

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS A GENERAL COMMENTARY



By Rev. Dr. Willis C. Newman

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(B.A., M.Ed., M.Div., Ph.D., D.Min.)

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INTRODUCTION

This work is a, introduction, survey and commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews. My goal was to do an accurate exegesis of the Epistle, but also to relate it to our Christian living. Although there is practical and theoretical information woven throughout the Epistle, the major division involves chapters 1-10 as more theological, while chapters 11-13 are intensely practical.

The primary motivation for this commentary comes from my Liberian pastor friend, Eric Sumo, and my wife Esmeralda (Esmie for short). It is the first book on my series on the General Epistles & Revelation. It is written as a text for a Bible School course. I appreciate their encouragement.

With this introduction, let me tell you a little about Esmie and Me, give a short segment on how to be saved, and then we will jump into the Epistle itself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Willis C. Newman had eight years' experience in pastoral ministry in Portland, Oregon, USA before going into teaching at the Bible College and Seminary Level. At the pastoral level, over 900 people prayed to receive Christ as their personal Savior. He is a graduate of the University of Portland, Multnomah School of the Bible, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, California Graduate School of Theology and Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary. He has taken post graduate courses in psychology from American Military University.

He is Associate Professor at Faith Evangelical College & Seminary, Adjunct Assistant Professor at a community college, formerly Principal of the Bible College of Tonga and Director of Polynesian Missions, a missions agency focused on the South Pacific. He served several years as the South Pacific Director of Faith Evangelical College & Seminary (formerly Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, Tacoma, WA.). He also served as Professor at International College and Graduate School of Theology in Hawaii. While ministering in the Kingdom of Tonga, in 1991 Newman started a teaching site in that country for Faith Evangelical College & Seminary.

Newman returned to America in 1998, after serving seven years in Tonga (South Pacific). Since that time, he has been teaching in a community college, where subjects included psychology, sociology, and communication. He still teaches Bible and the social sciences at now Faith Evangelical College and Seminary in Tacoma WA, USA.

With his wife, Esmeralda (Esmie), they have started a website featuring free Bible studies, and an online Bible Academy. At this writing, over 30,000 individuals visit the website monthly, and over 1,000 have taken the free online Bible courses. Esmie, who holds a B.A. from the University of Washington, and M.A. from both Faith Seminary and Liberty University, also teaches at Faith Evangelical College and Seminary. Newman has devoted over 30 years in tertiary education.

The Newmans have an extensive ministry in Liberia, Nigeria, Kenya West Africa. The Liberian ministry was founded along with Rev. Eric Sumo of Village Ministries. Newman

Bible Academy has teaching sites in the above African countries. They hold regular pastor's conferences and women's conferences with hundreds attending.

HOW TO BE SAVED

The Bible gives us the message (gospel) of how to be saved. By this we mean how to gain forgiveness for our sin and how to gain eternal life. Summarized below are the steps of salvation as presented in the Bible. We invite you to receive Christ as Savior.

1. Agree in your heart with God that you are a sinner in need of His salvation:

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

2. Know in your heart that there is a penalty to your sin:

"For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a).

3. Believe in your heart that Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay the penalty for your sins and to give you eternal life:

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners. Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)... "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b).

4. By faith pray to God: tell Him you believe the above in your heart and ask Him to save you through Jesus Christ. Remember that God is more concerned with the attitude of your heart rather than your exact words.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one would boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

"if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9,10).

"Behold, I (Jesus) stand at the door (of your heart) and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

"But as many as received Him (Jesus), to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12,13).

The following is a suggested prayer:

Heavenly Father, I admit to you that I am a sinner in need of your salvation. I believe that Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay for my sins and to give me eternal life. I believe that only through Christ can I be saved. I ask for and accept by faith your free gift of salvation. Please come into my heart and be my Savior and Lord. Thank you for doing so. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dr. Willis Newman, 2014.
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**AN INTRODUCTION
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INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. AUTHOR

Hebrews author is unknown. From earliest times opinion has been divided. The Epistle is very much like Paul's Epistles, yet there are differences. The writer was not one of the original Apostles, as is evident from chapter 2:3, where it mentions having received the Gospel from others. The omission of any address to a particular location is also unlike Paul.

Various authors have been suggested by those who deny that Paul wrote it. The most plausible suggestion is that of Barnabas, the mediator between the Jewish Christians and Paul. Others have suggested Apollos, Luke, Clement, Silas, Aquilla and Priscilla. The book is anonymous. Origen's said God only knows who wrote the book. That observation still holds true.

B. READERS

It is addressed to Jewish Christians, probably residing in Italy. The letter's content reflects this by the following:

- The book is named, "Letter to the Hebrews."
- The book warns about the danger of apostasy: lapsing back into Judaism.
- The letter speaks of persecution from the outside and also from hostile Jews.
- The reader's disappointment in their expectation of the speedy return of Christ led to spiritual feebleness and the beginning of apostasy. Hence, the author warns them against this danger, and exhorts them to be loyal to Christianity.
- The readers seem to be in Italy, as it is written, "Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you" (Hebrews 13:24). The idea is that Italians scattered from their homeland sent their greetings back home.
- The readers were Christians, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (Hebrews 3:1).
- The letter has a definite Jewish flavor with the many references to the Old Testament.

C. THEME

Since the problem addressed was a lapsing back into Judaism from Christ, the remedy to counteract this trend was to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus Christ over Judaism – which is the theme of the letter. Christ, the author emphasizes, is

sufficient and supreme to any and everything (e.g. 1:1-4; 9:11-14).

D. DATE

The exact date of writing is unknown, however, it appears that it was written somewhere in the A.D. 60's. There are three major reasons for picking this date. First, it was known by Clement of Rome who wrote in the 90's. Consequently, it was written before that date.

Second, the writer is trying to demonstrate the superiority of Christ over Judaism and all of its institutions, including the sacrificial system. Jerusalem and the Jewish temple were destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, which would offer convincing proof of the finish of the sacrificial system. However, the writer writes as though this system was still in place and operating (8:4, 13; 9:6-9; 10:1-3). Consequently, it must have been written before A.D. 70.

Third, the Roman Emperor began his terrible persecution of Christians in about A.D. 64. The letter does not seem to reflect severe persecution and death against the readers – which happened to the Christians in Rome.

If Paul was the likely writer, which he could have been because of the writer's extensive knowledge of Judaism and its systems, then he and Peter were executed about A.D. 67. Consequently, it would need to have been written before that date.

E. CONTROVERSIAL SECTION.

One very troublesome section is 6:4-8 where it speaks of losing our salvation. Many people use the section to "prove" we can lose our salvation. Of course, others believe that once saved always saved – or that truly born again Christians cannot lose their salvation. Several interpretations have been offered of this particular section.

1. One view is that Christians can lose their salvation. The problem with this view, however, is that it proves too much. Why? It is because if Christians can lose their salvation, then they can never get it back (6:6).
2. Another view is that only professing believers are involved, that is, not true, born again Christians. These are those who have only tasted salvation but not actually received salvation. They have fallen away from the knowledge of truth, but they have never fully believed the truth in the first place. The problem with this view is that these people have become "partakers" of the Holy Spirit which seems to indicate salvation.
3. A third view is seen in light of the context of Hebrews, which involves people turning back from Christ to the old animal sacrifices of Judaism to cover their sin. Here the thought is that if they reject the sacrificial atonement of Christ as the only means of salvation, there exists no other means or system of salvation (cf. 10:26-31 with 6:4-8). Animal sacrifices and good works are bankrupt regarding gaining salvation. Christ is the only way possible to get forgiveness of sin. I favor this view.
4. The fourth view is called the hypothetical position. Here the idea of Christians

losing salvation is only hypothetical. Perhaps it could be explained by contrasting the verses against John 10:27-30, which states that nothing can snatch us out of our Father's hand. In other words, this is a clear statement that the believer cannot lose their salvation. How can one reconcile this truth with Hebrews 6:4-6? One explanation is this: Christians can fall away and lose their salvation if left to their own strength. However, Christians will not fall way and be lost because they are kept by the power of the Holy Spirit.

F. IMPORTANT PASSAGES.

- The completion of special revelation in Christ (1:1,2).
- The role of angels in the believer's life (1:13, 14).
- The nature of the Bible (4:12)
- The nature of prayer (4:15, 16).
- The new covenant in Christ (8:6-13).
- The one time all sufficient sacrifice of Christ (10:10-14).
- The faith hall of fame (chapter 11).
- The heavenly city (12:22-24).
- God will never forsake us (13:5, 6).

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A GENERAL COMMENTARY

I. SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST (Chapters 1-4)

A. CHRIST IS GREATER THAN THE PROPHETS (1:1-4).

In this first few verses of Hebrews, the writer establishes the supreme qualifications, status, credibility, power, authority and absolute superiority of Jesus Christ. In the rest of the book, he breaks his argument down into its various parts. There are two parts he emphasizes: Christ's words are final and supreme, and His Person is exalted over all.

1. Prior to Christ's first Advent to this earth, God did communicate to humanity. Actually, one would expect the creator to connect with His creation. He did this through prophets, laws, kings, judges, institutions, events, dreams, personal visits, and ceremonies. His last mechanism of communicating with the human race was through Jesus Christ.

The revelations by God and about God that were given before Christ were in fragments, and partial. However, in Christ, He is the last and full revelation of God. The words, "Has Spoken," mean Christ is the final revelation until He returns. In other words, the Bible is complete and final.

John wrote, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth...No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:14, 18).

When we see Christ, we see God. In Christ's revelation, the Bible, we gain verbal, propositional words to clearly and accurately understand God and His relationship to us and His creation. Also, the content of Christ's words to us through the Bible is also pure, because they carry the authority and perfect character of God who never lies or leads us astray (Titus 1:2).

Peter also wrote, "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2 Peter 1:3; cf. v. 4).

What He means is that all the information we need for salvation, spiritual growth, and understanding what we need to function in this world has been given to us in the Bible (Cf. 2 Timothy 3:14-17). Christ also solemnly warned us to never add or take away from the words and theology of the completed Bible (Revelation 22:18, 19).

I stress this because virtually every religion and cult claims to have their own revelation from God that is equal to the Bible or is even greater than the Bible. For example, Mormons have the Book of Mormon. Jehovah Witnesses have the writings of founder Charles Russell and Judge Rutherford, and whose doctrines are distributed through The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

Islam has the Koran. Buddhism has the words of Buddha. Hindus have their Sacred writings. Even the Shaman of more isolated tribes claim to receive messages from

the spirit world. With all the non-Christian religions, false prophets, and cults claiming to have revelation from God, how are we to know what is the truth from God? The answer is to take as true the fact that the Bible is all the information we are to have until Christ returns.

Now I qualify my words. God does communicate to Christian individuals as we live out our lives on this earth. The Holy Spirit indwells every Christian. He guides us, encourages us, helps us to pray, gives us opportunity for ministry, and teaches us individually. He gives us principles to live by from the Bible. He speaks to us through the Sacred Words of the Bible.

We can gain impressions and heart desires from the Holy Spirit regarding certain life issues. He makes real to us His teachings from the Bible. We are in a living, dynamic, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This intimate, personal walk with God is never, however, contrary to the principles and words of the Bible. We always need to check with the Bible as to what we may think God is telling us, or leading us to do. Sometimes we understand the will of God through simple common sense and wisdom.

2. The second aspect of Christ is His Person and work. There are six qualities of Christ.

First, we see His universal Lordship of all things as Christ is as the, "Son," the, "heir," of all creation. He is the absolute owner and ruler of everything.

Second, Christ is the Creator of everything through, "whom also He made the world." This refers to the entire physical universe, along with space, time, spiritual agents, and even history. Of course, Christ did not create Himself, because He is The Creator.

Third, Christ is God, as He is the, "radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature." He is the very essence of God. It is not that Christ reflects the glory of God, but He is the glory of God. An example is the sun that radiates and gives off light and heat. The sun and the light are two different things. In the same way, Christ is not merely reflecting the glory of God, He is God who is the source of, and gives off glory.

Fourth, Christ is the all-powerful One who holds together all His creation, and keeps everything in its place operating in the way it was designed to function. Scientists and philosophers are always puzzled as to what is the "glue" that holds the universe together and keeps it doing what it does in an orderly, consistent, and predictable way? Christ is that "glue" that holds and sustains everything together and keep things operating as it should – even history, and your history (Cf. Colossians 1:15-17). God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life, and He will bring it to pass.

Fifth, He accomplished redemption for sin, "When He had made purification of sins." This refers to Christ's work on the cross where He took all the guilt, punishment, and suffering for all the sins for all time for all those who receive Him as their personal

Savior. He also rose from the dead to give eternal life to all born again Christians.

Sixth, His redemptive work was finished as He, “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” This phrase also points to His exalted position and status. Christ has always been co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, but now in His resurrected body, having completed the work of salvation by going to the cross in time and history, He now takes His seat again with God the Father. He is now the High Priest, exalted over and superior to everything and every institution.

Having now established the foundation and superiority of Christ in His revelation, His Person, His work, and His exalted position, the writer next begins to break down his arguments. His goal is to demonstrate to the wavering readers that nothing is superior to Christ and His Person and work.

The application to you and me is to trust God. He is in control of all, has a perfect plan along with the power to bring His promises of hope to completion in our lives. It is as I recently witnessed a line in a movie where the person uttered the words, “Don’t worry, everything is gonna be ok.” That is the reality to us in the troubles, conflicts, discouragements, and fears we face. History and our lives are in the hands of God, who is the Planner, Designer, Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of all. He loves us, and has the power and desire to protect us, and bring to perfect completion His plan for you and me.

B. CHRIST IS GREATER THAN THE ANGELS (1:5-2:18).

There are those who wish to worship and converse with angels. But, why look to angels when we can look to Christ who is far greater than the angels? Let’s see how.

1. The first way Christ is superior to the angels is in His exalted Person and authority (1:5-14). Angels are inferior in that they are all created beings, who owe their very existence to the plan and creation of Christ. Angel means messenger, and almost always in the Bible refers to a category of spiritual beings, who on occasion may take the form of humans (Hebrews 13:2). They are many in number, and very powerful.

