

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 1 ~

by Jim McDonald

The book of Hebrews is the nineteenth book of the New Testament, appearing at the conclusion of thirteen letters inscribed by Paul to individuals; single congregations or a collection of them. The order of its appearance serves, perhaps, to show the general feeling, but tinged with a bit of doubt, that the letter also was written by Paul,

There is no superscription in the outset of the epistle of those for whom it was intended. Very early, perhaps by 150 AD, the headings were found at the letter's conclusion: "to the Hebrews". This is one of the arguments made against Paul being the author: all previous thirteen letters included both names of those for whom the letter was intended, as well as Paul's signature. **It does seem strange** that if Paul is the author, that he would not identify himself since he did universally otherwise. Still, although the letter, in its body, does not address itself to the Hebrews, it was universally agreed by early eastern churches by the middle of the second century, that the letter was written to Hebrews.

And, equally as conclusive, is the fact that these were not just Hebrews; these were Hebrew Christians. It is quite possible that the letter was intended for Jerusalem Christians; certainly it was intended for those in Palestine. It may have been a specific letter to Jerusalem Christians, or a general letter to churches in Palestine, just as Galatians was written to the "churches of Galatia", but it is evident that the letter was designed for Jewish converts in the land of Palestine. And why not? Since various regions of the Roman world letters written to them, why should not at least one letter be directed to Jews from whence came Jesus?

While the doubts that Paul is the author of this letter have already been touched upon, it appears to this writer that anyone familiar with other writings of Paul would "see" and "hear" Paul in the different parts of the letter. Yet it must be acknowledged that while this seems strong evidence of his authorship; it is not conclusive. There are some portions of Paul's letters which "sound" like Peter, and vice versa. Thus, one cannot be dogmatic about the author of the letter, however strong his convictions may be. After

all, the letter does not say, and any conclusions reached are drawn inferences which are not necessary ones.

Whatever doubt may exist about the composer of the letter, the design of the letter is clear. It is written to show the superior nature of the system of Christ over that of Moses and to warn those who were Christians not to return to something inferior to what they possessed in Christ. It is a letter worthy of exvination and comment, and so we begin -----

GOD HATH SPOKEN

"God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son" (Hb. 1: 1f)

Revelation is essential for the well-being and happiness of man. Jeremiah of old said *"Oh, Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps..."* (Jer. 10:23). For man to live it is necessary that God provide the proper guidance unto him which he has done through the word (Ps. 119:105). The medium which through the ages God revealed his message to man were his prophets

The word "prophet" first appears in Genesis 20:7. Abimelech, king of Gerar, was told that Abraham was a "prophet" and that should he pray for him, he "would live". Others were obviously prophets before Abraham and Jude wrote of *"Enoch, the seventh from Adam who prophesied..."* (Jude 14). The word "prophet" is defined in various ways but one of its root meanings is "to bubble up as a fountain". This indicates that the message the prophet gave was not his; it was a revelation to him. Peter wrote *"No prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation, for no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20f)*. This fits exactly God's instruction to Moses that He (God) would give him a messages and Moses would deliver that message to Aaron. God said: *"And Aaron shall be thy prophet" (Ex. 7:2)*. There were false prophets, men who gave purportedly messages to men from God, but they only brought destruction to their hearers (2 Pet. 2: 1f). The test of a prophet was whether his prophecy came to pass or not (Dt.18:2ff). The word "prophecy" was the actual speaking of the prophet. The message he delivered was "prophecy".

Someone has said that prophecy may be either foretelling or forthtelling. This is correct. To unveil the future; to show what would happen in

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years to come is "foretelling". But, God's will and instructions for man; requiring on man's part, obedience to the message; although not revealing future things, was prophecy; forthtelling.

God did, in times past, "*speak to the fathers in the prophets in divers portions and divers manners,*" He spoke to Moses in a "burning bush" (Ex. 3). He spoke to Joseph by dreams (Gen. 37:5). He spoke to Balaam through the mouth of his donkey (Nu. 22:28). Frequently angels bore God's message to men. Others received messages in other ways: oftentimes the means through which revelation was made known was not stated: God gave unto Joseph and Daniel the interpretations of dreams others had dreamed but how God revealed the significance of that dream to the prophet who interpreted it is not made known.

