord's resurrection is a pattern for our own. This is the whole meaning of baptism. "God has both raised the Lord and will raise us up through his power" (1 Cor. 6:13,14). Yet there were evident continuities between the Jesus who lived mortal life, and the Jesus who rose again. His mannerisms, body language, turns of phrase, were so human- even after His resurrection. And so who we are now, as persons, is who we will eternally be. Because of the resurrection, our personalities in the sum of all their relationships and nuances, *have an eternal future*. But from whence do we acquire those nuances, body languages, etc? They arise partly from our parents, from our inter-relations with others etc; we are the sum of our relationships. And this is in fact a tremendous encouragement to us in our efforts for others; for the result of our parenting, our patient effort and grace towards others, will have an eternal effect upon others. Who we help them become is, in part, who they will eternally be. Job reflected that if a tree is cut down, it sprouts (Heb. *yaliph*) again as the same tree; and he believed that after his death he would likewise sprout again (*yaliph*) at the resurrection (Job 14:7-9,14,15). There will be a continuity between who we were in mortal life, and who we will eternally be- just as there is between the pruned tree and the new tree which grows again out of its stump. All our obedience and response to God's word in this life is likened to building a foundation which will endure beyond the storm, representative as that is of judgment day at Christ's return (Lk. 6:48). There is therefore a link between who we are now and who we will eternally be; we are building now the foundation for our eternity.

Who the Lord Jesus was is who He will be in the future; in the same way as who *we* are now, is who we will eternally be. For our spirit, our essential personality, will be *saved* in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5). "Flesh and blood" will not inherit the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50); and yet the risen, glorified Lord Jesus was "flesh and

bones" (Lk. 24:39). We will be who we essentially are today, but with Spirit instead of blood energizing us. It's a challenging thought, as we consider the state of our "spirit", the essential 'me' which will be preserved, having been stored in Heaven in the Father's memory until the day when it is united with the new body which we will be given at resurrection. For in all things the Lord is our pattern; and we will in that day be given a body like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:21)- which is still describable as "flesh and bones" in appearance (Lk. 24:39).

Note that whilst flesh and *blood* cannot inherit the Kingdom, the risen, immortal Lord Jesus described Himself as flesh and *bones* (Lk. 24:39). In fact, we find that "flesh and bones" are often paralleled (Gen. 2:23; Job 10:11; 33:21; Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30), and simply mean 'the person', or as the Lord put it on that occasion, "I myself". We ourselves will be in the Kingdom, with similar personalities we have now [that's a very challenging thought of itself]. "Flesh" doesn't necessarily have to refer, in every instance, to something condemned. Who we are now is who we will essentially be in the eternity of God's Kingdom. Let's not allow any idea that somehow our flesh / basic being is so awful that actually, the essential "I myself" will be dissolved beneath the wrath of God at the judgment. The Lord is "the saviour of the body" and will also save our "spirit" at the last day; so that we, albeit with spirit rather than blood energizing us, will live eternally. Understanding things this way enables us to perceive more forcefully the eternal importance of who we develop into as persons, right now. The Buddhist belief that we will ultimately not exist, that such 'Nirvana' is the most wonderful thing to hope for, appears at first hearing a strange 'hope' to be shared by millions of followers. But actually, it's the same essential psychology as that behind the idea that 'I will not exist in the Kingdom of God, I will be given a new body, person and character. It's actually saying the same- I won't exist. And it's rooted in a terribly low self-image, a dis-ease with ourselves, a lack of acceptance of ourselves as the persons whom God made us and develops us into. Whilst of course our natures will be changed, so that we can be immortal, it is *we* who will be saved; our body will be resurrected, made new, and our spirit "saved" in that day, reunited with our renewed and immortal bodies. We have eternal life in the sense that who we are now, in spiritual terms, is who we will eternally be. Our spirit, the essential us, is in this sense immortal; it's remembered with the Lord. In this sense, not even death itself, nor time itself, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). Just as we still love someone after they have died, remembering as they do who they were and still are to us, so it is with the love of God for the essential us. Hence 1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of how a "gentle and calm disposition" or spirit is in fact "imperishable" (NAB)- because that spirit of character will be eternally remembered. This is why personality and character, rather than physical works, are of such ultimate and paramount importance. How we speak now is in a way, how we will eternally speak- I think that's the idea of Prov. 12:19: "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment". Our "way" of life and being is how we will eternally be- and for me that solves the enigma of Prov. 12:28: "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death". In Jeremiah 18, God likens Himself to a potter working with us the clay. We can resist how He wants us to be, and He can make us into something else... we are soft clay until the 'firing'; and the day of firing is surely the day of judgment. The implication is that in this life we are soft clay; but the day of judgment will set us hard as the persons we have become, or have been made into, in this life.