All were created holy, but some followed the mutiny of Satan (Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:13, 14) against the rule of God, and became demons. Some demons are loose and roam the world under the authority of Satan and pitted against the work and people of God (Cf. Isaiah 14:12-14; Ephesians 6:10-12; 1 Peter 5:8, 9).

Satan has specific names which also point to his methods of operation in the universe. There are more than 40 descriptive titles and proper names given to Satan. Four are listed in Revelation 12:9, “And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

Other demons (fallen angels) are confined to a special prison for especial evil acts (Cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Ultimately, Satan and his demons are all accountable and will be judged by God (Revelation 20:1-3, 10). They cannot do anything except within

the limits God sets and for His purposes (Cf. Job 1:6-12).

However, we must never underestimate the power, evil, wickedness and hatred of Satan against not only Christians, but also all humanity. Consider this warning, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world” (1 Peter 5:8, 9).

Again, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Paul continues to warn us, “But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ...And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds” (2 Corinthians 11:3, 14, 15).

A very good description of how Satan works in the world is through corruption, which is the major problem of many countries and companies. We can see this by looking at his operation in heaven against God. He is proud, corrupted, unrighteous, filled with violence, and wickedness. But, in Ezekiel we can see his operation in this world.

The aspect of Satan’s sin I refer to is seen in the phrase, “unrighteousness of trade,” or, “dishonest trade” Ezekiel 28:16, 18). The word “trade” in the Hebrew is “*rakal*.” It means to go about from one to another. God is using a human analogy to describe what occurred in heaven.

By way of historical context of the passage, Tyre was a large business center in the trading world of that day, with many trading contacts. Business and government people have many contacts within an economy with which they do business or govern. They must go to bankers, investors, suppliers, retailers, manufacturers, traders, shippers, customers, employees, government workers and agencies – their contacts are very broad.

In order to be successful, businesses (and government) must operate within certain agreed upon ethical rules, laws and procedures. The rule of law must be observed. Crooks, con-men and cheaters who go “over the line” are eventually expelled in a good system. People will not trade with them because they lie, rob, cheat do not pay their bills, gossip, stir up trouble, hatred, mistrust, and hostility between people, cannot get credit, customers quit buying, etc. In other words, they corrupt the system (whether business or governments) and cause it to malfunction.

In the same way as a corrupt business person or government worker, Satan had great access to many component parts of God’s total creation. He sought to plunder

that which was God's. He lied to Eve, coaxed and lured many angels away from following God, causing administrative rebellion, and he tried to rob God of His influence, power, authority and treasures. His motive was pride (Ezekiel 28:17), and his strategy was corruption (Ezekiel 28:16, 18).

He is a murderer, cheater, thief, trouble maker, and liar – the chief of con-men. He is ruthless and will not stop at anything to advance his own personal interests at the expense of others. As a corrupted business person (or government worker) fouls the business, economic, and social systems, so Satan fouled the systems of creation God had set into motion. In the end, crooks go to jail – and Satan will too. His corruption got Satan fired from his once exalted position in the royal palace of God Almighty, and he is going to the lake of fire for his crimes.

Our best weapon is to don the armor of God, be aware of his methods, and resist Him (Ephesians 6:10-20).

2. Good angels are messengers and servants of God, and carry out His instructions. They also are assigned to serve Christians, and even observe Christians in churches (Hebrews 1:14; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 11:10). They observe our earthly events (Luke 15:10). One angel, Michael, carries the title of archangel, and Gabriel has an important place in the ranking of angels (Daniel 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Luke 1:19, 26).

We are told that angels move among us. The writer of Hebrews said, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

I know that it is a great source of comfort and joy to know of the power of angels toward us in this life. That is good, very good. However, Jesus pointed to our greatest source of joy this way, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

3. A great emphasis is placed on the words of Christ in the New Testament (Hebrews 2:1-4). The idea is that if the messages and laws given through the angels in the past were to be obeyed under conditions of great punishment if disobeyed, how much more the message from Jesus to be obeyed, and which is now recorded in the New Testament.

4. Verse five speaks of a new world organized during the millennial kingdom on earth that will not be ruled by angels, but by Christ as the Messiah and believers that God has given to the Son. Verse seven speaks of Christ being for a little while lower than the angels. This means of lower rank. Christ identified Himself with humans, suffered the penalty of sin for them, and then was raised to a place of ultimate ruler over all that exists. This was His position before He became human to take our sins.

Then with His suffering and resurrection, He regained His position, and has taken believers as His brethren and to rule in glory with Him. As a practical note, Christ is not ashamed of His people – He is not ashamed of you, the believer. Many times you

may feel as though everyone is against you, even though you are a Christian. Sometimes we commit sin and are ashamed of ourselves, or family members and friends have turned against us for some reason. We feel abandoned, rejected, humiliated, embarrassed, and forsaken. However, because of the work of Christ on our behalf, He is not ashamed of us.

As a consequence, don't be ashamed of Him. He considers us as His brother (2:11). Don't be ashamed of now being a part of the family of God, a Christian. Enjoy your new position.

5. Verses 2:14-18 speaks of an enormous freedom – victory over death. Christ identified by becoming human so as through His substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, He took our penalty. Christ broke the ugly power of death that hovers over the human race. This is the power Satan wields over humanity.

Every culture in any part of human history (after the fall of Adam) has had a religious expression. In that expression, they have certain rules, worldviews, and rituals that they hope will gain God's (or gods) favor, and somehow give them a few more years of life. That is the power of religion: to escape death. It is interesting to note that all of the major religions have some sort of remedial system after this life. That is, they hold out hope that after death they will somehow get a second chance to get better and avert ultimate death and punishment.

I have often thought that the common and central dynamic in culture is death, the fear it brings, and the culture that surrounds it.

We have cemeteries, religions, casket makers, hospitals, poisons, prisons, medications, life insurance, funerals, armies, police, prisons, sanitation services – and the list goes on. The death industry is enormous. Take just a minute and think how different life would be if there were no death. As I write, there is a deadly Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa. It is one of the most deadly diseases on earth with no cure and a 90% death rate. Those afflicted places are almost in a state of panic. Why? Because of death.

The object of war is to bring enough death to the enemy so they will surrender. The ultimate power and threat of a bank robber is that, "If you don't give me your money, I will kill you." His power? Death.

As the writer states, "that through death He (i.e. Christ) might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Hebrews 2:14b, 15).

The power of death and the fear it spawns is how Satan controls the people of the world. The great fear is that of punishment. The great news is that with Christ, death has been defeated. We need not fear death and punishment anymore, because Christ took our punishment, and we are guaranteed of heaven and peace with God. Satan has lost his powerful weapon of the fear of death to use against us.

6. We are taught that Christ made “propitiation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17). Propitiation means that God’s wrath toward guilty mankind was satisfied through the death of Christ (cf. Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2). We are told the Christ is now our permanent High Priest, and that He is merciful and faithful. He was tempted in all things as we people of the earth (but remained sinless); consequently, He can understand and sympathize with the temptations that we go through. It is a good thing that He is merciful, because even as Christians, we need much mercy.

C. CHRIST IS GREATER THAN MOSES (3:1-6).

1. First, we see that the issue is of building God’s house. We Christians who are partakers of a heavenly, eternal status are God’s building. We are “holy” in that we have been set apart for God and His purposes.

Moses was faithful as only a servant in God’s house. The Mosaic system of laws, ceremonies and rituals pointed forward to Christ who would build God’s building – the Church. The builder of a house has far more status than the servants of a house.

2. Second, consider what that means. There are those who think we must keep the laws of Moses – that is the Ten Commandments and the hundreds of others that accompanied that body of law. It is true that those laws reflect the nature and holiness of God, and the Ten Commandments are excellent standards to order a civil society.

The problem is that those laws cannot give life – they can only point out our guilt and the need for a Savior. It is impossible for any man to perfectly keep the Mosaic Law. Except, that is, Jesus Christ. We are dead in our trespasses and sin, in desperate need for forgiveness and life.

The Old Testament laws pointed forward to Jesus who fulfilled the demands of the law, and who was the object of the law. How foolish to think that by keeping a law that we can gain eternal life. And, what gain does it give us to slavishly try to adhere to the law to gain righteousness when it an impossible feat to begin with?

For example, let’s say we want to go to Paris, France. Our starting point is Los Angeles, USA. We then board a Boeing 777 that is heading toward Tokyo, Japan. Will we reach Paris? Of course not! We are headed in the wrong direction. Our destination will be Tokyo, not Paris. We got on the wrong plane!

In a similar way, our greatest destination in life is forgiveness and eternal life. If we try to obtain them by keeping the Law of Moses, we cannot reach our desired destination. We are headed in the wrong direction. The only route to heaven is only through Jesus Christ alone. We must be careful to go to the correct gate at the airport – the gate called Jesus Christ.

3. If Christ is greater than Moses, then that makes Him greater than the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses is inferior to Christ. If there ever was a law that could get

us to heaven, it would be the Mosaic Law, which is perfect – except that it cannot give a dead person life. Since Christ is superior to the greatest body of law, then that make Him superior to any religious system of laws that seeks to earn favor with God.

Furthermore, since the greatest system of laws is rendered worthless in terms of salvation, life and gaining righteousness before God, then all religious system of laws, rituals, and ceremonies to gain favor with God are also worthless.

That renders all religions worthless in terms of gaining favor and righteousness before God. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven.

Many religions have good things and are wise in many ways. They produce many good and wonderful things that help society, families, governments, and individuals. It is to our peril to ignore the wisdom of the ages in arranging our lives and cultures.

But, consider this illustration. Let's say that there is a wonderful six lane highway that links two major cities. The highway is straight, smooth, has no potholes, has solid guard rails and is made of the best asphalt. Even the scenery alongside the freeway is gorgeous. We might say, "My but this is a great highway."

However, let me throw in a problem. About half way between the cities, there is a huge bridge that has been washed out by a major volcano eruption and the mud slides that followed. It is 400 feet to the bottom, which is filled with mud and ash. It is impossible to drive a vehicle through the mess. Question: is it a good highway?

No, it is a worthless highway, because it cannot get me to the next city, which is my destination. It has many wonderful features, but it cannot get me to my destination.

It is the same way with religions: they may have many wonderful, beautiful features, but they cannot get us to heaven.

D. CHRIST IS THE GREATEST OBJECT OF FAITH (3:7-4:16).

1. The first thing we note in this section is the importance of faith, and the destructive nature of unbelief and sliding away from faith in Christ. The illustration is given of how ancient Israel fell away in unbelief during their 40 year journey in the wilderness (cf. Numbers 14-21). The condition that drew the anger of God, and the 40 years of trials in the desert, was unbelief.

2. There are several words that describe of unbelief that puts a barrier between us and God. Unbelief is exercised in the face of clear revelation and communication from God. It is written, "Today if you hear His voice" which is repeated in 3:8, 15), and "For who provoked Him when they had heard?" (3:16).

Unbelief is expressed when we ignore, doubt, or do not believe in our hearts and behavior the revelation from God as delivered in the Bible.

Unbelief is describes as "hardened hearts," "testing God," going astray in the heart,"

“not knowing God’s ways,” “evil unbelieving heart,” “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,” “disobedient.” Those are harsh words, but the fruit they bear is even worse. Unbelief provokes God to “anger” and removing blessing from His people.

3. You can see the linkage between our thought life and behavior. First came the refusal to believe God, and then came the disobedience in behavior and lifestyle. Consequently, this emphasized the importance of what kind of information we put into our minds. Disobedience follows unbelief.

4. The antidote to unbelief involves several things. First, there is the state of being on guard (3:12). That is, realize the ease of how faulty thinking can invade our mind. Society and culture around us constantly pumps unbelief into our minds. We see it in the movies, newspapers, TV, educational books – everywhere. That is why be aware of what we decide to believe.

Second, we are to, “encourage one another day after day” (3:13). This step has to do with the company we keep. It is true that we must work and live in this secular world. We cannot withdraw from our work and communities. However, we also need to spend time reading encouraging books, being around spiritual Christians who will affirm our faith, make it our practice to be in church, be engaged in Christian service, and to fellowship with Christians. The “encouragement” is to give us courage to believe and obey God in all walks of our life.

Third, there is the linkage between hearing mingled with faith (4:2). We can read the Bible many times, quote Scripture verses, and listen to many great sermons. It is possible to know many things about the Bible, even deep theology, but at the same time not really believe or feel it down deep in our hearts. True faith consists of a heartfelt sense of confidence, satisfaction, reliance, and trust in God and His word, and a full surrender to His will.

5. We can also note several things about Moses and creation in this section. The writer of Hebrews, who was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, believed that the wanderings of Israel coming out of Egypt, and led by Moses, and the story of Joshua were actual historical facts. There are many who deny those facts of the Bible.

Second, we can see the writer believed the Genesis record regarding the creation of the world. This is where a test comes to us regarding the issues of evolution verses creation. The writer claims that God’s works were “finished from the foundation of the world” (4:3). This would be contrary to the theory of evolution that believes that the universe is still evolving from the simple to the complex. In other words, creation is done.

Third, we also see that the writer believed the Genesis account of the creation being accomplished in six days – not six eons of time. It is said, “For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’” (4:4). This is a quote from Genesis 2:2 (cf. Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17).

Regarding the days of creation, Moses considered them to be six actual 24 hour days. The writer of Hebrews believed Moses' account.

Fourth, God rested after His creation. This does not mean God was tired. It means that God entered into a restful sense of satisfaction and repose that comes from the completion of a task. When we finish a task, and look at the finished product, we have a sense of satisfaction over the completed work. This is what is referred to when God, "rested" on the seventh day.

6. This sense of, "rest" is used to describe our salvation. When we enter into salvation by grace through faith, we enter into a sense of satisfaction and the end of fear and struggle, because by faith we have entered into and enjoy our state of salvation.

We can rest in our salvation, because it is finished. As God was satisfied with the completion of the creation of the world in seven days, it is said it is finished. Likewise, our salvation is finished when we come by faith to Jesus Christ. There is nothing else to do. Christ finished the entire project.

7. Verses 12 and 13 tell us vital facts regarding the Bible – the Word of God. The Bible is truth. The inward parts and motivations of humanity is complex, and a mixture of good, bad, deceit, honesty, lust, purity, doubt, faith – a maze of secret, churning conflicting thoughts and motives.

When we read and hear the Word of God preached and taught it speaks to those contradictions deep within us. It becomes a purifying factor as it exposes the hidden secrets and sins of our lives.