"*Hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son*". This passage tells us the era of God's speaking to man has been brought to an end for His last message to man is through His Son, who is fittingly called "the Word" by John in the prologue of the gospel which bears his name,

When Jesus was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James and John and Moses and Elijah appeared in their presence, Peter said "*Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah*" (Mt. 17:4). A voice from heaven spoke "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him*" (Mt. 17:5). The words of Christ are important, Jesus said "*It is the Spirit which quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life.*" (Jn. 6:63). Peter exclaimed "*Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" (Jn. 6:68) At the conclusion of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave a parable saying "*Everyone therefore that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock .. everyone therefore that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man that built his house upon the sand*" (Mt. 7:24-26). Moses wrote of the time when God would raise up a prophet like himself but who would be greater than he. Of that Prophet Moses said "*to him shall ye hearken to whatsoever things he saith unto you. And it shall be that every soul that hearkeneth not to the voice of that prophet shall be utterly cut off from among the people*" (Acts 3:22ff). Indeed God has spoken--by His Son. Let every person have the spirit of Samuel of old "*Speak Lord, thy servant heareth.*" "

The preeminence of Jesus is discussed in many New Testament passages. In fact, the Colossian letter has this subject as it's theme. In that letter Paul states that Jesus "*is the firstborn of all creation*"; that "*he is before all things, and in him all things consist*"; that "*in all things he is to have preeminence*"; in him "*all the fullness dwells*"; that in him "*dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily* (1: 15; 17, 18, 19; 2:5). In addition to these verses, many more may be sighted-- all showing that God has exalted his Son to the highest seat of authority man can conceive. The Hebrew letter says "*God has spoken ... in his Son whom he appointed heir of all things...*" (1:2ff), Who is this Son and why has God exalted him to the place he occupies? Hebrews chapter one gives many answers to these questions.

First, this Son is identified as him "*through whom he made the worlds*" (1:2). The unanimous testimony of New Testament writers attribute to Jesus the creation of the worlds. In John's prologue to his gospel he wrote: "*all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that hath been made*" and "*he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*" (Jn. 1:3; 10). Jehovah's witnesses meet a fatal blow in John One, Their doctrine is that Jesus was merely a creature. Since all things were made by Jesus, and without him was not anything made that hath been made, their doctrine is reduced to the ridiculous position that Jesus must have made himself,

Second, this exalted Son is said to be the "effulgence" of his (God's) glory. The word "effulgence" is defined by W.E. Vine as "light shining from a luminous body" (W.E. Vine, Vol. 11, P. 19). Mr. Vine adds his following comment: "*The Son, being one with the Father in Godhood, is in Himself, and ever was, the shining forth of the glory, manifested in himself all that God is and does*" (IBID.). Jesus reflects all the glory and grandeur of God.

Third, this exalted Son not only reflects the glory of God but he is the "*express image of his substance...*" (1:3) The writer was not content simply to say that Jesus radiates the glory and brightness of Deity; he adds that whatever the nature of the Father is equally the nature of the son. Philippians 2:6f tells that Jesus, "existed in the form of God .. but emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man." Some, desiring to avoid the fact of the Deity of Christ, say that Jesus only existed in

the form of God, but was not really God. If this be correct reasoning, it applies also to the following statement "*made in the form of a servant.*" If the word "form of God" means Jesus was not really God, the "Form of a servant" means Jesus was not really man. Such reasoning reduces Jesus to a non-ententity. But, this is error. Jesus was God and man.

Fourth, this exalted Son "upholdeth all things by the word of his power" (Hb, 1:4). The Son still functions in the workings of the world. It continues to operate with the same preciseness as it has in millenniums past. The Son is still active in the affairs of men and nations. While men are not puppets, he must never forget that "*in him we live, and move and have our being,*" (Acts 17:2 8).

Fifth, this exalted Son made "purification for sins" (1:4). The writer deals more explicitly as to how this purification was accomplished further in the letter and he not only here but in almost universally all Paul's letters testifies that Jesus put away sins by the sacrifice of himself I Corinthians tells that "*Christ died for our sins*" (I Cor. 15:2f); that "him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf (2 Cor.5:21). The Galatian letter states that the "*Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me*" (2:20).