The continuity between the mortal, human Jesus and the exalted Lord of all which He became on His ascension is brought out quite artlessly in Heb. 4:14: "Our

great high priest, who has passed through the heavens". The picture is of "this same Jesus", the man on earth, passing through all heavens to 'arrive' at the throne of God Himself to mediate for us there. His ascension to Heaven was viewed physically like this by the disciples, and is expressed here in that kind of language of physical ascent, to bring home to us the continuity between the man Jesus on earth, and the exalted Lord now in Heaven itself. The same Jesus who once experienced temptation can thereby strengthen us in our temptations. We need to realize that nobody can be tempted by that which holds no appeal; the Lord Jesus must have seen and reflected upon sin as a possible course of action, even though He never took it. And for the same reason, several New Testament passages (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:5) call the exalted Lord Jesus a "man"- even now. Let's not see these passages merely as theological problems for Trinitarians. The wonder of it all is that Jesus after His glorification is still in some sense human. He as "the pioneer of our faith" shows us the path to glory, a glory that doesn't involve us becoming somehow superhuman and unreal.

And so the Man who walked dusty Galilee streets is the very same one, in essence, whom we will meet in judgment day. The ultimate question for each of us, is whether we will be accepted by Him. In the Gospels, we see the Son of man, Son of God, so acceptant of others, so patient with their weaknesses, passionately dying for our salvation. Will He turn as it were another face on us at the day of judgment, showing Himself suddenly and unpredictably to be someone else? Like people we know, who suddenly surprised us one day by showing a completely different aspect to their character? I believe He won't. Because integrity and consistency of character, sharing His Father's characteristic of not changing, is what He is essentially about. He won't show another face then, that we've not seen now. The same basic Jesus, who so wished and wishes to eternally save us, will be the One whom we meet in the final day.

If we truly love the Lord, we will fantasize about our moment of meeting with Him. I suspect that His very appearance of ordinariness and evident human aspect will impress me in that first moment of meeting. Perhaps it will be that He appears to me in the midst of everyday life, when I'm desperately consumed with doing something, and interrupts me. And He'll seem like an ordinary local person, speaking with the same accent, wearing normal clothes, just as He did after His resurrection. And then He'll say with a very slight, cultured kind of smile: "Duncan, I'm Jesus...". Who knows how it will be. But if you love Him, you'll fantasize of that moment, as you love His appearing.

13:9 *Do not be carried away by various and strange teachings. For it is good that the heart be established by grace- not with food laws, which have not profited those who have been so occupied with them-* The Hebrews were indeed being carried away and back to Judaism. But if we have known grace, the certainty of salvation in Christ, looking forward 'boldly' to future eternity with Him, then our heart will be stable; the hope we have will be as an anchor of the soul. Our heart will be stable.

It's easy to assume that the arguments about "regulations about food" in the first century hinged about what *types* of food should be eaten, i.e. whether the Mosaic dietary laws should be observed or not. But the angst about "food" was more passionately about *with whom* you ate. Peter explains in Acts 11:3 how utterly radical it was for a Jew to eat with a Gentile. Bearing this in mind, the way Jew and Gentile Christians ate together at the Lord's supper would've been a breathtaking witness of unity to the watching world. And yet ultimately, Jew and Gentile parted company and the church divided, laying itself wide open to imbalance and every manner of practical and doctrinal corruption as a result. The problem was that the Jews

understood 'eating together' as a sign of agreement, and a sign that you accepted those at your table as morally pure. The Lord's 'table manners' were of course purposefully the opposite of this approach. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue With Trypho* 47.2-3) mentions how the Jewish Christians would only eat with Gentile Christians on the basis that the Gentiles firstly adopted a Jewish way of life. And this is the nub of the problem- demanding that those at your table are like you, seeing eating together as a sign that the other has accepted your positions about everything. The similarities with parts of the 21st century church are uncanny.

13:10 *We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat-* As noted on :9, the arguments about "food" were more about with whom one ate. In the same way as the Jews were connected with the altar by reason of eating what was upon it, so all who are connected with the Christ-altar (Heb. 13:10) show this by eating of the memorial table. If we deny the breaking of bread to brethren, we are stating that they are outside covenant relationship with God, that they have no part in Israel. The argument here is not that the priests or Judaists were forbidden from breaking bread with Christians. Rather was it that they considered that they partook with the literal altar and thereby as it were fellowshiped the tabernacle system as a whole; they themselves denied themselves the right or [Gk.] authority to eat at any other altar. For Judaism was exclusive; if you were partakers of the Jerusalem temple altar, you were not allowed to partake of any other altar. And so they themselves declared that they had no authority to eat of the Christ altar. Return to the temple system was therefore a radical separation of themselves from fellowship with Christ, for Judaism had become so exclusive. Initially, Christianity could exist as a sect within Judaism, but Judaism soon began to exclude Christians, and the time came as the Lord predicted when Christians would be cast out of the synagogue system.

However as explained on :11, it is the day of atonement ritual which is in view; and those who kept the Mosaic laws had no right to eat of the sin offering whose blood brought atonement. But Christian worshippers do.

13:11 *For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the Holy Place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside of the camp-* The sin offering at the day of atonement, which is the situation in view throughout Hebrews, could not be eaten of by the priest nor worshippers. Its blood was important, but the body was burnt and not eaten. Yet Christians by going outside of the camp of Israel and the tabernacle system could eat of that ultimate sacrifice.