For example, I recall when I first started going to church as an adult. The preacher was preaching through the Bible verse by verse. I thought He was speaking directly to me. I even had suspicions that my wife had been telling him about my secret life, and he was talking about me. However, the preacher, Rev. Mel Erickson, was just explaining the meaning of the verses, and the Holy Spirit was applying the truth to my life.

That is why it is important for pastors to preach the meaning of the Bible to their congregations. The Word will encourage, expose, and purify the hearers. The preacher doesn't need to point out the sins of the congregations, just preach the Bible in a practical way, and the Holy Spirit will perform any needed change in people's lives.

The Bible is living and active. That means the Bible is effective, valid, and able to do the work it was intended to do. It still applies to and is up to date in addressing our troubles, sins, solutions and giving encouragement. Being sharper than a double edged sword drives home the point in a figurative way. A double edged sword is far more effective than a single edged sword. The Bible goes down to deepest parts of our spirit and soul, and exposes our thoughts and motives.

There are no secrets before God. He knows all that we do and think. He is aware of the secret sins we do, but also He knows of our struggles and temptations, and desire to please Him. We must all stand before Christ in judgment – for the Christian it will be for rewards or lack of rewards. The issue will not be salvation for the believer (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Some theologians use this section to point out that our being has both a spirit and soul. Others believe that we have just one faculty, but that it is divided into two different functions. There are two different divisions mentioned: soul and spirit; and joints and marrow. It would seem that since joints and marrow are different parts of our body, then soul and spirit are also two separate parts of our person.

Our soul contains our emotions, intellect, and will and directs their intent through our bodies. This is taught by many psychologists. That is, we think a thought, the emotions consist of chemicals that give us the energy to carry out our choice, or wills into existence behavior consistent with our thinking.

Our spirits are that part of the person that communes with God. It is that part that is born again when we are saved (cf. John 1:12, 13; 3:3-6; Ephesians 2:1, 5).

8. Verses 14-16 give us great encouragement. Christ is our great high priest. The writer returns again to subject of Christ as our High Priest (cf. 2:17-3:6).

The priesthood in the OT was in charge of sacrifice and offerings at places of worship – especially in the tabernacle and temple. Priest also were to give blessings to the people (Numbers 6:22-26), determining the will of God (Exodus 28:30), and teaching the people the laws of God. They were the representatives of the people before God. They were a mediator between God and the people.

In the Old Testament the High Priest was to pass beyond courts and veils into the Holy of Holies to offer a sacrifice to God. This was the ultimate sacrifice. Christ fulfilled perfectly all the functions of the priesthood, that is, a Prophet, Priest, and King.

There is a special twist in this section. The earthly temple was built after the pattern of the heavenly tabernacle (Hebrews 8:2-5; 9:24, 25). The earthly High Priest went into the earthly Holy of Holies to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people. However, Jesus “passed through the heavens” into the real Holy of Holies where He offered His own blood for the sins of the people.

Some believe this event happened when Mary Magdalene discovered Jesus after His resurrection (John 20:11-18). Mary was astonished to see the risen Christ and began clinging to Jesus. Jesus answered, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God’” (John 20:17).

The time line, then, was this: following His resurrection, Christ met with Mary. Then he passed through the heavens to the throne of God to offer His own blood as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all who come to Him (Hebrews 10:12; 13:12). His remarks to Mary, then, meant something like, "Stop clinging to me, Mary, I still need to go into heaven into the Holy of Holies to present my blood as sacrifice to God the Father. Then I will come back to earth again for a short time." Later, after 40 days back on earth, He returned to Heaven where He took His position at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12).

9. The second encouragement to us is found in verses 15 and 16. Christ, as our High Priest, has experience life just as do we. Christ is sinless (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). Just as an elephant cannot fly, Jesus could not sin.

However, He could be tempted, and He was in every way that we can be tempted. Satan tempted Jesus with the intent to disqualify Christ as a sufficient, sinless Savior. The temptation came in three forms, just like it did to Eve. First, Satan tempted both Eve and Christ with hunger, or physical appetite and desires (Genesis 3:1; Matthew 4:3). Jesus answered that people don't live by bread alone – indicating that obedience to God is first before trying to satisfy earthly desires.

Second, the temptation came in the offer of personal gain and popularity. Jesus answered that it is better to be in God's will than to be popular with people by some kind of marvelous talent or ability (Genesis 3:4; Matthew 4:6).

Third, the temptation was a quick way to power or glory (Genesis 3:5; Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus would eventually rule everything, but He would need to follow the plan of God, which meant going through the suffering, humiliation, and agony of the dying on the cross. If He had not done that, then we would be without access to salvation. Christ would also be worshiping Satan who is an inferior being compared to God. Christ followed the plan of God, which meant that we now have provision for salvation, and Christ is the Ruler of the entire universe. If Christ had followed Satan's offer, He would only be the ruler of the kings of this world.

Another factor, which was a difference between Christ and Eve, is that Christ knew and believed the Word of God. Eve disobeyed, or did not believe, the Word of God. Consequently, it is very important to know, believe, and apply the Bible to our lives.

John expressed the major forms of temptation this way, as paraphrased in the Living Bible, "Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love these things you show that you do not really love God; for all these worldly things, these evil desires – the craze for sex, the ambition to buy everything that appeals to you, and the pride that comes from wealth and importance – these are not from God. They are from this evil world itself" (1 John 2:15, 16).

At least three things we can learn from the temptations of Christ: 1. God is sufficient, adequate and able; 2. God's plan for your life is the best plan; 3. Obedience to God's will offers greatest long term reward than the temporary rewards of this world. That

is, the wealth, power and popularity offered by this world pales in comparison to the future “praise, glory, and honor” that will come from God, present joy in this life, and the obtaining of eternal salvation through faith (1 Peter 1:7-9; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Christ, the perfect One, has experienced all the temptations in their most intense form that we experience. Yet, He remained sinless; however, He knows what we go through in our weakness. Because of His experience, He can and does understand the problems we face in our sinful nature. His invitation, then, is for us to come quickly and without fear to the throne of “grace” to receive mercy and grace.

Mercy is for forgiveness of our sin by confession (1 John 1:9), and grace is for enablement to live the life Christ wants us to live. Note, too, that it is a throne of grace, not punishment and torment. Grace is unmerited favor toward the guilty.

When we need encouragement, or when we have sinned out of weakness of the flesh, or ignorance, or willful disobedience, we can approach with confidence the throne filled with grace and forgiveness. Christ desires our companionship, even in our saved but still sinful condition. He does not wish us to run away and hide like Adam and Eve, or to point fingers and give excuses as did those two. He desires us to humbly come to Him for what we need.

All our worries, fears, doubts, troubles, weaknesses, sins, mistakes, and tragedies He wants us to bring them all and lay them at the foot of the throne of grace. He loves us, and is our High Priest whose very own blood pays the eternal penalty for our sins, and who is our Advocate or Intercessor before a Mighty and Holy God.

Without doubt, Jesus Christ is the greatest object of our faith. From here, come with me and we will explore the superiority of Christ’s Priesthood in chapters 5-10. The exercise will deepen our faith, and increase our service to Christ and His people.

II. SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD (chapters 5-10).

A. CHRIST HAS GREATER CREDENTIALS THAN THE HIGH PRIESTS (5:1-10).

1. In this section the functions of the earthly, Leviticus high priest are given. They were assigned by God from among men (descending from Aaron) in regard to the things of God. They offered sacrifices and gifts to God for the sins of himself and the people. They also counseled gently those who were caught up in sin either by ignorance or being misled, or other situations.

2. Christ, however, came from the line of Judah, which was not from the line of Aaron (7:14). He was, however, called and appointed by God. The crying out to God was of His experience of times like those of John 12:27; and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39-44). His prayers were heard because of His holiness or piety.

3. He came from a different priesthood – Melchizedek. The issue is who is Melchizedek? More about this person is explained in chapter seven. He is a type or picture of the future Christ. His story is told in genesis 14:17-20). He was a great

king-priest like Christ (cf. Genesis 14:18; Zechariah 6:12, 13); a man like Christ (cf. Hebrews 7:4; 1 Timothy 2:5); like Christ he was appointed by God (cf. Hebrews 7:21); and both he and Christ were called King of righteousness, and King of Peace (cf. Isaiah 11:5-9; Hebrews 7:2).

As we will see later, this order of priesthood is superior to that of the Levitical Priesthood.

4. A practical lesson we can take from this section is the place of suffering in our lives. Jesus learned obedience through suffering. Suffering can bring different responses from people. It can cause people to become bitter and hardened toward God. Suffering can also cause people to become distracted from God, eagerly seeking relief from somewhere. However, suffering can also cause us to draw closer to God, drawing our strength from Him. We can realize that suffering is not permanent, and if because of involvement in the cause of Christ, will bring great reward (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). It can cause our faith to grow. Suffering can purify our faith.

5. A theological truth is that Christ is our source of eternal salvation. That fact certainly sets Him apart and renders Him superior than the Levitical priesthood. The earthly high priest was a sinner himself – who eventually died. He could not save himself let alone the people. However, the perfect Christ made a complete, adequate atonement for our sins and lives eternally.

B. READERS ARE EXHORTED TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO CHRIST (5:11-6:20).

The writer gives an interlude, or sidebar. He will return to the issue of the Melchizedek priesthood in chapter seven. However, there are several practical living issues He reminds us.

1. He first calls us to grow in spiritual maturity (5:11-6:3). His reproof is that people had stopped growing in spiritual maturity. They kept going over the simple things of salvation through Christ, and neglected to dive deeper into the Word and the things of God.

Sometimes church (and individuals) can have, “dead orthodoxy.” That is, they believe the grand truths of how to be saved, but just give it lip service. It is true that it is helpful to review and be reminded of our salvation. It is our greatest joy to know of our inheritance in heaven. But, sometimes those truths and other teachings become boring to people. People care not to dig deeper into the things of God, or to experience Him in new and fresh ways. There is no expansion, growth, personal application, of the things of God in a personal way. The Bible and Christian experience is not real to people. They remain “baby Christians.”

There are at least three ways, mentioned in this section, of how to grow in Christ. The process involves time (v. 12), concentrated focus on learning the Bible (v. 13), and practical experience and practice in using the Bible to discern what is good and evil, or what is the best course of action in different situations (vv. 13, 14). It is training, and training needs knowledge, practice, evaluation, correction, and time. It is

to obtain in our minds correct information, and then linking that information to other ideas, experiences, and knowledge we have already picked up through our life experience.

It is to find out what the Bible says, what it correctly means, and how does it apply to all the parts of my personal life experience. Spiritual maturity is a process, a journey – not a onetime event. Maturity is a marathon, not a sprint – or a onetime experience.

2. Now we come to a very complicated section of Scripture: can Christians lose their salvation (6:4-8)? These verses have been interpreted several different ways.

First, the Arminians hold that people can lose their salvation. Arminians hold to a particular theology, and are contrasted with the Calvinists. On this particular doctrine of eternal security, the Calvinists believe that once a person is saved, they are always saved for eternity. Arminians believe that once a person is saved, there are some things that a Christian can do that cause them to lose their salvation. This great doctrine was hotly debated during the Reformation (@A.D. 1500-1700).

This event was when the Protestant church broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in Europe. Some important Protestant leaders of the time were Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Menno Simons.

Actually, this theological issue dates back to the great controversy between Augustine of Hippo (d. A.D. 430) and another fellow named Pelagius (d. @ A.D. 440). The Reformers such as Calvin followed Augustine. Jacobus Arminius (d. A.D. 1609) followed in the vein of Pelagius.

These differences today can be found generally in today's denominations. For examples, some Baptists are Calvinists; others are Arminians. Methodists, Assembly of God, Wesleyans follow the Arminian views. Presbyterians and some Baptists follow Calvin.

Coming back to these particular verses in Hebrews, the Arminians believe it is a proof text that a Christian can lose their salvation. The problem this view faces, however, is that it proves too much. One, it means a Christian who once loses their salvation, cannot ever regain it. Two, it does not clearly define what, "fallen away," means. Consequently, the Christian is constantly worried if they have committed a sin that will cost them their salvation.

And, three, it flies in the face of how our salvation is accomplished. For example, later in Hebrews, the writer states, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...but He having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time...For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14).

Christ has already fully paid the entire penalty for all the sins for all time for all who come to Him by faith. There is absolutely nothing we can do to add anything to our

salvation. Christ paid it all. Salvation is all about Christ and His work on the cross. If He paid everything that was needed to secure our salvation, then it would be impossible for us to lose something we had nothing to do with to begin with.

The problem with this understanding is that if a Christian loses their salvation, then there would never be any Christians in heaven. All of us have sinned. Even Paul stated that He was not perfect (Philippians 3:12), which means he still sinned after His conversion. He even said He was the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

King David would not be in Heaven because he committed adultery and murdered the husband of Bathsheba. Even more, why would Peter bother to preach a sermon on how to be saved after he denied the Lord (cf. Acts 2:14ff; John 18:25). Why would he become a church leader even to the point of martyrdom, if he could not be resaved after he denied his faith? If anyone ever fell away from their faith it was Peter when he denied even knowing Jesus.

Furthermore, it would be pointless for Paul to instruct the Corinthians to restore a sinner and forgive the guilty one if in fact the poor backslider could not be saved again (2 Corinthians 2:6ff.).

Finally, John explains it this way in speaking to believers, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10).

A second view of these verses refers to a person who has heard the gospel of Christ, but was never saved in the first place. This view refers to verse nine, "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way" (Hebrews 6:9). This view would emphasize that these are verses that warn Christians to keep walking in the ways of God.

A third view says that these verses are a hypothetical view. Another way of saying it is this, "Christians can fall away, but they will not fall away because of the Holy Spirit who has sealed them in Christ."

A fourth view, that makes a lot of sense, is that this Scripture applies to those liberal forms of Christianity that have become apostate. There are those denominations, seminaries, and theologians who no longer believe the Bible is the Word of God, that Jesus never existed or that He did not do the things the New Testament said He did, and deny as being true the historic orthodox beliefs of the Christian Faith.

Many Christian universities have abandoned the historic Christian Faith and are Christian in name only. Some universities that were started by Bible believing, evangelical Christians have even taken out the name Christian, and play down their Christian roots.