Because Christ "*humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea the death of the cross*"; God "*highly exalted him and gave unto the name that is above ever*~ man" (Phil. 2:8), The position occupied by Jesus is one He richly deserves! Well spake the poet:

"All hail the pow'r of Jesus name, let angels prostrate fall,

Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all"

JESUS, HIGHER THAN ANGELS!

The Hebrew writer says that Jesus has become "*by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they*" (1:4). After this observation there follows seven quotations from three Old Testament prophets, Moses, Nathan and David, to verify this claim.

His first reference is from David's second Psalm. "*Thou art my Son, this day hath I begotten thee*" (2:7). Twice this passage appears in the New Testament; here and in Paul's sermon in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:33). This passage is sometime understood to be speaking of Jesus' conception in Mary's womb and his birth in Bethlehem but we do not

agree. Acts 13:33 can certainly be understood to have reference to his resurrection, and we believe such is the contrast here. Without doubt, the resurrection of Jesus proves his Deity (Rm. 1:1 ff). The writer's point here is that never were such words spoken of angels but they were of Jesus. He is higher than angels!

The second quotation "*I will be to him a Father and he shall be to me a Son*" are Nathan's words from God to David that Solomon would rule in David's stead. This promise (along with Psalms 8:7, "*what is man that thou art mindful of him?*") are two illustrations of the very few prophecies which are dual in nature. 2 Samuel 7:14 finds full completion in David's Greater Son, Jesus; but was a promise that Solomon would be David's successor. In the sense of David's Greater Son, never did God say to an angel, "*I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.*"

The next Old Testament passage cited by the writer is from Deuteronomy 32:43, to the Septuagint (Greek) translation used by the Jews in the first century. Hebrew 1:6 reads "*And when he again brings the firstborn into the world he saith, let all the angels of God worship him.*" Angels are not objects of worship, but they are commanded to worship the Son. What an evident difference!

The citations of Psalms ~~110~~¹⁰⁴:4 and 13:6 are coupled together as one argument in Hebrews 1:7-9. "*and of the angels he saith, who maketh his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire: but of the Son he saith, thy throne, O God is forever and ever.*"

Jehovah's Witness, because they deny the Deity of Jesus Christ, in their New World Translation, makes this passage read: "Thy throne is God". Such a translation is possible, as a footnote from the ASV indicates. Yet, the intent of the writer can be perceived without dispute. First the writer quotes Psalms 104:4 "*who makes his angels winds and his ministers a flame of fire*". Next there follows the word "but" which marks the beginning of a contrast with what he has just said with what he is about to say. Angels are winds, flames of fire; the Son is identified as "God"; unchangeable in nature and character.

"*And thou Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy fingers: they shall perish, but thou continuest, and they shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a mantle shall thou roll them up, as a garment, and they shall be changed But thou art the same and thy years shall not fail*" (1: 1 ff). This passage from Psalms 102:25ff states what earlier was shown: the world was created by Jesus. All created material things, are things which, however permanent they

appear to be, will pass away, but he who created them is unchanging, everlasting. This passage, along with the passage which declared *"thy throne, O God, is forever and ever..."* emphasizes the eternal, permanent unchanging nature of Christ, contrary to the fact that angels are winds, a flame of fire.

The final passage used to prove that Christ is superior to angels is the familiar text from Psalms 10:1 *"The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet."* Jesus used this passage to silence his questioners in Matthew 22. when he asked them if "my Lord" in the text referred to the Messiah, David's son, then why did David call him "Lord"? The passage is quoted by Peter on Pentecost affirming the passage to have been fulfilled in that Christ was made Lord and Christ (Acts 2:35f). Paul uses the passage in I Corinthians 15 to prove that even Death, man's mortal enemy, will someday be abolished by the Mighty Son of God.

Yes, Angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that inherit salvation, but Jesus is the Eternal God who not only made the world, but made the angles as well!

PAY ATTENTION

Ms, in essence, is the significance of the words when the Hebrew writer wrote: *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we heard lest haply we drift away from them. For if the word spoken by angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received its just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? Which having at the first been spoken by the Lord was confirmed unto us by them that heard," 2:1-3.*

The word "therefore" tells that a conclusion has been reached which conclusion was that Jesus is superior to angels. Such was the thrust of the writer's lengthy discussion in the previous chapter where he appealed to several citations from Deuteronomy, Second Samuel and the Psalms to "proof text" his statement that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high "having become so much better than the angels..." (1:4).