13:12 *Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside of the gate-* The reference is to the day of atonement ritual. "The people" are no longer natural Israel but those who believe in His blood and are sanctified even in their consciences, cleansed from all sin. But "sanctify" is the word used by the LXX to describe the consecration of the priests to service of the body of Israel (Ex. 28:41). If we reject the call to priesthood today, we reject the point of the Lord's saving suffering for us. The Lord's death was not within the temple system; it was outside the city gate.

13:13 *Let us therefore go to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach-* We recall Simon carrying the Lord's cross in the sad procession which went outside the camp of Jerusalem to Golgotha; and he becomes a type of us. See on Mt. 27:32; Jn. 8:56.

When Heb. 13:13 speaks of *us* going forth outside the camp, perhaps there is a reference to Joshua who dwelt with Moses outside the camp- thus making Joshua

symbolic of us all.

We are to go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach, his 'having it cast in the teeth' (Gk.; Heb. 13:13). *We* may boldly say that we will *not* be fearful, as Joshua was, because God has addressed to *us* the very words which He did to Joshua: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5,6). In this especially, Joshua is our example.

The call to even now go to Him outside the camp speaks as if He is still there, outside the city gates, and we shoulder our crosses and His reproach as He walked the Via Dolorosa, and go out to be crucified next to Him, as we endure being fools for Christ's sake in our worldly decisions. It's a rather strange idea, at first consideration. But His sufferings are ongoing. The cross is still there- wherever we go, and however far we fall away from Him. And the implication appears to be that the Hebrews had already returned within the camp of the temple system, and were being asked to come out from it, to Golgotha.

"Without the camp" is full of Old Testament allusion. The cross convicts of sin, for we are impelled by it to follow Christ in going forth "without the camp", following the path of the leper who had to go forth without the camp (Lev. 13:46).

We'd sooner skip over the words of Deuteronomy 23:12-13 than analyze them closely: "Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad: and thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith". Yet there can be no doubt that this is one of the source passages for the words of Hebrews 13:13: "Let us go forth therefore unto him (Jesus) without the camp, bearing his reproach". When the Israelite soldier had a call of nature, he went forth "without the camp", doubtless with a sense of sheepishness as he carried his spear-cum-spade with him. Everyone knew what he was doing. This commonplace incident is picked up by the Spirit and made relevant to the Jewish Christians going forth from the camp of Israel, carrying with them the obvious reproach of the cross of Christ.

13:14- see on Eph. 2:19.

For we do not have here a permanent city, but we seek after one which is yet to come- The exodus of people from Jerusalem to Golgotha was seen as symptomatic of how we as God's people, as Abraham, are ever on the move, looking for a permanence and stability that is yet ahead for us in literal terms (11:10). Jerusalem with its apparent solidity was not a permanent city, it was about to be destroyed. The Jerusalem yet to come is the community of believers whose memories / spirits are in God's memory, who shall in symbolic terms come from heaven to earth at the Lord's return. And the apparent solidity of secular life is likewise far from permanent.

13:15- see on 1 Pet. 2:5.

Through him, therefore, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God; that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to His Name- Mosaic sacrifice could never be continual; the whole nature of the rituals precluded that. But with such a priest as the Lord Jesus, we can continually offer the sacrifice of praise, rather than animals. The praise is for the certainty of our salvation and for the certainty of our forgiveness; for "confession" can mean just that, confession of sin. Our praise is for the forgiveness of sin confessed, celebrated in the peace offering.

The peace offering was offered with unleavened cakes as was the Passover. The bitterness of sin was to be ever remembered, amidst the joy of peace with God. The

description of the peace offering as “the sacrifice of thanksgiving” is alluded to in Heb. 13:15: “Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God”- praise and thanks for our spiritual peace with God, our forgiveness through His grace.

True sacrifice is praise of God; thus Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac was “praise” (Gen. 22:5). Israel in their repentance “will account our lips as calves” (Hos. 14:3 LXX, RVmg.), i.e. as sacrifices. The “fruit of the lips” there was repentance. Which is why Paul says that we “make confession to his name” with the fruit of our lips (13:15 RV). Continually we should offer this sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15), the thankfulness that wells up from knowing we are forgiven, the joy born of regular, meaningful repentance. And we do this “by” or “on account of” the sacrifice of Jesus for us, which enables this forgiveness and thereby repentance (Heb. 13:12,15). “Continually” in itself suggests that “praise” does not mean singing or musical expression. This “sacrifice of praise” is a quotation from Jer. 33:11, which describes our offering “the sacrifice of praise... for his mercy” at the beginning of the Kingdom. Praise will [and does] bring forth sacrifice / action. Yet “praise” here is the same Hebrew word translated “thanksgiving”; and the sacrifice of thanksgiving was the peace offering, a commemoration of our free conscience and the peace of sin forgiven (Lev. 7:12-15). If we seriously confess our sins and believe in forgiveness, we should be experiencing a foretaste of the praise we will be offering at the start of the Kingdom, as we embark upon eternity. Our offering of this sacrifice of praise will be “continual” if we continually maintain a good conscience through the confession of our sins. This is surely a high standard to have placed before us: to *continually* confess our sins, to *continually* receive God's mercy, and therefore to live *continually* in a spirit of grateful praise. The way David praises God so ecstatically for immutable things and principles (e.g. His character) is a great example in this (e.g. Ps. 33:3-5); our tendency is to only seriously praise God when He resolves the unexpected crises of life.