Apostates were in the early church, and have infected the Faith from the start of Christianity – and even before.

A fifth view is more complicated, but to me it makes the most sense. It states that if one rejects the salvation package of Christ, there remains no other means of salvation. In the context, what we must remember is that some of the Hebrews were under persecution from both the Roman authorities and the Jews, and were deciding that maybe it would be better to reject Christ and turn back to Judaism.

The writer is saying, then, if you turn back from Christ, there is no other way to be saved. Peter clearly stated to the Jews, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6).

If we skip further ahead in Hebrews, I think it explains the most sensible meaning to these troublesome verses. It reads,

“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10: 26-29).

In other words, if we come to a clear understanding of salvation through Christ, but reject it and go looking somewhere else for salvation, we are doomed to damnation. Why? Because, there is no other means of salvation available – or in existence, anywhere. It is by Christ alone, and only through Christ. Salvation is exclusively through Jesus Christ. If we reject the only salvation available; then, there is no other salvation available.

3. Sometimes when we get caught up in a controversial theological point we lose sight of a very practical and valuable truth relating to our own personal service to Christ. Such is the case here. Here is one such verse, and it means so much to me personally, “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints” (Hebrews 6:10).

Wow! What encouragement. Many of you have worked hard and at great sacrifice in your Christian service. You have given generously of your time, talent, and treasure (TTT) in service as a pastor, evangelist, humanitarian worker, teacher, missionary, or

church worker in service to God's people. Sometimes you may wonder why you gave so much. You get tired, discouraged, humiliated or stressed out. You may want to give up, and quit the ministry.

Sometimes when you get old, and your life has been given to the Lord's service, you find yourself in financial trouble. You gave all your money to others in the name of Christ, or you sacrificed and barely scraped by, resulting in little or any retirement or savings for your old age. You look at others who worked in secular work, and they have fine retirements, big houses, and new cars, and you might think that you made a mistake – that somehow God was unfair to you.

Or maybe you do have money, but are barely paying the bills. You have a family, bills to pay, and the pressures of living life. You say to yourself, "I need to pay bills first, I really do need a new car, or a remodel on the house, better clothes, better insurance, I just don't have the time to serve God, I can't afford it now," and the like.

This is what Jesus was referring to in the parable of the sower, "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22).

The problem with this kind of thinking, however, is that we have the wrong perspective of who God is, and of money and the good life it can buy. We think that it is our TTT that we are giving God – that somehow He needs our TTT to carry out His work. It is like God is fund raising from us and competing against every other non-profit in the world. We may think He is just another telemarketer trying to get another donation, or for us to donate clothes, or volunteer our time.

If we have this outlook, we begin to think God is broke. We may even think that God is unjustly taking our hard earned money that belongs to us, and that would be better spent by going to an expensive restaurant, play, or something else we want.

It is so easy to distort our view of God when we are tempted and bombarded by this world to gain more popularity, wealth, and power.

Remember this, faithful servant of Christ, God is not unjust, unfair - nor has He forgotten your hard work for Him. God is not a beggar. His record keeping system is perfect. He will never forget your struggles. The opportunities you have for Christian service were given to you by him. The struggles you have are to purify your faith – and your persistent service in the face of many obstacles will bring great reward to you. The money you gave was given to you by God in the first place. You cannot out give God. He will not let Himself become obligated to you.

I have nothing against any of those things I mentioned. It is fine to have money – a lot of it. Don't misunderstand me. It is how we use it is the issue, and our attitude. Here is God's view on people and money,

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Another thing we can learn from this verse is that our sacrificial service to God by helping and continuing to minister to His people is an expression of our love to Him. Sometimes some may think that if they just sing songs of love toward God, and praise Him in church, then that is enough love to show Him. He tells us, however, that ministering to His people is not only a form of obedience, but also a demonstration of our love to Him. Action demonstrates our love. Actually, this is one major point that the epistle of James puts before us.

The writer, in wrapping up this encouragement, tells us to be diligent, not lazy, but be imitators our spiritual forefathers, and with patience and faith.

God wrote through Paul, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Let this verse be an encouragement to you great Christian servants who have and are sacrificing to get out the gospel of Jesus Christ to unsaved sinners under hard circumstances and with little funding. Be encouraged as you help the people of God as they struggle with life, and as you help them grow in Christ. God has not forgotten you, and He is not unjust. I know it is a great encouragement to me – I hope you also.

4. Now the writer gives us another encouragement. He wants to assure us of our salvation – maybe because of the doubt He may have stirred up a few verses prior. (6:13-20).

The issue is the sure hope of our salvation, and the certainty of it, and how it is an anchor to our soul. Abraham is brought up as an example. God promised to give Abraham great blessing and spiritual offspring. The spiritual offspring are all those who place their faith in Christ as their Savior – and OT saints who placed their faith in God. It was an unconditional promise from God to Abraham. All Abraham had to do was to believe God’s promise – and with good reason.

God made an oath to Himself. Ordinarily, when people give an oath, they swear on the Bible, or to some greater authority. God, however, is the highest Authority, so He swore the oath to Himself. There were three cementing features of God’s oath to save us by faith.

First, the oath is unchangeable (6:17). His promise to save us by faith alone in Christ alone cannot be changed. Your salvation is sealed in heaven, and it is impossible for it to be changed. Not because of what you or I have done, but because of what Christ

has done. Faith is the only condition required to be saved – and even that is given to us by God. God will never change His mind and come up with another means of salvation.

Second, God cannot lie (6:18). It is not that God will not lie (though that is also true), but God cannot lie. It is against His nature. For example, a horse cannot fly – because it is against his nature. The horse does not have the ability to fly. In the same way, God does not have the ability to lie. He is absolutely holy and pure in His being. If He cannot lie, then that is another solid reason he cannot undo and remake His plan of salvation. It is impossible for Him to change His promise that He made by an oath.

Third, this promise serves as an anchor to our soul. It encourages us, gives us hope that is solid, a foundation to our lives. We never again need fear going to hell. Of course, we don't want to die – we naturally have a fear of the unknown. Self-preservation is a basic part of our nature. However, some day we will die. But our faith assures us that better things await us at our next destination.

The writer further assures us by telling us we will “enter within the veil,” which means we will enter the presence of God Himself. This, too, is certain, because Christ was our forerunner, preparing the way for us to enter His presence. The word, “forerunner” is used as both a scout, and a herald announcing the arrival of someone. Christ entered the Holy of Holies in heaven as our High Priest, and had made a way for us to enter the presence of God. We can approach with confidence, hope, anticipation, and not fear and trembling.

From here we go into more detail about Melchizedek.

C. CHRIST IS GREATER THAN THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK (7:1-8:13).

The point in this section dealing with this person, Melchizedek, is to demonstrate that Christ's priesthood is separate, superior, and different than the one established between God and Israel – the Levitical priesthood. Israel's priesthood original ancestor was Levi, the third son of Jacob and Leah. Levi is described in the Bible as savage, merciless, and instruments of wrath (cf. Genesis 34:25-31; 49:5-7; Exodus 32:28).

1. To set the scene of this section of Scripture, it is important to remind ourselves of the genealogy of the Patriarchs – the founders of the nation of Israel. It is time for a little history lesson. The Patriarchs were Abraham, his son, Isaac, his son, Jacob, and the 12 sons of Jacob. The latter became known as the 12 tribes of Israel.

Abraham was the first Hebrew patriarch. His name means, “father of a multitude.” Through his wife, Sarah (“Princess”), they had a son, Isaac. However, through Abraham's Egyptian concubine, Hagar, Abraham produced a son by the name of Ishmael – the half-brother of Isaac.

The descendants of Ishmael settled east of Canaan (Genesis 16:12) in the Arabian

Peninsula and the desert land stretching up through Mesopotamia, and intermingled with the people already living there. As they mingled with the other nomadic tribes, they became known as the Ishmaelites, and also are identified as Midianites (Genesis 12:11-16; 37:25-28; 39:1; Judges 8:22-24; 7:1ff.). They eventually became the modern Arabs.

The land referred to as the cradle of civilization (Mesopotamia) included ancient Samaria, Assyria, Persia, and Babylon. Today the lands include parts of southern Turkey, Iraq, parts of Iran, and Syria, and Kuwait.

According to Islamic tradition, they trace their genealogy (through multiple generations) from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Ishmael to Abdul-Muttalib who was the grandfather of Muhammad, the father of Islam.

Judaism and Christianity trace their genealogy the same as Muslims up to Abraham, but then through Isaac, then Jacob and his twelve sons. To Christians, the line goes from Jacob's son, Judah, finally to Mary then Jesus. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is God (and Messiah), and gave us the final revelation from God in the New Testament.

Jews believe that Jesus was not the Messiah, but that the Messiah is still future. Islam believes that Muhammad was the final prophet, but that a messiah is still coming in the future. They believe that Muhammad was the last prophet who received the full and more complete revelation from God, and that revelation was placed in the Koran. Since Muhammad came from Ishmael, Muslims believe they are the favored people of God, and not Jews or Christians. There were always conflicts between the people of Ishmael and Isaac, which was the start the tensions between Muslims, Christians, and Jews – and carried on with the conflict between Jacob and Esau.

Now we go back to the Patriarchs, or founders of Israel – the Hebrew nation. Abraham was the offspring of Terah who descended from Shem, the son of Noah – the fellow associated with the great flood. Abraham grew up in Ur of the Chaldees, a leading Sumerian city located in Mesopotamia. God called Abraham into the land of Canaan where he settled along with his family after him.

One of the 12 sons of Jacob was a man named Levi. His family was known as Levites, and they eventually were given the responsibility to conduct the priesthood duties when Israel became formally organized as a nation. On a timeline, this was after the Hebrew exodus from slavery in Egypt.

Levi's tribe was chosen because they stood with Moses when the rest of Israel worshipped the golden calf in the desert (Exodus 32:25-29; Deuteronomy 10:6-9).

The great lawgiver and Levite, Moses had a brother, Aaron. Aaron had the great privilege of being appointed the very first high priest in the organized Levitical priesthood. This priesthood started at a specific time in history, and with a specific

person who was born, lived and died.

With this short history lesson in mind, we go back to Hebrews chapter five through seven, and find out more about this fellow named Melchizedek. This king-priest's name means king of righteousness and peace. He was a real, historical king and ruler over Salem, which eventually was named Jerusalem. He was also a priest to God. Other than this section in Hebrews, all we are told of this king/priest is found in Genesis 14:17-20; Psalm 110:4). Evidently, there was a group of people who lived in Jerusalem at that time who believed in the God of the Bible, and worshipped Him.

As today, various factions and alliances of kings of Canaan fought against each other for power, plunder and praise. A group of kings residing in the area of Sodom rebelled against the oppression of a northern king by the name of Chedorlaomer, who, along with his confederates, occupied the land later occupied by the Babylonian and Assyrian empires. Chedorlaomer put down the rebellion, and along with the captured loot, Lot, the nephew of Abraham, was taken prisoner. Abraham rallied 318 of his trained warriors, pursued and defeated the alliance that had captured Lot.

Upon Abraham's return, he met with Melchizedek, who gave refuge and rations to Abraham's troops. In turn, Abraham recognized Melchizedek as a king and priest of the Most High God. Abraham then gave a tenth of the spoils as a sacrifice to God through Melchizedek. It was an act of gratitude on the part of Abraham. Remember, this was years before the formally organized Levitical Priesthood.

Melchizedek was a type, or symbol of the future King-Priest, Jesus Christ. Melchizedek's mother, father, genealogy, time of birth or death is not mentioned in the Bible. Consequently, he is portrayed as timeless, or eternal, a different type of priesthood that the Levitical priesthood who did have a genealogy, a time of beginning, ending, and a location in history. Melchizedek was a real person as he is identified as, "made like the Son of God" (Hebrews 7:3; cf. 7:15).

As to his having no genealogy or record of the time of his rule, means that information is not recorded in the Bible or any records.

2. The point: the Melchizedek Priesthood is a totally different priesthood contrasted against the Levitical Priesthood.

The Melchizedek Priesthood is eternal, and Jesus Christ is our eternal High Priest. Even Levi, who was still unborn, gave offerings to the priestly order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:7-10). This means the temporary Levitical Priesthood, staffed by temporary priests, is inferior to the eternal Priesthood of Jesus Christ – our High Priest, King, and Prophet.

Christ also descended from Judah, not Levi, who was not commissioned by Moses to be a priesthood (Hebrews 7:14).

Christ's priesthood is different in that Christ never died. He is perfect, and our eternal

priest to represent us to God the Father. Under the Levitical Priesthood a body of laws and regulations was given through Moses from God. The laws are perfect, but we cannot attain to them. They become condemning, violent and punishing against us. Consequently, sacrifices needed to be made constantly to cover people's sins. The Law could not generate life.

In contrast, however, Christ's priest hood never ends. He never dies. His onetime sacrifice covers eternally and completely all the penalty of our sins. By His eternal life, Christ gave us life.

Here are 16 benefits of Christ's Priesthood in contrast to the old Levitical Priesthood as given in chapter seven, eight, and nine.

1. It is perpetual and permanent – it lasts forever (7:3, 17, 21, 24). This give great hope to us believers.
2. It is not traced through the Levitical Priesthood. It is different (7:6, 14, 17).
3. It is superior to the Levitical Priesthood (7:7-10).
4. It is perfect, that is, it can make believers perfect before God (7:11).
5. It replaces the Law of Moses and Levitical Priesthood (7:12; 8:13).
6. It does not require physical law, but grants indestructible life (7:16).
7. It is more powerful than the Law, which was weak and useless, and made nothing perfect (7:18, 19).
8. It gives us a better hope: we can draw near to God (7:19, 22).
9. Its promises and hope are guaranteed through an oath from God (7:20-22).
10. It is able to save believers forever (7:25).
11. It provides an eternal priest (Christ) who always intercedes on our behalf (7:25).
12. Our High Priest is eternally perfect and exalted above the heavens at the right hand of God (7:27, 28: 8:1).
13. Our High Priest's sacrifice was needed only once for all believers. His ultimate offering was Himself (7:27; 9:26).
14. Christ performs His Priesthood duties in the real heavenly sanctuary, because He was from the tribe of Judah; thus, forbidden to perform Priestly duties on earth (8:2, 4, 5). The earthly tabernacle was just a symbol pointing to the perfect Priesthood and perfect tabernacle of Christ in heaven (9:9). The heavenly tabernacle is not of physical material (9:11, 24).
15. It is a more excellent ministry, faultless, and better covenant (8:6, 7).
16. Christ's new covenant and Priesthood nullifies the old covenant which contained the requirements of the Levitical Priesthood and Mosaic Law, "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear" (8:13).