Remember the apostle begins with this declaration: *"God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets in divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son..." (1:1-2a).* With his ample proof

that Christ is "better than angels" brings us to the opening words of chapter two. *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which were heard lest haply we drift away from them..."*

A special group of people -- Jewish Christians -- were the ones for whom this letter was primarily intended. The many warnings inserted throughout the letter against "drifting away", "losing faith" and "shrinking back" are clear evidence that if there had not already been many who had "turned and walked nomore" in the teaching of the Son, there were disturbing signs which the writer perceived that caused him to know that the danger was on the threshold of becoming reality and the Holy Spirit revealed to him the warning against the danger signs which were present.

Keep in mind that the writer's showing the superior nature of the Son over angels must be remembered to perceive the significance of his warning *"for if the word spoken by angels proved steadfast, and every transgressions and disobedience received a just recompense of reward"*. What is this "word spoken by angels" which the writer avers to have been steadfast? That word was the Old Testament scriptures so sacred to devout Jews. Those words were the "Holy Scriptures" to which Timothy from a child had been exposed to, (2 Tim. 3:15). Both Stephen and Paul declared that angels had been God's agents in revealing the law to Moses for Israel. Stephen threw these accusative words into the ears of those who were about to slay him *"Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye ... ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels and kept it not" (Acts 7:51, 53).* Paul wrote the Galatians: *"What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come ... and was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator" (Gal. 3:19).* God had spoken to the fathers in time past through the prophets in divers portions and manners, one of those manners being through angels who revealed the law to Moses. Angels were (are) inferior to the Son, yet their words (for their words were the words from God) proved to be steadfast. Every infraction of those words was duly and appropriately punished.

Now...God has spoken to us by his Son who is infinitely higher than angels. If the words given by angels were steadfast, how much more so will be the word of the Son?! If every disobedience against the words given by angels were appropriately punished, who can doubt that the Son's words will be--even more so! So ... Pay Attention to the words of the Son!

Jim McDonald

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 2 ~

by Jim McDonald

Christ Made A Little Lower Than Angels

"But we behold Him who hath been made a little lower than angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He should taste of death for every man." (Heb.2:9).

It has been observed that the Deity of Jesus is emphasized in chapter one of Hebrews while his humanity is shown in chapter two. The dual nature which Jesus possessed on earth came about because He, as Eternal God, took upon himself flesh that He might die for his creature, man. John wrote: *"in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . . and the Word because flesh and dwelt among us..."* (Jn. 1:1,14). Paul wrote *"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He who was manifested in the flesh..."* (1 Tim. 3:15a). The verse cited from Hebrew 2:9 speaks of Jesus who was made a little lower than angels.

This observation of the Hebrew writer follows his citations of a familiar section from Psalms eight. *"For not unto angels did he subject the world to come, whereof we speak. But one has somewhere testified saying, 'what is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitedst him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands. Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet' (2 :6-8).* The Psalms passage revels in awe of the lofty place God has placed man in his created works. The Hebrew writer adapts the passage, properly so, to Him who is the example of a perfect man.

It is interesting to note that the most frequent reference Jesus makes of himself is the "Son of man". He did not reject the designation "Son of God" when it was offered by others to Him and He clearly made the claim of Deity for Himself; but repeatedly He spoke of himself as the "son of man". By illustration: the gospel of Matthew has no less than 27 appearances in different

verses where Jesus refers to himself as the son of man. By such a reference He claims kinship with man.. Bolstering that claim, the Hebrew writer adds: *"For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren"* (Heb. 2: 11). When the writer says that both he that sanctifieth (Christ) and they that are sanctified (redeemed man) are all of one; he tells his readers that they are all of one humanity, thus he calls them brethren because of their kinship in the flesh and in the Lord. Further, citing Isaiah 8: 17 *"Behold; I and the children whom God hath given me"* Jesus is linked to his human kinship. Since the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also in like manner partake of the same. (2:14)

There was a heresy prevalent near the close of the first century which denied that Jesus had a fleshy body. These people were called "gnostics" in historical writings of that era and possible reference is made of these in the Revelation letters to Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira. There different false teachers are mentioned: the Nicolaitians, followers of Balaam, and Jezebel (Rev. 2:6; 2:14, 15; 2:2). It was against such teaching that John wrote *"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God..."* (1 John 4:2f). *"...many deceivers are gone forth into the world; even they that confess not that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist' (2 John 7).* Possibly a remnant of this ancient heresy has surfaced in our age in the form of a nearly 1900 year old manuscript of book called "The gospel of Judas".