The Name of God of itself elicits repentance. Faced with the wonder of who He is, we can't be passive to it. We realize and are convicted of our sin by the very reality of who He is, was and shall be. Heb. 13:15 speaks of the fruit of our lips, giving confession to His Name. The “fruit of lips” in Hos. 14:2 RVmg. to which the writer alludes is clearly enough, in the context, the confession of sin. And the context in Heb. 13:12 is that Christ's blood was shed to sanctify us. That declaration of the Name elicits a confession of sin, albeit in words of praise, to His Name. Mic. 6:9 has the same theme. When the Lord's voice calls to the city demanding repentance, “the man of wisdom shall see [perceive] thy name”- i.e. repent. We come to know God's Name in practice through the cycles of sin-repentance-forgiveness by God which we all pass through. It is through this process that we come to know the very essence of God's Name. Thus Is. 43:25 LXX: “I am “I AM”, who erases your iniquities”. We come to know His Name, that it really *is* (“I am”) all about forgiveness and salvation of sinners. See on Eph. 3:15.

13:16 *But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*- This was a prompt to remember the early days of the Jerusalem church, when the members shared their possessions. In the immediate context here we have been reminded of the Lord's sacrifice and our partaking in it. But there is to be a practical response to that, in sharing what we have rather than solely partaking in the sharing of the Lord Jesus.

The letter to the Hebrew Christians describes salvation and the Kingdom with the idea of inheritance. The believers had possessions (Heb. 10:34), had been generous to

others (Heb. 6:10), and yet needed the exhortation to "not live for money; be content with what you have" (Heb. 13:5) and to "share what you have with others" (Heb. 13:16). We could surmise that this audience weren't unlike many of us today- not overly wealthy, but sorely tempted to be obsessed by possessions and material advantage. And to them, as to us, the writer emphasizes that salvation in Christ is the ultimate inheritance or possession (Heb. 1:2,4,14, 6:12,17; 9:15; 11:7; 12:17); this is the ultimate "profit" (Heb. 13:17). Hence Esau was quoted as an example- he gave up his inheritance for the sake of a material meal (Heb. 12:15-17). The *eternal* inheritance which is promised to us in the Gospel, rooted as it is in the promises to the Jewish fathers, should make us not seek for great material inheritance in this present world.

13:17 *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive; for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you-* Given the apostasy of the Jerusalem church and their lack of support for Paul and his positions, this was surely an attempt by Paul even from prison in Rome to yet ingratiate himself to the Jerusalem leadership.

Elders must give an account for their flock as a shepherd must for his sheep- implying that there will be a 'going through' with them of all in their care. The drunken steward was condemned because he failed to feed the rest of the household and beat them. If the capricious behaviour of the flock makes the shepherd watch out for them "with grief", with groaning and heaviness, then this is not profitable for us the sheep. For they will not shepherd us well if all the time they are grieved by our wayward behaviour and need to restrain all the time rather than lead forward.

13:18 *Pray for us. For we are persuaded that we have a good conscience, desiring to live honourably in all things-* The prayer was for Paul's from prison (:19). Paul's sense of injustice at his incarceration comes through so often, and again here. His conscience had been cleansed in Christ, as he had previously taught in this letter; he felt no guilt over his sins as they had truly been dealt with. A lesser faith in the Lord's sacrifice would have surely led him to consider his imprisonment as a just reward for the bad life he had previously lived, involving as it did torture and murder of civilians.

The argument seems to imply that the more they prayed, the sooner he would be released from prison. Thus prayer can hasten things, given certain preconditions are fulfilled. So it is in our experiences, and so it may be with the Lord's return. It was accepted in Judaism, as well as in many other contemporary religions, that faithful saints [e.g. the patriarchs, Moses, the prophets etc, in Judaism's case] could intercede for the people. Yet in the New Testament, *all* believers are urged to intercede for each other, even to the point of seeking to gain forgiveness for others' sins (1 Thess. 5:25; Heb. 13:18; James 5:15). They were *all* to do this vital work. The radical nature of this can easily be overlooked by us, reading from this distance.

13:19 *And I exhort you the more exceedingly to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner-* As noted on :18, Paul felt that the answer to his prayers depended upon how many others were praying for him. Revelation uses a similar idea in visualizing a situation where there is enough incense arising to trigger a response from Heaven. This in God's wisdom is how prayer operates, so that we share our situations with others and urge their prayers for us, and we too pray for others. This explains why we cannot be Christians in splendid isolation from others, but rather active communion and prayer for each other are a vital part of our collective lives.

I suggested in commentary on Acts that Paul was not warmly received by the Jerusalem church on his last visit there, and it would appear that his arrest and imprisonment there was partly due to Jewish Christian elements collaborating with the temple system. Yet Paul wishes to be restored to them; he intended after release from prison to return to see them in Jerusalem again. His fervour for their spiritual strength and holding on in faith is remarkable after such betrayals.