Verses eight through 12 refers to the future application to Israel in the Millennial Kingdom.

Let me give a little more emphasis to His priesthood from chapter seven. We could think, for example, that maybe His Priesthood might end someday by His death, or passing the duties off to someone else in the future. If that might be true (which it is not), then the next person might not be as dependable as Christ – or the

requirements of our salvation might be changed. His efforts on our behalf might be diminished.

It might be that we could again sin in the next life (which is just our present life lived in a different place), then we would find ourselves in another predicament of being under a curse. To calm our souls, let me examine the nature of His Priesthood a little more in detail.

First, Christ's life (and therefore tenure) is called, "*akatalutos*," which means indissoluble, indestructible, and therefore, endless (7:16). This is in contrast with the constant changing of High Priests in the earthly priesthood of Aaron because of their death. However, it also indicates the nature of the life of Christ. This arrangement cannot be dissolved or dissipated – like the early morning fog. Many times in organizations of this world, a job must be dissolved or done away with. Not so with the Priesthood of Christ.

Second, by His oath, God the Father declared that Christ's position as High Priest would be eternal, or that it is eternal (7:17, 20). That has to do with duration of time – an existence that has no ending. In other words, Christ could never be demoted or fired from His position as High Priest.

Third, His position is described as, "*aparabatos*," which means unchangeable, unalterable, inviolable, untransferrable, permanent (7:24). It cannot be transferred to someone else, or morphed or modified into a different arrangement with different conditions.

This verse seems to say that any apostolic succession of priests that hold a special power or position is not a valid doctrine. We have only one Priest, which is Jesus Christ who permanently holds that position and rank. Furthermore, all believers are priests under Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:9).

Fourth, since His position is authorized and solemnized by the oath of God, it has perpetual authority of the highest kind – the authority of God Himself.

Fifth, since Christ's one time sacrifice was sufficient to cover the penalty of our sins, then any penalty is banished forever. As it is stated, "because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (7:27). His death was accomplished here on earth, but His sacrificial blood was offered in the permanent heavenly temple (9:11-12). He was both the High Priest who offered His own perfect sacrifice in the temple in heaven. That was a onetime event.

Sixth, currently, Christ makes constant intercession for believers now that He is in heaven, seated as Priest/Ruler at the right hand of God (8:1, 2). It follows that we can never be separated from the love of God in Christ. By His sacrifice we are forgiven; by His intercession we are admitted to God's favor. Note: the immediate application speaks of His Priestly duties, but seated at the right hand of the throne of God also indicates rulership and authority. Christ is our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Seventh, when Christ intercedes for us, as our Mediator to God, it is not that God is reluctant to hear Christ's requests on our behalf. It is because God the Father is well pleased with the Mediator in whom the Father is well pleased with man.

Eighth, since Christ is our permanent Mediator (High Priest) in a real temple in heaven, and since He also sits at the right hand of God (Ruler), there must be real permanent activity in heaven. It follows that we also are involved in some way in that eternal activity in heaven.

We can now apply some conclusions to our life. Since we are in Christ and have His life within us (cf. Romans 8:11), then the nature of the life of Christ applies to us as well. It gives us some insight as to what "eternal life" actually is (cf. John 3:16). What I am saying is that the characteristics of Christ's eternal Priesthood are grounded in the nature of His eternal life; therefore, those characteristics can also apply to the nature of the eternal life we receive at salvation. The characteristics, then, of eternal life consist of at least:

1. Duration of time – it has no end.
2. It is indestructible or indissoluble.
3. It cannot be changed or altered in any way. It is permanent in its nature. It cannot be transferred or traded.
4. Our position is declared perpetual by the oath of God.
5. Any guilt as a result of our sin(s) is abolished forever.
6. Our permanent dwelling or habitation is in the presence of God.
7. That life or existence involves activity, work, or accomplishing forever what He desires of us in His never-ending economy. He has an eternity designed for us.
8. We are placed in a relationship of favor and peace with God forever. This means there is no possibility of our ever sinning against God sometime in the future, which would place us again under a curse.

That gives us something to be very happy about. Don't you think so?

D. CHRIST HAS THE GREATER PRIESTHOOD (9:1—10:18).

1. I start here with some general remarks. Christ is superior to all forms of religion. He is God. He is perfect. He has provided a perfect and complete salvation (sacrifice) for us. He performs perfectly the functions of Priest. He offers the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. He fulfilled perfectly the demand of the Levitical Priesthood and Mosaic Law. He intercedes on our behalf to God. He mediates between believers and God.

It is also worth noting that since Christ is of the order of Melchizedek, He is also our King. As a Mediator, Christ is also distributes God's wishes to believers. That makes Christ the ultimate Prophet. He represents us to God and God to us.

Christ fulfills the three basic needs of humanity in general: Priest, Prophet, and King. We all desperately need a Savior for our sins. Every religion acknowledges this in one way or another. We need a way to God. That is the role of Priest.

We all need instruction as to how to govern ourselves. What is truth? This is what science and philosophers try to find, but can never agree on. A Prophet tells us what truth is.

We all need a leader – someone to guide us as an individual and as a community. We need someone to enforce the truth. The world cries for a leader. Leading and governing is what a King does.

Jesus Christ is the perfect Priest, Prophet, and King.

2. A critical declaration is given by the writer, “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this come judgment” (9:27).

The reason this fact is so critical is because virtually every religion believes in some form of afterlife (including Hinduism with the wheel of life and reincarnation) with some form of remedial work to escape hell or get better. That is, they believe in a second chance in the next life.

According to this verse, there is no second chance. The decision we make in this life is all we get. This life determines forever where we will spend eternity. An example of this truth is the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31; cf. Matthew 25:41, 46).

That salvation is exclusively through Jesus Christ. If we reject the only salvation available; then, there is no other salvation available.

3. Chapter 10 continues to hammer home the mechanism of our salvation. There are several general observations we can make.

First, the earthly Jewish Levitical priesthood and ancient tabernacle and temple were just a shadow or symbol of the real one in heaven. The activities of ceremonies and rituals themselves were also symbols of Jesus Christ’s ultimate sacrifice and ministry in heaven. Furthermore, those earthly symbols never paid the penalty of our sins, but Christ did.

Second, we learn again of the nature of Christ’s sacrifice – or as the theologians call it, the “substitutionary sacrifice” of Christ. There are several characteristics to His sacrifice.

1. Only Christ has the value to take away the penalty of our sins. Animal sacrifices and human ceremonies won’t work.

2. The sacrifice of Christ covers all the penalty for all the sins for all time for all those who place their faith in Christ. Consider these blessed words, “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time...For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14).

There is nothing we can do to add to or take away from our salvation. Some 2,000 years on a cross, Jesus Christ purchased completely and forever our entire salvation.

We can never go back and add anything to His sacrifice. It is all about Christ and what He did for believers. All we can do as sinners is to accept His offer of salvation.

To illustrate, let's say that I purchased an automobile for a total sales price of \$3,000. I carry the \$3,000 cash into the dealership, place it on the counter, sign the papers, pick up the title, get into the car and drive off. Then, two months later, I drive back into the dealer, and tell him that I have come to pay the \$3,000 for the car. He would stare at me in unbelief!

"You already paid for the car," he would say.

"Oh, you don't understand," I would say, "I need to pay for it again."

"Why?" he would say. "You already paid for the car once. You cannot pay for it a second time. You paid the price in full once. That is enough."

Such is the situation with Christ's one time sacrifice to take away our sin. He completely paid the penalty once. That is enough. It is silly and useless to try to pay again for our sins. They have already been paid for.

3. The era of being under the Mosaic as a means of salvation (as the Jews thought, and unfortunately many others also believe) is over. Following the Levitical Priesthood is also finished as a means of Christian growth and maturity. It is the Old Covenant; Christ brings in a New Covenant.

We have to take seriously the words, "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old' is ready to disappear... Then He said, Behold, I have come to do Thy will.' He takes away the first in order to establish the second" (Hebrews 8:13; 10:9).

Jesus Christ has the greatest Priesthood, because by His High Priestly work He actually took away the sins and granted believers favor and peace with God. No other priesthood on the face of the earth or in the annuals of history can do that.

III. SUPERIORITY OF A LIFE OF FAITH IN CHRIST (10:19—13:25).

A. THE BELIEVER'S POSITION IS SECURE IN CHRIST (10:19-39).

1. One thing that causes fear in the lives of people is the fear of death and what comes after it. For the believer, that issue may give us pause, the hard fact is that because of what Christ has done, we can have confidence and a sense of security that we are safe in the position we have been granted in Christ. With full assurance we can draw near to God with a clean conscience. We are saved and can know it.

The reference to washed bodies with pure water does not refer to water baptism. It is a figure of speech designed to teach purity by the study and application of the Bible, obedience, and the power of the Holy Spirit. It is akin to 1 Peter 2:2; 1 John 1:9; Titus 2:5.

2. The assurance of our salvation we have is solid, because it does not depend upon us, but upon Christ. He is faithful, and His promise is sure. Therefore, our faith is not in vain.

3. Verses twenty four and five exhort us to mingle with other Christians. We need our own personal devotion to our living God, but also the encouragement, friendship, instruction, and motivation of others of like faith. We also see that the day of Christ's return to this earth is near.

The early Christians believed in the "immanent" return of Christ. That means that there is nothing yet that need to happen in history before Christ can return. It can be at any moment.

We also learn that many Christians have the habit of not going to church. Once we stay absent for a little while, it gets easier to stay away some more. The next step is to stay away completely. That does not mean we lose our salvation, but we do miss out on a major ingredient of Christian growth. We are stimulated to growth through the sermons, Bible studies, ordinances, testimonies of others, the prayers of other people for us, and there is a sense of accountability. Just to be around other believers affirms our faith, which is mocked and ridiculed by the world.

4. There is a frightening warning given to those who reject Christ. There is no other sacrifice for our sins. There is no forgiveness outside of Christ. The judgment is described as, "the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (10:27).

Some people come to Christ for different reasons. Some are motivated by His love for us. Some are motivated because of the fear of judgment. Whatever the motivation is that God uses to bring us to Himself, the fact remains that a terrible judgment awaits those who do not receive Christ as their Savior. (Note: see the notes on Hebrews 6:4ff).

5. Part of the judgment refers to unbelievers, "the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (10:26; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:5ff.). However, another part of the warning is directed to Christians who depart into apostasy. The writer warns, "The Lord will judge His people" (10:30). Christians will not be judged regarding their salvation, but on their faithfulness and service to Christ.

The danger of becoming a lukewarm Christian is very uncomfortable. The nature of the insults to treating lightly and carelessly the work of Christ are bad. The charges include.

First, there is the trampling underfoot the Person of Christ.

Second, there is regarding as unclean the Work of Christ on our behalf.

Third, there is the insulting of the Holy Spirit who brought grace to us.

Consequently, the discipline is harsh. Those who call themselves Christians and have pushed away the Person of Christ, the Word of God, and the rebuke of the Holy Spirit should take caution. Many today consider the values of present society as

more important than God and His Word (the Bible). I would suggest that those liberal denominations, universities (that are Christian in name only), seminaries, and publishers who have traded the Word of God for what is popular in culture are in trouble. The writer says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31).

As to the believer's response to those who hate Christ, we do not need to become overly upset against them. God has said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (10:30).

6. Evidently, many believers of that time were persecuted by the prevailing culture. Some were in prison for their Faith, others had their property taken. The way to handle that kind of persecution is to keep our eyes set confidently on the abiding and eternal blessings in our future. Our faith brings reward, and is pleasing to God. Our course of life is to live by faith, with our hope in the promises God has given us. This life is very temporary.

B. EXAMPLES OF FAITH FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (11:1-40).

From this point, the writer stresses the practical application of the theology he has been explaining in the first 10 chapters. He starts with faith. As a means of expanding on the importance of faith and the great reward it brings, the writer dedicates a whole chapter on the subject. It is critical to the Christian walk. The writer states, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (11:6). Finally, the word, "faith," is mentioned 24 times in this chapter. It is a rule of Bible Interpretation that if a word or concept is mentioned repeatedly in a section of Scripture, then it carries special emphasis.

Consequently, it behooves us to spend a good measure of time to focus on what exactly faith is.

The reward of faith is both for this life, and the next. Our faith in this life brings confidence, hope, and assurance. The full enormity of our reward in our eternal destination is yet to be fully explored, understood, and enjoyed.

1. The first thing about faith is to understand what it is. Faith is described as, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11:1). The NIV translates this verse as, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The Living Bible paraphrases the thought this way, "It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead"

This is not a definition of faith in its whole, or the faith in the gospel, but a description of the characteristics of faith relating to the writers encouragement to persevere in the face of very punishing persecution. If we break faith down, it makes more sense. First, assurance is "hupostasis," which can be translated as confidence or assurance, or being sure of something. It is the belief that something is factually real. It is holding to our mind that something is real. It literally means a foundation, or that which stands under something.

For example, I can look at the books on my bookshelf. I believe they are real, that they actually exist, because I can see and touch them. If, however, it was night and the light was turned off, I could not see the books on my shelf. Does that mean that the books disappeared or vanished? No, the books are still on my shelf, I just cannot see them. By faith, I believe the books to be real and still on their place on the bookshelf. I even regulate my thinking and behavior around my belief the books are still on the bookshelf.

Second, there is the phrase, “things hoped for.” It means a confident expectation, or trust in God. The conviction is that God is good and that He will perform His promises. Faith is that which enables us to treat as real the things that are unseen, but declared as true by God, and certified as real by the visible resurrection of Christ and His other miracles.

This hope is not the kind that says, “I sure hope such and such is true. I don’t know for sure, but I hope the thing I believe in is true.” Rather, it is the kind of hope that says, “I know that what I hope for is true.” It is a “know so” hope, not a “gee, I hope so” hope.