13:20 *Now the God of peace, who brought from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, through the blood of an eternal covenant-* The idea of "peace" speaks of peace between believers as well as with God; and this would be the context provided by :19, where as noted there, Paul has in view the restoration of his relationship with the Jerusalem church. God is the author of peace both with Him and within His people on account of the blood, resurrection and covenant relationship of the Lord Jesus. "*Our* Lord Jesus" is another attempt to demonstrate that they had in common a joint acceptance of Jesus as "Lord"; even though it would seem many amongst the Hebrew Christians were losing that sense of His exaltation. The references to the Lord's resurrection, His blood and the eternal new covenant pave the way for the desire in :21 that God would continue working within them. For it was the Lord's death and resurrection which brought into effect the new covenant for those in Him, with its promise of the blessing of being spiritually transformed within.

"In the blood of an eternal covenant" (Gk., through the power of the blood) is a hard phrase to understand if we isolate it from the rest of the verse. The GNB gives the best general sense: "God has raised from death our Lord Jesus, who is the Great Shepherd of the sheep as the result of his blood, by which the eternal covenant is sealed". The Lord's qualification as the supreme elder was on account of His death. The Abrahamic covenant is the new covenant of eternal inheritance (see on 9:15), but this was sealed, brought into operation for us and guaranteed, by the Lord's death. The connection between the covenant and God's people as sheep, shepherded by God through Messiah, is made clearly throughout Ezekiel 34. The sheep of Israel shall be led by the shepherd into an eternal covenant. This is true of all the Lord's sheep today as it will be for natural Israel in the last days.

13:21 *Perfect you in every good thing to do His will; working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ. To whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen-* We work God's will, and He works in us (Gk.). There is a mutuality between God and man. The new covenant involves the blessing of the Spirit, preparing us, perfecting and maturing us, so that we might do God's will in practice. But all this is predicated upon the ongoing work of the Lord Jesus within us. It is the internal gift of the Spirit through which God works within us (Eph. 3:20), and this is an outflow of the new covenant (:20). The "Amen" brings to a close the sermon we have transcribed here (see on :22); and the final appeal to glorify the Lord Jesus would be an appropriate end to breaking of bread sermon.

13:22 *But I urge you, brothers, bear with this word of encouragement; for I have written to you in few words-* I suggest that the letter to the Hebrews is actually a breaking of bread sermon first given by Paul to the Jerusalem ecclesia, against a background of Judaist pressure to return to the Law, and also bearing in mind some specific moral and doctrinal problems which were in the ecclesia; see on 1:1. If you read it through out loud, the "letter" takes about 45 minutes. The last few verses seem to be 'tacked on' to turn it into a letter. Paul asks them to "suffer the word of

exhortation" (Heb. 13:22 AV), although, he says, it was a brief one. This would imply that usually "the word of exhortation" was a lot longer. Remember how Paul exhorted all night at Troas at the breaking of bread (Acts 20:7-9).

There is evidence that the early breaking of bread service was based upon the Synagogue Sabbath service. Heb. 13:17,24 speak of "them that have the rule over you", the language of the 'ruler of the synagogue' (cp. Lk. 8:49; 13:14; Acts 18:8). There were weekly portions of readings which were read, similar to our *Bible Companion* (1) and then expounded by the Rabbi and any others who would like to offer a "word of exhortation" (Acts 13:15). Acts 13:15 is the only other place apart from Heb. 13:22 that "the word of exhortation" occurs. It is clearly a synagogue phrase. It is possible that "suffer the word of exhortation" was also a Synagogue phrase, said at the end of the 'exhortation' on the Sabbath. This suggests that the whole of Hebrews was a "word of exhortation" at a Sabbath breaking of bread (probably this was the day the Jewish ecclesias met in Jerusalem), being a commentary on the readings for that week (perhaps the Melchizedek passages and parts of the Law), constantly bringing the point around to the death of the Lord Jesus. In this, Hebrews is an ideal sermon: it continually comes around to the work of Christ.

Hebrews is also a series of quotations and allusions (over half the sermon is comprised of these), interspersed with commentary and brief practical exhortation (e.g. to disfellowship false teachers, 12:15,16), all tied together around the theme of Christ's sacrifice and our response to it. Our sermons should be Bible based, after this same pattern. This is surely the way to construct sermons: re-reading verses from the chapters in the readings, commenting on them, bringing it all round to the work of Christ. A recurring theme of the Hebrews sermon is a reminding of the hearers of the reality of their future reward, made sure by Christ's work (4:9; 5:9; 6:10,19; 9:28; 10:34; 11:40; 12:10). This should surely be a theme embedded in our sermons: the personal Hope of the Kingdom, made sure for us by the work of Christ.