Third, faith has a conviction, regularly translated as, “proof, test, or proving.” Faith is certain that the promises of God are true and real. It is to believe, feel, and behave in such a fashion that we are certain, beyond doubt that God is trustworthy and will do what He says He will do.

Faith is to consider God worthy of trust regarding His character, ability, and motive to do what He says He will do – that He will make happen what He says will happen. The key element in faith is not the exercise of faith in itself, or a trust in any promise or principle (although this is involved) that is given. The key is trust upon God Himself to accomplish what He has expressed.

For example, I have a small mechanic shop that I take my Volvo to for service and repairs. The shop specializes in European cars. When the owners tell me that a particular repair needs to be done, and that they can fix it, I will agree for them to perform the repairs. I find a way home, and await their call. I trust that they have the honesty of character, necessary skills, and sincere motive to do what they say they can do. In other words, I do not merely believe in their promise, but I place my faith in them as experts.

To emphasize again, Faith’s emphasis is not on God’s (or the Volvo expert) promise, but rather on God Himself and His ability to deliver.

There is one more word that adds to this concept of faith. That is, the word, “*pragma*,” or things. The word means, “A thing done.” This adds to the fuller understanding of Faith. *Pragma* is more than merely, “things hoped for.” The things God has stated, promised, and explained are considered already done. In other word, whatever God says or promises is a, “done deal.”

2. There is another issue that needs addressed regarding faith, and it expands on the concept of what do we exercise faith in, the promise of God, or God. I have already spoken to this, but this adds to the concept.

Many times in the Christian world we are told that God has given principles for us to follow, and if we can find His secret formula, then we will gain success. For example, if we follow a certain formula, then our kids will turn out right, or if we follow certain principles, then our church will grow. Others are that if we speak something, then it will happen; if we think positive, then positive things will happen; if we do such and such then we will get rich.

Some popular Christian organizations teach that if we follow a certain set of rules, behavior codes, and regulations, then we will enjoy success. This is known as legalism – that is, the belief that the rules themselves will bring success. That is what the Pharisees did. Some place their faith in religious regulations, ceremonies, feasts, fasts, chants, repetition of certain prayers, or praying at certain times, or praying a certain number of times, or having a certain prescribed posture for prayers.

For example, years ago in my early days after Seminary, I served eight years as a pastor. I wanted big churches, great revival, and large numbers of souls to be saved. I read many books on how to make revival happen based on the experiences and methods of famous evangelists and revivalists of the past. In their books they gave steps to follow.

Well, as it turn out, I did my best to follow those formulas those famous men gave, yet I did not see the great numbers of people coming to Christ. The formulas did not work for me. Why? God had His own plans for those revivalists, and His own plans for me. God did not promise me that I would see great revivals, or that He would work in the same way He did with those revivalists. I had wrongly placed my faith in formulas and not God.

Now, as things turned out in my life, quite by accident in 2007 my wife, Esmie, and I decided to put up a website to make available free Bible studies and courses. A dear Filipino pastor, Merciano Driz, encouraged us to forge ahead with the project. At this writing, we have some 50-60,000 hits per month on the website. We have a steady and growing following of some 20,000 people. We have taught thousands of pastors and Christian leaders in Africa. Those are good numbers.

However, in the intervening years, both of us went through many trials, sufferings, blunders, and mistakes. We had many lessons to learn about God and His grace. God was preparing us for future things.

My point is this. We did not have a formula. God did not promise success to Esmie and Me. He just made it happen in His own way and timing – very much to our surprise. God is a God of surprises. There is a great deal of mystery about the plans of God, but He does work, “all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).

I could be misunderstood here, so let me clarify. It is true that to do things a certain way will work better than doing things another way. God has placed absolute principles in the Bible for us to follow. Some methods will work in one culture, but not another. We also learn from experience. For example, if the farmer does not put seeds into the ground, then a crop will not come up. If we don't advertise for our evangelistic campaign, then no one will show up. If we don't purposely plan for soul-winning, then it won't happen. If a writer doesn't write words on paper, then a book will not be written. If a family or church is full of fighting, then failure will follow.

It is written, "He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty" (Proverbs 28:19). We must set and execute plans, and work hard, but success is in the hands of God.

My point is that if we trust in formulas and prepackaged principles, then our faith or trust is misplaced. Our faith must be in the power, purpose, plan, and good will of God Himself, not any special formula or set of principles. Our life must be lived in dependence upon God.

Paul explained the tension this way, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6). The psalmist wrote, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

In another place he wrote, "For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the desert comes exaltation; but God is the judge; He puts down one, and exalts another" (Psalm 75:6, 7).

3. I need to emphasize another misconception some may have. When we exercise our faith that God will do what He said He will do, make sure that he actually said that He would do it. Some think that if they can believe hard enough, or muster up enough faith, have a special impression or vision, then God will answer their prayer and grant their wishes.

For example, say a boyfriend girlfriend relationship breaks up, and one party desperately wants the relationship back. They may think that if they have enough faith, God will bring back the other person. However, God never said He would restore that broken relationship.

Make sure that you exercise faith in express statements God has given in the Bible, clear principles, plain promises, direct examples in Scripture, and that we carefully interpret those revelations from God. Make sure that God has said or revealed certain things, don't put your words and wishes in His mouth. However, to add another tension to our Christian experience, many times God does place certain things on our heart, or disclose His desire through events in our life experience.

4. Moving on to another aspect of this "faith" chapter, we learn about creation. The

verse reads, “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible” (11:3). The “worlds” can mean “ages” or the “physical world” depending on the context.

If “ages” is meant, then it means the preparation of all things after the original creation, and everything the successive periods that time would contain. In other words, history is created and unfolded in conformance to God’s plan for the physical universe.

If “physical world” is meant, then it speaks to the original physical creation of the universe. It seems that both meanings are true in this context.

First, we learn that God created the physical universe out of nothing. Matter, or the stuff of our material universe, did not exist at one time. Matter, time and space are not eternal. They were brought into existence by the word of God – in fact, by Jesus Christ (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-3).

It is important to note that various evolutionary theories are not built or proven by science, but rest on a philosophy. At its heart, evolutionary philosophy assumes that anything non-physical cannot or does not exist. The assumption is that God does not exist, or that if He does, then He didn’t have anything to do with creation.

The Bible declares that God, indeed, did create the physical (and spiritual) universe, and the creation was made with the appearance of age. For example, Adam was created a grown man, and a tree that looks 1000 years old just looked that old when it was created.

The core issue goes back to the ability, power, and purpose of God Himself. If there is an all-powerful God (and there is), then He could make the universe anyway He wanted to. Our faith, again, is in God, and that He can and will do anything He wants – despite the protests of little humanity.

This is the reason that hard core evolutionists must erase any possibility of God from the presuppositions in their theories.

Second, we learn that the writer assumes the literal story of Genesis, creation, and the Old Testament. He mentions Abel, Cain, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and other Old Testament figures. Since Cain and Abel came from Adam & Eve, then they too were real people.

Third, we learn that the writer believed in the literal story of Noah and the universal flood (11:7). Further, he assumes the real history of the exodus from Egypt (11:22), passing through the Red Sea with a dry floor (11:29), the fact of Moses’ life and ministry in Egypt (11:21ff.), and the literal story of the walls of Jericho falling (11:30, 31).

3. There are critical elements of faith that are of great importance for the believer.

- We live out our lives in this world by faith.
- We gain approval from God as we live by faith (11:2).
- We gain reward by faith (11:6).
- We please God by faith (11:6).
- We look to the Old Testament for examples of how to live out our faith.
- We believe, by faith, the Bible's story of creation as opposed to evolutionary explanations.
- We must expect opposition and perhaps persecution from the world and non-Christians if we live by faith (11:35ff.).
- We may experience unusual abilities to accomplish great things from God in His timing and will (11:32-34).

As a final suggestion to you (and me), it would be well to read and reread chapter eleven so as to let those experiences of faith sink deeply into our mind and spirits.

C. BELIEVERS HAVE A DIFFERENT FOCUS IN THIS LIFE (12:1, 2).

This section is a great motivation for us to live our life by faith, perseverance, energy, and focus. The writer gives us an example of a track and field sport. The picture is of runners speeding around a race track urgently competing to win the prize.

There is some uncertainty about the details of this passage. Some think the cloud of witnesses are up in the stands of the stadium cheering us on. That would include all the heroes of the faith mentioned in chapter eleven, plus all other Christians of the past.

This view has some precedent. In Luke we are told, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance...I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7, 10).

I think this view has merit, but maybe with just a twist.

1. First, the first word of chapter 12 is, "Therefore." That mean what is taught before in chapter 11 is connected directly to chapter 12. The people of chapter 11 are people who have already ran the race of life by faith.

2. Second, the cloud of spectators are, "witnesses" to us. That is, through their life while on earth, they serve as a witness and example on how we are to live our lives. They are not up in the stands, but they, "surround" us motivating us on. It is like a former great athlete eventually reaches the age where they cannot perform any more. They become coaches to train and encourage us.

If there is anyone in the stands of the stadium, it is we who live now. We are to come down out of the stands and pick up where our forefathers left off.

3. Third, we are to lay aside every "encumbrance" that entangles us. The word points excess bulk (weight) on an athlete that slows them down. It is a main part of an

athlete's training to have a minimum of excess weight, because it slows them down and it takes more energy to carry the excess around. They tire more easily.

In a practical level, this would refer to those things that might not be wrong in themselves, but they hinder our Christian life and service. This would mean different things for different people. There is nothing wrong, for example, with making money, watching movies, taking a vacation and resting, communicating on Facebook, and many other things. But, if they begin to distract us and hinder our Christian life and service, then they become like the extra weight (which is not wrong in itself) that slows down an athlete trying to win a race.

Many times people will become a Christian, get baptized, go to church, but their personal life stagnates. They don't continue to grow in their faith, to improve in their knowledge of the Bible, prayer, Christian service, relationships with others, or character.

4. Fourth, what is the, "sin" that entangles us? Well, first, "entangle" mean something that wraps around or surrounds us. In this picture it might be clothing such as a robe that would trip up a runner. In sports the athletes wear shorts and jerseys - the least amount of clothing possible, because loose clothing will tangle their legs and arms.

The sin spoken that entangles us is not specifically identified, but it is connected to faith in chapter eleven. In fact, the whole book of Hebrews is about faith. The opposite of faith is to drift away or become sluggish in our Christian life and service. The specific sin, then, is doubt. Anxiety, distractions, and lack of focus are some things that will bring doubt and drain our faith. Reading the stories of the Bible heroes will help build our faith. That is why the writer spent a whole chapter giving us examples of faith.

The race we run must be run with endurance. The word here (*hupomone*) contains the meaning of passive endurance and active persistence. The Christian life and service is not a sprint, but a journey – a process. We need to pace ourselves, but push ourselves to our limit – but not past our limit. We need to finish and win the race of faith. We must take life seriously – and reach for the reward of victory. Remember, the text is not talking about salvation, but victory in our Christian life and service.

5. The example of Jesus Christ is our ultimate example. The words, "fixing our eyes" has the meaning of turning our eyes away from one thing and focusing our gaze on something else. The image is that of an athlete racing hard down the track, but shifting his gaze to the cheers of the crowd, or maybe a pretty cheer leader alongside the track – or maybe looking over his shoulder to see how far ahead of other contestants he is. The distraction will slow him down. He must keep his eyes fixed on the goal – the shortest distance to the finish line.

We Christians also get distracted from our walk of faith. Finances, sickness, family troubles or responsibilities, entertainment, hobbies, addictions – oh, the world is full of things to distract us from Christ and His fellowship, His lessons, blessings, and

work He has for us. How hard it is to keep our priorities correct, and to stay focused on the important things of life. The things we accomplish, earn, and accumulate in this world are temporary.

This world is obsessed with gaining power, wealth, and fame. We want more and higher titles, bigger bank accounts, better cars, more fun and entertainment, bigger houses, higher status – and the list goes on. When we die, we leave it all behind.

For example, one of my colleagues at a college I teach at is a graduate from West Point. He was a career Army officer reaching the rank of Full Colonel. He is a decorated Viet Nam veteran. Following his retirement, he gained much wealth in real estate.

When I was in the army, I was just a private. My friend intimidates me with his rank and success. We are now both in our 70's, age wise. One day he pulled me aside, put his arm around me and said, "Willis, at this age we are both on equal ground." He was right. God could care less that I was just a private in the US Army; He is interested in how good a soldier I am in the Army of Jesus Christ.

6. Part of our Christian life is suffering. Christ is our example, and He suffered. For the end result of His suffering is great joy, because He has completed the work on the cross for our salvation. The joy He entered refers to the full glory of His life with God the Father in Heaven before the cross. He was back on the Throne of Grace ruling the universe at the right hand of God. His work for our salvation was finished and perfected. He would never have to go through the suffering again.

At the time, His crucifixion was a great humiliation and shame to Him. He was rejected by the world, and abandoned by His disciples. His suffering was intense, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. He was alone, mocked, tortured, beaten, and called evil and crazy. The taunts of the mob rang in His ear. No one came to his defense, or even wanted to. Can you think of such treatment? It was horrible. He died for His beliefs and the work set before Him. His sacrifice was total and unappreciated.

Have you ever been mistreated for your faith? As I read the news there is persecution against Christians around the world. Here in the United States, Christ and the Bible are mocked in the public arena. We as Christians sometimes lose our jobs, and people, whether outwardly or subtly, hold us up to scorn and ridicule. Dear reader, all those things mentioned to the faithful in chapter eleven can happen to you and me – and even are in some spots of the world. I think of those businesses and public figures that have been slammed and careers destroyed because they speak out against gay marriage and go public with their biblical beliefs.

How, then, should we respond? How did Jesus respond? I think you will find this surprising.

First, He endured, "hypomone". This is a basic New Testament attitude of faith.

Against a hostile, cruel, and brutal world, believers wait confidently for the fulfilment of the kingdom and their own salvation. Endurance and patience under suffering and trials produces strength. That is a positive character quality.

This is the attitude Jesus had. He patiently endured the suffering, looking to the time of its completion, and His reentrance into Heaven in all His glory. He looked beyond the temporary rejection and suffering to eternal matters.