So much in Hebrews is obviously relevant to the memorial meeting. The wine represents the blood of the new covenant. That new covenant is repeated in 8:10,11; and the word "covenant" occurs 14 times, and the parallel "testament" 7 times. The blood of the covenant is explicitly referred to in 7:22; 8:6; 9:1 and 13:20. 12:24-26 personifies that blood as a mighty voice speaking to us, manifesting the voice of God, capable of shaking Heaven and earth. This is truly the power of appeal behind a consideration of Christ's blood, as symbolised in the wine. There are 22 references to "blood", 4 to "body", 8 to "sacrifice" i.e. the body of the animal, and 9 to "offering", also a reference to the body of the animal. The breaking of bread is designed to remember the body and blood of our Lord's sacrifice. And this is exactly the theme of Hebrews. Yet at the same time as doing this, Paul was getting over his specific point to the Jerusalem ecclesia: the utter supremacy of Christ's sacrifice ought to obviate the need for any other theory of reconciliation to God. If only we could exhort like this: make the specific points we need to make under the umbrella of a *sustained* emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ.

1 Cor. 10:17,21 (probably an epistle known to the Jerusalem ecclesia) speaks of us being *partakers* of the one bread at the breaking of bread, *partaking* of the Lord's table there. The same word is used in Heb. 3:14 concerning being *partakers* of Christ, again suggesting that Hebrews was first spoken in a breaking of bread context. The

same word occurs in Heb. 12:8: we are *partakers* of Christ's sufferings. We are Christ's *partakers* (AV "fellows"; 1:9); Christ *partakes* of our nature (2:14). Yet we are only ultimately *partakers* of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence (3:14). All these ideas are brought together in our *partaking* of the emblems of Christ at the memorial meeting. In them, Paul is reasoning, we should see our partaking of Christ's sufferings as a response to His partaking of our nature, and thereby our partaking of the promised reward, the "heavenly calling" (3:1).

Oral Style

The references to "let us" do this or that are all so appropriate to a verbal sermon, encouraging the listeners to respond to the work of Christ. "We see Jesus" (2:9), "Consider... Jesus" (3:1; 7:4; 12:3) would fit in well to the context of a sermon given with the emblems before the audience. "Concerning whom in our discourse..." (Heb. 5:11 Diaglott) would certainly fit in to an oral discourse. "And, so to say..." (Heb. 7:9 RV) is another example. Saying above, Sacrifice and offering..." (Heb. 10:8 RV) sounds as if a scroll is being read and quotation made from passages "above" in the scroll. "Of the things which we have *spoken* (RV we are saying) this is the sum" (8:1) is language more appropriate to a transcript of an address than to a written composition. "As I may so say" (7:9) is another such example. "One in a certain place..." (2:6) is an odd way to write in a formal letter. Yet it fits in if this is a transcript of a sermon; it's the sort of thing you would say verbally when you know your audience can't turn up the passage. The word of exhortation contained in Hebrews was in "few words" (13:22); but this is a bad translation. Strong defines it as meaning "a short time, for a little while" (2)- i.e. Paul is saying 'It won't take long in terms of time to hear this, but consider the points carefully'. Note that the RV speaks of "suffer the exhortation", unlike AV "the word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). One almost gets the impression that Paul is speaking with great constraints on his time: "the cherubim... of which we cannot now speak particularly... what shall I more say? for the time is failing me, running out" (Heb. 9:5; 11:32 Gk.). These sort of comments would surely be irrelevant in a written letter. But as a transcript of a live sermon, they make perfect sense. M. R. Vincent in his *Word Studies Of The NT* observed in Hebrews "a rhythmical structure of sentences (with) sonorous compounds", as if what is written had first been spoken.

"Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God" (13:15) would be appropriate to communal praise at a memorial meeting. Likewise "Let us draw near... we draw nigh... let us come boldly before the throne of grace" (4:16; 7:19) is appropriate to the congregation coming before God in collective and private prayer, culminating in the 'drawing nigh' of taking the emblems (cp. the idea of 'coming to God' in 11:6). The emphasis on the power of Christ as a mediator (7:25; 9:24) would be appropriate in this context of rallying the congregation's faith in their prayers and confessions of sin. The encouragement to "exhort one another *daily*" (3:13; 10:25) takes on a special relevance if said at the breaking of bread; Paul would have been implying: 'Don't just listen to me exhorting you today, or a brother doing it once a week; you must *all* exhort each other, every day, not just on Shabbat!'.

Self Examination

There is another sustained theme in this sermon, in addition to all the stress on our Lord's sacrifice. It is the repeated warning as to the likelihood of apostasy (2:1-3; 3:12; 4:1; 6:4-8; 10:26-30,38; 12:15-17,25,27) and the possibility of abusing the

blood of Christ (10:26-30)- exactly after the pattern of 1 Cor. 11:26-30, which explicitly makes this warning in the context of the breaking of bread. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye [again, oral style], shall he be thought worthy, who hath...counted the blood of the covenant... as unholy thing?" (Heb. 11:29) is almost allusive to 1 Cor. 11:29, warning of drinking damnation to oneself through an incorrect attitude to the memorial cup. This kind of emphasis in a 45 minute sermon wouldn't go down well in a Western church. Yet the more we consider the wonder of the work of Christ, the more we will be driven to consider our own weakness, and the need to "hold fast" our connection with it. This is why we should examine ourselves at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28). "Hold on" is another related theme (3:6,14; 4:14; 10:23). And here and there we find brief, specific practical warnings which were doubtless especially relevant to the initial audience. It's amazing that Paul got so much in 45 minutes. Yet this is what is possible. Note that all the exhortations in Hebrews, the comfort, the warnings, are all an outcome of a consideration of first principles, especially relating to the atonement. Thus Paul turns the fact that Christ is our *representative* round to teach the need for unity amongst us whom He represents (2:11).

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief" (3:12) is very relevant to a call for self-examination in the presence of the emblems. "Let us" boldly ask for forgiveness (4:16) could be read in this context too. The reminder that Christ examines us, that we are naked and opened in His sight, would have encouraged them to be open with him in their self-examination (4:12). Paul reminds them of their initial conversion (3:6,14; 6:11; 10:22,32), in the same way as the Passover was intended to provoke national and personal self-examination, looking back to their spiritual beginnings at the Red Sea (cp. baptism). He encourages them with a reminder that Christ is such a powerful priest that He can really cleanse our conscience (9:14; 10:2,22); the blood of the *new* covenant can destroy an evil conscience (10:22 cp. 9:20). Therefore, Paul reasons, with this clear conscience, "let us draw near"- to the emblems, to the reality of our relationship with God. Again we see a marked emphasis on the need for self-examination at the breaking of bread.

Having created this background of self-examination, Paul is able to more easily hand out explicit rebuke; e.g. "You are dull of hearing" (5:11-14; 12:5). Yet at the same time Paul expressed a very confident view of his audience; e.g. "We are persuaded better things of you" (6:9; 10:38,39). This is an important aspect of exhortation; to convey to the brethren and sisters the fact that we genuinely respect them as brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus, with the sure Hope and possibility of salvation. There is an emphasis on the good works which a true understanding of the first principles should bring (4:11; 9:14; 10:24; 12:28). This is exactly in harmony with the idea presented above: that exposition of first principle doctrine is the basis for practical exposition. This emphasis on the need for works in response to the doctrines of the atonement could suggest that Paul expected the congregation to make resolves at the breaking of bread concerning their future behaviour. Maybe this is behind his appeal for them to appreciate that Christ offers our works to God as the priests did the sacrifices in the past (5:1; 8:3,4; 9:9).

Personal Relevance

The Hebrews sermon is shot through with internal connections; just as our preaching sessions should constantly refer back to each other. Paul is trying to get the brethren

and sisters to see that if they respond to his exhortations as they should, they will be connected in spirit with the faithful heroes of the Old Testament; they will become connected with "the spirits of just men made perfect" (12:23). Thus Noah was moved with fear, Paul says (11:7), just as we should be (4:1); Sarah "judged him faithful who had promised" (11:11), just as we should (10:23); as Moses bore the reproach of Christ (11:26), so should we (13:13). The breaking of bread is the equivalent of the Passover under the Old Covenant; therefore 11:28 highlights how Moses kept the Passover in faith as to the power of the sprinkled blood of the lamb. The implication is that if we take the wine with a similar faith in Christ's blood, we will come become united with the spirit of Moses.

There are many of these inter-connections within Hebrews. Our "afflictions" (10:32) uses the same word translated "suffering" in the context of Christ's sufferings (2:9,10); we are to "endure" (10:32) as Christ "endured" the shame of the cross (12:2,3 same word). Through these inter-connections, Paul is trying to make the sufferings of Christ relevant to them. We may never hope to achieve as much as Paul did in those 45 minutes. But the principles remain for us to try to copy. Therefore we should try not to offer unconnected comments on the readings, we should seek to tie them together under the umbrella of the work of the Lord Jesus, we should relate His sufferings to those of our brethren and sisters, we should seek to inspire them with the fact that they are fellowshipping the hope of the faithful recorded in the Bible records.

A Pattern For Us

The sermon to the Hebrews becomes more significant for us as we consider its likely background. In his book *The Jewish War*, Josephus explains in detail how the Jews in Palestine revolted against the Romans in AD66-70. Initially, everything went well for them. The Romans were defeated at the foot of the temple mount, the legions of Cestius Gallus were defeated, and the Jewish zealots attributed these successes to God's rewarding of their loyalty to the Law. They purified and rededicated the temple, and appointed a High Priest who was not a collaborator with Rome. The zealots spoke of the liberation of Israel in strong religious terms; there was a great wave of enthusiasm for the Law. It seems that Hebrew Christians were caught up in this revival, and of course all Jews were expected to take up arms and fight. The exhortation to the Hebrews therefore stressed the passing of the Mosaic Law, the need to rally around Christ as the true altar and the only true, pure High Priest (Heb. 4:14; 10:19-25; 13:10). There was the command to move outside the camp of Israel, i.e. Jerusalem (Heb. 13:13). And the institutions of the temple, which the Jewish nationalists were so glorifying, are shown to be of no value compared to the blood of Christ. The references to the temptations of Jesus (Heb. 2:17,18; 4:15) may be references back to the wilderness temptations, where He faced the same choice that the Jewish Christians had- to opt for a Kingdom here and now, throwing off the Roman yoke; or to hold fast our faith in the Kingdom which is surely to come. The speaker / writer to the Hebrew Christians doesn't specifically tackle the issues affecting them in bald terms. He instead sets a masterful example of how we should approach issues and weaknesses which need our comment. He adopts a Christ-centred and Biblical approach, demonstrating that he is exactly aware of the issues which face them, and reasoning from unshakeable principles towards specific applications of them.