Second, His attitude toward the shame was to despise it “*kataphroneo*”. At first look, it might seem that Christ was horrified, embarrassed, humiliated, and mortified about what people thought about Him. Frankly, that would be my reaction. Don’t we all worry about what people think of us? We all must dress well, have our hair combed, be clean, have the right manners, be friendly, try to hide and mask our deficiencies – all because we want people to like us. To be rejected or betrayed causes deep dejection and depression.

However, this is the wrong understanding of Jesus’ attitude. *Kataphroneo* means to disparage, to treat with disinterest, or to consider then to dismiss. It means to think down upon, to think slightly of – to despise, to disregard.

The reason He thought this way about the pain and jeering against Himself, was because He could look beyond the present, temporary event. He knew who He was, what He was doing, and what the eventual end would be. The rejection and betrayal did not bother Him – He just disregarded it and pushed it away.

The lesson for us is that, sure it hurts when we are disliked, rejected and don’t feel accepted for our Christian faith. But, so what? Disregard it. Think above it. Be secure and comfortable in who you are. Remember who you are – a child of God who will spend eternity with Christ in glory.

Peter wrote, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Jesus said that because the world hated Him, it would hate us as well (John 15:18). To experience hatred from those who hate Christ is just part of the Christian experience. We shouldn’t be surprised. However, since God is for us, who can be against us – and if they are, so what? What can they do? The worse is to kill us. Then we will be in glory with Christ which is far better anyway (Cf. Romans 31-39; Hebrews 13:5, 6; Luke 15:4; Philippians 1:21-23).

Rejection from the world and people of the world is just part of the high position of being a Christian and the job we are called to do. We just patiently put up with it for a little while, pursue on with what God has assigned to us to accomplish, knowing that we are on the winning side. Christ will soon return in victory – and if not, we will be going to Him. In Christ, victory and glory is ours. That is a settled matter that we can confidently count on.

D. CHRISTIANS ARE DISCIPLINED BY GOD (12:3-11).

This section deals with our Christian growth. Several things can be learned.

1. In our struggles in this life, specifically opposition to the gospel, Christ, and the Bible, we are to compare our own situation to that of Christ. He is our example. The hostility by sinners against Christ was severe, to say the least. The harshly spoke against Him.

When we realize that hostility against us goes with the privilege of being a Christian, then we don't become despondent and discouraged. We look to the example of Christ. Two common responses we Christians have in the face of adversity are to kick against God's will and rebel, or else to become discouraged and depressed. Neither response is correct. Encouragement comes from looking at our Master's example.

2. The point of suffering is also brought into view. First, there is the image of the Greek games of that time. It is said that we have not yet resisted against sin to the point of shedding blood (11:4). First, it was a picture of foot racing. This time it is a picture of boxing. When boxers get hit the blood starts flowing from their nose or a cut.

The cut man in their corner in between rounds works hard to close the cut, but commonly tells the fighter, "It's nothing. Don't worry." They don't want the fighter to get discouraged. Many times the sight of blood by a fighter just spurs them on to greater effort. The word for striving, "*antagonizomai*," is translated, "to fight agonizingly against." It refers to a terrific fight.

3. The sin we resist against is unbelief, and the constant battering of the world, our flesh and the devil intimidating us to disbelieve the Bible and turn away from Christ. It is critical that we stay close to the Bible, take it seriously, and let our minds become fortified with the Word of God. Through that process, we can begin to understand our lives and the world from God's point of view, considering eternity and the glory that awaits us.

It is worrisome and discouraging to get trapped into understanding and reacting to the events of the world and our lives from the temporary vantage point of the here and now. We must avoid letting culture shape our values, lifestyles, and viewpoints when those cultural values oppose God.

4. Now for the purpose of suffering, "it is for discipline that you endure" (12:7). Seven times in this section the writer uses the word, discipline. Repetition means major emphasis. The word for discipline is simply, "*padeia*," and it means education, instruction, training and all for the good of the student or child being trained.

Suffering is a mechanism used by a loving God for training Christians – his beloved children. His training program for us is the guarantee of our son ship, and of divine grace and forgiveness. It associates us with Christ. We endure for the purpose of our

education.

The training is for our holiness and preparation for righteousness so as to participate in the eternal worship and service to God in His program and economy after the one we live in now. He is preparing us for our niche in heaven and whatever He wants us to do for eternity.

5. The issue surfaces, “Why would God want us to suffer. Why use suffering as a mechanism of our training?” Suffering is part of any training. When the student goes to school trying to learn algebra or microbiology or whatever, they must stay up late at night. It is hard work that is painful at times.

When an athlete trains, they go through a great deal of physical suffering. They run, lift weights, boxers spar which involves taking blows to the head and body – but it is all for the purpose of winning the prize. For the student, the suffering of difficult study is for the purpose of gaining a degree that will lead to a better job. The suffering involved in training is not viewed as a bad thing, but something we must endure to achieve our goals.

All of us some day must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ for our evaluation and judgment regarding rewards and the positions we will have in heaven after this phase of our life is complete and we are transferred to the next phase. (Cf. Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 6:8; 1 Corinthians 3:8, 10-15; 4:1-5; 9:24-27; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 3:1; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10; Matthew 6:19-21; 19:27-30; Mark 10:29-31; Luke 18:28-30; 19:11-27).

One must remember that standing for our judgment and reward is not a sorrowful event. It is more like a commencement or graduation ceremony. Some graduates will have sadness because they did not do better on their grades, but all will be joyful and happy because they graduated, have their degree, and are prepared for the job before them. There will be a great sense of achievement and satisfaction.

6. In light of the persecution and suffering Christians endure, there are several things to keep in mind.

First, it is not wise to deliberately provoke people into causing us harm in order to gain more reward from God. Don't be an obnoxious Christian. Let God make the lesson plan for your personal training program. Don't volunteer to become a martyr for your faith. Take care of your health. A dead or sick Christian worker is of not much use in Christian work. Sometimes it is wisest for a church to go underground. Sometimes it is well to push back against opposition. It all depends of the circumstances.

Second, trials come to us in many different shapes, times and forms (1 Peter 1:6-9). God's program for us is individually designed and crafted. He knows what He is preparing us for, and what the exact areas we need training in are.

Sometimes the trials may be harsh things like murder from a terrorist group, public harassment, or a jail term - but not always.

He may put us in a place of comfort, ease, and plenty. Many times when we have abundance, we don't think we need to depend upon God, and are numbed to the needs of people and the urgency of the cause of Christ. That, too, is a test of our faith, commitment, and willingness to sacrifice for the cause of Christ. It is easy to become lazy regarding the things of Christ. The devil lulls us to sleep.

For example, in many parts of the world, pastors live in abject, shocking poverty, but they are faithful to their calling. Their sacrifice is intense. On the other hand, there are Christians in wealthy countries who spend more on feeding and caring for their pets than the poor pastors do on their whole family. Which one will gain the greatest reward in heaven? You guess.

In all cases, however, our trials, sufferings, and testing is for our benefit and advancement in God's training program for us, and is designed for our placement, occupation, reward and responsibility in the next phase of our eternal life.

In the pitfalls and discouragements of this temporary life, keep looking past the present difficulties toward Christ and the very bright eternal future on ahead. Remember, suffering is not eternal for the believer in Christ – it is temporary. All the hard things of this life have an ending.

Peter summarized it this way, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6, 7).

E. BELIEVERS RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS (12:12-17).

1. The picture of weak and feeble hands and knees and lame limbs is a metaphor comparing our physical health to our spiritual life. Just as we can become physically crippled, we can also become spiritually crippled. This medical reference was well recognized in the ancient world. Luke was a physician, and there were great medical centers in the land of the Bible.

For example, in Alexandria, Africa in 163 A.D. was the most famous center in the world. For those who struggle to understand who the writer of this epistle was, these two examples give some clues, but no conclusive evidence. If the influence of this metaphor was from Luke, then that gives support for a Pauline authorship. Those two spent much time together.

The image could also indicate the writer may have spent time in Egypt, which not only supported a great medical center, but also a great library and intellectual center.

The context in Hebrews 12:12, 13 is that of Jews who were saved and those who were still struggling whether or not to leave the temple service and follow Jesus as Messiah.

The encouragement is for saved Jews who followed Jesus as Messiah to stay strong in their Christian life and faith. This would encourage the wavering Jews to seriously consider following Jesus as Messiah.

The practical application to us is to keep encouraging others to stay strong in their faith – as well as staying strong ourselves. When we observe the life of other strong Christians, they become role models for us. Leaders must carefully think and live like they really do believe God and the Bible. Others look to them to affirm their faith. Sometimes we become doubtful in whether or not our faith is genuine, or if we are just fooling ourselves. When we look at leaders who are strong in the faith, our faith is strengthened.

For example, when I started to college many years ago, evolution was pushed down my throat, so to speak. I was told that the Bible was just a myth. At that time I happened to read a little book by Henry Morris on the “The Twilight of Evolution.” Dr. Morris was an expert on creation vs. evolution. I compared both sides of the creation/evolution debate. My faith was encouraged and strengthened. God used that struggle to cement my faith in the Bible.

Even now, I have a good friend that I have known for years, Don DeYoung. He has a Ph.D. in physics from a big secular state university, and is the head of a science department in a Christian University. He believes in the literal Genesis record of creation, and is a young earth proponent.

It would be easy for me to become befuddled by the arguments of atheist scientists. They would say, “Oh, your doctorate is not in a hard science. You are just too weak of mind to understand science.” However, I look at Don. His credentials and experience are just as good as the atheist evolutionists. I can say to myself, “If Don believes the Bible, then my faith is affirmed – it is not foolish or misplaced.”

2. Verses 14 and 15 urge us to urgently pursue peace in our relationships with others. In this context, the tension was between believing Jews, and wavering Jews who were on the brink of forgetting about Jesus’ claim as Messiah, and returning to temple worship. There was tension between the two.

The application to us is to always have unity, peace and patience with our fellow Christian and non-Christian alike. Contention brings bitterness that wells up in our heart. Bitterness is covered up anger that just sits stews and simmers in our soul. It spoils the delights of life, sours our life experience, sends people away from us, spews out poison toward others, and stirs up more discontent between people.

3. The reference to Esau (12:16, 17) is not that he committed physical immorality, but spiritual immorality. He was a crafty, godless man, who put the present world with its

physical pleasures and prizes before God. Even though he desired the benefits of blessing, he could not bring himself to turn to God. He had no appetite for spiritual things. Esau's case is a warning to the Jews who were thinking of going back to temple sacrifices.

There is a twist to Esau's craftiness. The blessing of God was granted by God to Jacob as his birthright (Romans 9:10-13; Genesis 25:23), even though Jacob was not the firstborn. It consisted of the honor and privilege of being the next family priest when his father, Isaac, died. It involved the spiritual responsibilities and benefits from God. Though Jacob was crafty, he had a heart for God (Hosea 12:2-4). Esau despised the birthright with its spiritual benefits, and chose the secular worldly way of life (Genesis 25:34).

Esau claimed the birthright that was not his to begin with, and then sold it to Jacob to satisfy his physical appetite. He then regretted his sale, but not to the point of repentance – or turning to God. He wanted the benefits, but He did not want God.

The practical application to us is that many times we enjoy our position in Christ, the status of church membership, and the honor of being respectable citizens. However, we do not desire God Himself. Other times the sacrifice and discomfort of being a Christian are not worth it. Our priorities then shift to the world (power, wealth, fame, or comfort), and not to God and the cause of Christ.

That was the problem with some of the Hebrews at that time: they wavered because of the troubles that went along with the Christian name, and wanted to retreat back into the comfort of Judaism.

F. CHRISTIANS HAVE A UNIQUE SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION (12:18-29).

This section of Hebrews is one of contrasts, but also some amazing revelation about the future.

1. There is a dramatic contrast. It is of Law vs. Grace. On one side (12:18-21) there is the Old Covenant with the Mosaic Law, animal sacrifices, religious ceremonies, symbols, and feasts at its heart. On the other side we see the grace and forgiveness granted to believers through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ to eternally take away our sins.

The Old Covenant is described as dark, gloomy, and terrible that caused even Moses to fear and tremble – he was terrified. It is a picture of Mount Sinai. The Law itself is not bad; it just brought judgment to people because they could not keep the law. It bodes of death. The New covenant, in contrast, is described as life, joy, righteousness, Jesus, eternal, permanent, and Christ's blood that covers our sin (12:22-29). It bodes of life.

2. We are so blessed to have the curtain of heaven and eternity pulled back just a bit so we can look into the world to come. It is invisible to us now, but it is real. Mount Zion refers to the heavenly Jerusalem, the geography of the next phase of our life. Our citizenship is already on the rolls of that place (Philippians 3:20).

First, we learn that heaven is a literal place. It has a name, creatures that live there, and a specific location - heaven. It has activity, life, communication, brings joy, fosters fellowship and positive relationships, safety, peace, justice, a huge population, identity for its citizens, and recognition. The creatures have awareness and consciousness. God lives and reigns there.

Second, we see that there is an afterlife. It is a fact. Every group of people in every culture in every time of history has a religious expression of some kind. All the major living religions express a belief of an afterlife of some kind. People are fascinated with the idea of an afterlife. Books and movies are made about someone having an after death experience, and returning to this life. Some claim to have gone to heaven and come back with strange tales of what is there. Some psychologists and scientists try to prove there is no afterlife.

Here we have the absolute truth revealed: there is a real afterlife.

Third, we can identify some of the creatures that live there. There are myriads of angels. Of course, angels also travel between heaven and earth, and walk on the earth (13:2). We human beings will co-mingle with the angels.

Next, we have the words, "general assembly." The word is, "*paneguris*," which refers to a festal gathering of the people to celebrate public games or other events. It is a festal gathering of angels, saints of God, and even the church. The latter includes all believers in Christ from the day of Pentecost to the future Rapture. All saved people from Adam and Eve onward will be there. It is a celebration, not a place of terror.

Fifth, God the Father will reign as Judge, and God the Son will be our mediator. It speaks of Christ's blood being superior to the blood of Abel – or, that of animal sacrifice. The contrast and emphasis is the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over against animal sacrifice to take away the penalty of our sin.

Activities in heaven.

Sometimes people wonder what we will do in heaven. From this section, we have hints – even clear indications.

First, there is celebration. A celebration takes a lot of organization. Someone has to do that. We know that angels do administrative work for God, so they must have something to do with the festal activities in heaven. People probably do as well.