The Final Appeal

All good sermons have a strong final appeal and focus on the sacrifice of Christ. Heb. 12:23 appears grammatically and structurally to be a climax: "Ye are come unto... the general assembly and church of the firstborn". It is possible to understand this 'general assembly' as a reference to the combined ecclesia present at the breaking of bread. Indeed the Orthodox churches use this verse in this sense in their eucharist liturgy, rendering it "the festival of the firstborn" (3). Chapter 13 contains a series of brief practical exhortations just before the final appeal to home in on the body and blood of our Lord. 13:10 then goes on to compare us to the priests eating the sacrifice on the altar; a picture so appropriate to partaking the emblems at the memorial meeting. 13:11-15 is surely a fitting climax to the sermon, as the audience prepared to take the emblems: "The *bodies* of those beasts...Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with his own *blood, suffered*...let us go forth therefore unto Him, bearing his reproach... by Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God *continually* (not just at this meeting)". Notice the emphasis on the *body* and *blood* of Christ, and an appeal for our response in praise rather than further self-examination. The whole sermon started with God (the very first word in 1:1), and ends with God; reflecting the fact that Christ's work is a manifestation of God, and is intended to bring us to the Father, and eternally reconcile us with Him.

Indeed, a fair case can be made that most of the NT epistles are in fact based upon sermons read out at the breaking of bread service. Given that most Christians would have been illiterate, the memorial meeting would have been the logical time and place to read out the latest letter from Paul or Peter, in any case (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). Consider how Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 5:3-5 as if he is present with them at their memorial meeting ["ye being gathered together..."]. Many of the endings and greetings of the letters have some reference to the memorial meeting. The commands to pray and kiss each other which conclude some of the letters must be compared to the information we find in Justin Martyr's description of the early communion meetings: "When we have ceased from prayer, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president bread and a cup of wine" (*Apology* I, 65). The strange ending of 1 Corinthians 16:20-24 is an obvious allusion to the passage in the *Didache*, describing the words spoken at the breaking of bread meetings in the first century: "If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema. Maranatha...Amen". According to the *Didache*, the president at the memorial meeting said: "If any man is holy, let him come; if any be not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen". Indeed, it is possible that the book of Revelation is a series of prophecies initially given at ecclesial gatherings. The whole book is punctuated by passages of liturgy and worship (4).

The evidence provided here that 'Hebrews' was a sermon at the breaking of bread is to me quite strong. As we've said, in an oral culture of illiterate converts, it is to be expected that the majority of Paul or Peter's letters would've been read aloud to the assembled congregations when they gathered for worship. There is reference to a "holy kiss" at the end of some of the letters (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). This was understood by Justin, Tertullian and Hippolytus to be a signal to the hearers that now the sermon had ended, and they were to kiss each other and begin partaking of the Lord's supper (5). Whether that's the case or not, there's some major homework here for the enthusiast- to study each of the New Testament letters as a sermon appropriate to the breaking of bread service.

Notes

- (1) See Joe Hill, 'An Ancient Bible Companion', *Tidings*, series 1994/5.
- (2) The only other times this construction occurs is in Heb. 2:7,9, where we read that Christ was for "a little while" (RV mg.) lower than Angels.
- (3) Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom Of Morality* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996) p. 107.
- (4) This idea is developed further in Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM, 1953).
- (5) References provided in Martin Hengel, *Studies In The Gospel Of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985) p. 176.

13:23- see on 1 Thess. 2:17.

Be informed that our brother Timothy has been set at liberty; along with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you- This is a strong indication that Paul was the author, writing from Italy (:24), where it seems Timothy was also imprisoned. Paul expressed his concern for the situation in Jerusalem by sending Timothy to them. His begging of Timothy to come to him in 2 Tim. 4 was therefore asking a fair favour of Timothy, seeing timid Timothy had apparently been imprisoned with Paul at some stage. Although it has to be said that there is no specific implication that the place of Timothy's imprisonment was Rome.

13:24 *Greet all those that have the rule over you, and all the saints-* Paul recognizes their elders (see on :17), but parallels the elders with the church membership.

They of Italy greet you- This is significant in that we get the impression from 2 Tim. 4 that the Rome ecclesia had come to ignore Paul, so that he effectively stood alone.

13:25 *Grace be with you all. Amen-* There is significance in the "all", because it's clear from the letter that some of the Hebrew Christians had returned to the temple cult. And I noted in commentary on Acts that there were apparently elements within the Jerusalem church who collaborated with the Jewish 'satan' to get Paul arrested and imprisoned. But we should likewise wish grace, the experience of God's gift working within to transform us, to all who have named the name of Christ; no matter how far they have apparently strayed from Him or personally turned against us.