Second, God the Father is the Judge of all. Consequently, there are legal activities happening. That means laws must be written, records must be kept, cases must be made, procedures must be followed, and there must be a flow of cases that come before the Judge. There will probably be sub judges, just as Moses needed to delegate minor cases to others. There are a lot of job openings in a judicial system.

Third, God the Son (Jesus) is the mediator, and it refers to sprinkled blood. That

describes religious activities. Someone has to organize and do the religious duties. Peter called us a, “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). There are job openings there as well. It speaks of a New Covenant, which implies a specific system involving workers. There is singing in heaven. You might make the choir.

Fourth, there is much civil organization, many people, and traffic, living quarters to house and care for such a big population. Remember in John 14:2, 3) when Jesus said He is going to prepare a mansion for us, and that there are many dwelling places in heaven? There is a ranking of angels and authority, and delegation of duties, and communication systems. Consequently, there is civil government. Bureaucrats. You can be a government worker.

Work, celebration, government, and worship are the order of the day. This fits with the theme of chapters eleven and twelve, that is, we are being prepared through suffering and trials for positions in God’s economy in the future life. Here are the job openings in the department of employment.

The purification of creation.

3. The writer speaks of “shaking” the earth and heaven (12:26-28). We come to a troublesome concept: what is the new heaven and earth going to be like, and what is God’s process of bringing in the eternal state? Some believe that the new heaven and earth (Cf. Revelation 21:1, 2) is a renovation of the present heaven and earth. Some understand the process as the destruction of this present creation, and God starting over from scratch (Cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13). Here I will just focus on what this section actually states. We need to do serious study here, because the subject comes up again in 2 Peter – and elsewhere.

Here is my main point: in the future God will shake out and remove all those things and systems that clog up and hinder the perfect operation of the machinery of His entire creation – physical, social, and spiritual. This purified state will be permanent, glorious, a reorganization, and eternal.

Now, I will break down the evidence from Scripture and show you how I reach this conclusion. Bear with me as this gets a little complicated – but fascinating.

First, let me put the key verses before us. After that, I will examine four key concepts: the meaning of “shake,” “remove,” “once,” and the eternal state of affairs.

“And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet **once** more I will **shake** not only the earth, but also the Heaven.’ And this expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the **removing** of those things which can be **shaken**, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be **shaken**...” (Hebrews 12:26-28 – emphasis mine).

First, let me define the word, “**shake**” (*seio, or saleuo*). The word means to shake to and fro, shaking so as to make insecure, to agitate, stir up, move, topple, or vibrate.

The word is used to describe the tossing of the sea, the shaking of an earthquake, political unrest, or physical change. The root denotes violent movement – to move to and fro, or disturb.

In the New Testament the word is used to stir up (Mark 15:11). Cosmic disturbance are at issue in Matthew 27:51; Hebrew 12:26; Revelation 6:13). Earthquakes are included in the events of the last times (Mark 13:8; Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:11; Revelation 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18).

Earthquakes are also associated with Christ's death and resurrection (Matthew 27:51, 54; 28:2). In our Hebrew context the comparison is made between the earthquake at the giving of the Law at Sinai and the final shaking of both heaven and earth (Hebrews 12:26).

At this point I need to bring in the quote of Haggai, which the writer employs in verse 26. The Lord speaks through Haggai.

For thus says the lord of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to **shake** the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. And I will **shake** all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:6-8 – emphasis mine).

Since one key word in trying to find out what God is going to do with the future world is "shake," then what does it mean in the Hebrew language? The root means to undulate, like a field of grain. Another picture is to spring or hop such as a grasshopper. It to move, quake, shake, to cause to tremble.

In the Haggai context, it speaks of nations, heavens, earth, seas, and gold and silver. By connecting Haggai with Hebrews 12:26, the event is the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ during the Millennium in all its glory, and the eternal state of our habitat and existence.

Now let's define the word, "**remove**" (*metathesis*). It means a change of place or position. It combines two words, "*meta*" (to change), and "*tithemi*" (to place, or put). It is the transfer of something from one place to another. The word is used in Hebrews, three times. One place is, "For when the priesthood is changed, or necessity there takes place a change of law also" (Hebrews 7:12). Here it means to change the Old Covenant for the New Covenant. Another place is in Hebrews 11:5 where Enoch was taken up (removed) from earth to heaven without tasting death. In Hebrews 12:27 it means to remove.

It is the word we use in English, metathesis, which is the transposition of two phonemes in a word (as the development of crud from curd), or a chemical reaction in which different kinds of molecules exchange parts to form other kinds of molecules. Nothing is destroyed, but just changed.

Next, what is meant by, “once more?” Two things can be gleaned. First, the massive change God will bring about to His creation in the future will be eternal. The process will happen only once; thus, it is permanent - eternal.

Second, since this or similar event will happen once more, then it assumes that something similar has happened in the past.

Conclusions

What can we conclude? By putting all this research together, we can understand several astonishing things in dealing with this future event.

First, according to these findings, nothing is destroyed in the sense of dissipating or disappearing. God did not destroy the heavens and earth, sea, dry land, gold, silver, and nations with their people and government and start over again. God shook it. He changed it.

Second, God will bring about massive changes in our environment. Nations, physical elements and such will undergo radical, astonishing changes. It will be a strange new but wonderful place.

Third, the “shaking” (changes) will involve the removal of all things opposed to God. That would include the world structure with its economic systems, governments, media, and educational systems. Rather than greedily keeping wealth to themselves, they will bring it to Christ. The world’s exploitation, wars, greed, injustice, and all evils will be shaken out of (removed from) God’s new order of creation. The rulers of nations will fall before Christ and submit to His lord ship. Christ will be the Lord of lords, and King of kings. All the factors in the social realm of creation that oppose God will be shaken out and removed from the new order of creation.

Fourth, consider the physical realm. We are told that the universe was subjected to the horrible effects of sin of Adam and Eve, which also extended to the physical and spiritual realm. Originally, All God’s creation (heavens, earth, and their hosts) was, “very good” (Genesis 1:31; 2:1).

Paul explains it this way, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to **futility**, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to **corruption** into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Romans 8:18-22 – emphasis mine).

All creation was subjected to futility and enslaved to corruption. By creation, I mean the heavens and earth. Heaven does not refer to the abode of God, but of the universe with all its stars and planets, and even includes the spiritual realm where both evil and good angels traffic (Cf. Genesis 1:1; Ephesians 1:3, 20-22; 2:2; 6:12; Daniel 10:10-21).

Because of sin and Satan, God's creation is presently infected with futility and corruption, decay and death. Futility (*mataiotes*) means vanity, and the idea regarding humans means human nothingness and foolishness (Cf. Ephesians 4:17-19). It is worthless because of deception and is ineffectual, being the opposite to the normal function of something.

The preacher wrote, "Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher, 'vanities of vanities! All is vanity'" (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

Corruption (*phthora*) means destruction, death, decay, or a bringing something into an inferior or worse condition. It is used to describe a shipwreck or food spoiling.

In the physical realm, considering the universe, it is diseased with death and decay. In science this condition is known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Every system in the physical and biological world is subject to this law. It means that everything tends to decay or disintegrate from a state of organized complexity to a condition of randomness and disorganization. The universe is crumbling, deteriorating, decaying, and in the process of decomposing.

Just as humans, animals, fish, flowers, houses, and trees are subject to death and decay, so is the rest of the universe. It is corrupted by this disease called sin. The universe doesn't work like it was originally meant to. However, someday, God will shake the corruption out of the physical and spiritual universe, and things will operate with precision and perfection – for eternity.

Finally, and to summarize, in the future God will shake out and remove all those things and systems that clog up and hinder the perfect operation of the machinery of His entire creation – physical, social, and spiritual. This purified condition will be permanent, glorious, a reorganization, and eternal.

G. CHRISTIANS HAVE A NEW PERSPECTIVE WHILE ON EARTH (13:1-6).

Chapter thirteen deals with our personal relationships, along with some surprising spiritual dynamics to encourage our lives.

1. The first six verses tell us to love each other with brotherly love, show hospitality to strangers, keep the prison ministry going, and let the marriage bed be pure. There is a surprise for us here: angels roam this world as ministering messengers. Sometimes they take the form of human beings. Certainly they are spiritual beings, but can morph into human form. Have you ever met one?

Three things can be taken from this verse on marriage. First, sex outside of marriage is sin. Second, marriage assumes a union between male and female. Paul wrote, "let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2ff.)

God is the judge in these matters of marriage and adultery. In this day and age there is a great emphasis on homosexuality and same sex marriage. This is a perversion

of God's creative purpose design for sex and marriage. It is an offense to him, and He will judge those guilty. It is not that God is unaware of sin. Surely, those angels are reporting back to Him.

Third marriage is to be held in honor. This discourages unmarried couples living together outside of marriage. Marriage and family are very important in the eyes of God – and for the stability of society. It is how He designed society to work. The disintegration of the family destabilizes society.

2. Sexual urges and obsessions are brought into view, but following along right after it is the lust and urge for money. Sometimes the two go together – not always. Along with the love for money comes anxiety and fear.

3. Finances are a constant problem for most of humanity. Some are wealthy, some are poor. The disparity is great. According to a Gallop Pole, the average annual household income in 2013 for Norway, for example, is USD\$51,489. In sharp contrast, in Liberia, West Africa, it is USD\$781. Wow! What a difference! Incidentally, the United States is USD\$43,585. One third of the world lives on less than USD\$1.25 per day.

Yet, God is telling us to be content with what we have (13:5). It is hard. My grandmother used to tell me, "It doesn't matter how much money you make, what is important is how much money you spend." However, to show that the statistics in trying to find out how much money people in the world make is complicated. Many are farmers, have their own small business, grow their own gardens and such.

Our encouragement is the express promise in the direct context of money, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (13:5). Our financial situation gives us opportunity to believe God – that is, exercise faith.

Verse six addresses the issue of fear when we are in want. Sure, we need to work hard, be creative and resourceful in gaining enough money to live on, but anxiety only hampers our creativity and saps our energy. If we are poor, look around for the opportunities to gain what we need to live on.

Many times people think that the more money they have, the happier they will be. Psychological research has shown to the contrary. After we have enough to cover the basics, money beyond that point does not increase our happiness. Be content with what you have and look to God – that is the message of Hebrews.

H. CHRISTIANS HAVE NEW SPIRITUAL DUTIES (13:7-25).

1. We now come to the final section of the book of Hebrews. The exhortation in verse seven is to be mindful of, think about carefully, and imitate those leaders who were the foundation of the Faith (i.e. chapter 11). Many had suffered death for their faith, but they speak to us today in the words of the Bible, and also through the examples of their lives of faith.

2. We now come to an often misunderstood verse of the Bible, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever” (13:8). He is the same in character and purpose and who He is. God is unchangeable. He does not operate on a whim. He is always trustworthy, fair, full of grace and truth, all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, and holy and just.

However, He does not govern the affairs of humanity always the same throughout history. For example, His government among men was different in the Garden of Eden, the times of Noah, the life of Abraham, and with the nation Israel during the Mosaic Law.

He did not, for example, require the Egyptians to take up the Law of Moses with all the sacrificial offerings, civil regulations, and religious ceremonies. In fact, Noah and Abraham were not saddled with the Mosaic system. Even today, the Church does not offer blood sacrifices of bulls at an altar or the communion table. Why? The reason is because He governs His people differently in different times of His unfolding of history.

For a concrete example, just because an angel talked with Daniel in a dream does not mean that angels or God are communicating to you in your dreams. He may to some on some unusual occasion, but He has chosen to relate to you primarily through the Bible. Just because God bodily took Enoch directly to heaven without tasting death does not mean He will you. Be careful. God never changes; however, His methods of unfolding history do as determined by His predetermined plan and purpose.

Another practical application is that since Jesus Christ (the Messiah) was faithful and able to deliver in the lives of the saints of old (e.g. chapter 11), He will be faithful and able regarding you these many centuries later – even today.

3. Another warning deals with doctrine (13:9). We are confronted with many various teachings, but test everything by the Bible. False religions, Christian cults, Liberal theology, local religions, universities, the United Nations – in fact, the world in general – bombard us with ideas to lead us astray. Be well grounded in the Bible.

4. Because of our wonderful and grand position and status we have in Christ, our attitude is to be one of sacrifice. The sacrifices spoken of (13:15, 16) are expressing praise and thanksgiving to God, and doing good and sharing. Here we have the key to joy and happiness: keeping our eyes on the hope of an eternal home and future in heaven – and all that glorious time will bring. An attitude of gratitude for what Christ has done for us equals happiness.

Another aspect of happiness is contained in these verses. Many times we get self-absorbed in our own problems and worries. The result is discouragement, worry, lack of creativity, frustration, and a sour spirit. One cure is to get out of ourselves and get involve in the lives of other people who need help and encouragement. The grace God has given us, pass it on to others.

5. Prayer is another exercise we are to practice (13:18ff.). In this case, the writer confesses to have a clear conscience and to live honorably. Then his request is to be restored to them. Pray works, and is a vital part of Christian living.

It might be strange that the writer claims to have a clear conscience and honorable behavior. First, it could be that some of the Hebrews were suspicious of him because He was so critical of the Old Covenant and the Levitical Priesthood. He needed to establish His credibility.

Second, it could have been that he was in prison, and needed their prayer to get out return to them. He was saying he was innocent of any charges against him. He also mentioned that Timothy had been released, which means that he also had been in jail (Cf. Acts 16:1; Romans 16:21).

These facts of being in prison, having a close relationship with Timothy, and writing from Rome (However, it could be that Italians outside of Italy were sending their greeting back to believers in Rome) where Paul was in prison, and taking a low key by not even mentioning his name as writer, gives evidence the writer of this book was Paul. Remember that there was a strong animosity between Paul and the Jews, and he was the one who spoke the most vigorous against Judaism. The general feelings of the early Christians gave the authorship to Paul. The Council of Carthage (A.D. 419) formally reckoned it among Paul's epistles.

6. Finally, we get our last view of God, His purpose for us, and His character. He is the God of peace, who brought up Jesus from the dead. His resurrection demonstrates His power and guarantees that His words are truth. He is our Shepherd, which means He oversees and cares for us.

He is making us into the people that He wants us to be, equipping us for good things. Finally, grace be with us all. Amen.

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