Jesus did come in the flesh, a manifestation of His humility and love. Because of that sacrifice, He was highly exalted by God.

Crowned With Glory and Honor

"The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now..." So wrote the poet perhaps in meditation or reflection of the Hebrew writer's words: *"But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor..."* (Heb.2:9)

These words are part of that Hebrew section which affirms that God has made Jesus to be Lord of all things. This elevation of Jesus came as a result of Jesus' abasing himself to, for a little while, be made a little lower than angels; to, for a little while, walk upon the earth in the form of man he made.

Both the fact of Christ's sojourn in the flesh, along with the purpose of it is often written of in wonder by New Testament writers. Paul said: *"Have this mind in you, which also was in Christ Jesus, who existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself becoming obedient unto death, yea the death of the cross, wherefore God also highly exalted him..."* (phil. 2:5-9). John recorded the praise of the myriad's of angels who praised Jesus as worthy to open the seven seals of the book which none other was worthy to open, which praise was thus expressed *"Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might and honor; and glory, and blessing"* (Rev. 5:12). Peter's conclusion to his mighty Pentecost sermon was *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God hath made him Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified"* (Acts 2:36).

It was reason that God should crown Jesus with glory and honor because of his noble and self-denying advent to this world. The Hebrew writer tells that he suffered the death he died so that by God's grace *"he might taste of death for every man."* (Heb. 2:9). Jesus said *"The son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."* (Mt. 20:28) John revealed this aspect of the Master's life by saying *"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."* (In. 1:29). Isaiah wrote 700 years before Christ *"Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrow, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."* (Isa 53).

Why? Let the Hebrew writer explain. *"For it became him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."* (Heb. 2:10). Elsewhere the Corinthian letter states *"But we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block and unto Gentiles foolishness, but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"* (I Cor. 1:23f). In God's wisdom the death of Christ was needful to make salvation complete.

At least two things were accomplished through Christ's fleshly sojourn and ultimate death. *"Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself partook of the same; that through death he might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil and might deliver all them who through*

fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Heb. 2:14). Through his death Jesus went into the domain of captive spirits who are unable to escape the power of death. Christ triumphed over Satan: Hades could not hold him. Peter said *"Whom God raised up having loosed the pangs of death; because it was not possible he should be holden of it"* (Acts 2:24). His triumph over death gives hope to all others that they can triumph over death through Him.

"Wherefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). Little wonder then that Peter said: *"And in none other is there salvation, for neither is there any other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

"Made Like Unto His Brethren"

The Hebrew writer has devoted the major portion of his second chapter to a proof of the humanity of Jesus. He has shown that Jesus was, for a little while, "made lower than angels" (vs. 9). He has shown that in God's mind that in bringing many sons to glory the Captain of their salvation should be made perfect through suffering, thereby necessitating that he robe himself with flesh and experience the death of the cross (Vs 9ff). he has affirmed that both he who sanctifieth (Christ) and those whom are sanctified (man) are of one (humanity) (vs. 11). Because Christ and those whom he sanctifies are of one humanity, he is not ashamed to call them brethren (vs 11ff). Further, he has shown that by his death Christ was able to deliver all those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (vs. 14ff). He has shown that it was not to angels to whom he gave help, rather it was to those who are sons of Abraham and this he could not do without sharing their nature. (vs 16). This brings the writer to the conclusion of verses 17-18: *"Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of the people."*

Here, for the first time (but not the last) the word "priest" appears and is applied to Jesus. In this passage is introduced the high priesthood of Jesus. Jesus was manifested in the flesh, that, among other things already noted, he might function as a high priest. The priesthood of Christ will be referred to many times in the next eight chapters. Jesus is not called here a "mediator" (although he is in Paul's letters, 1 Tim. 2:5); but the role

of Jesus as a high priest is precisely that -- a mediator. For God, he serves as a propitiation for the sins of the people: for the people he functions as a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God. It was necessary he robe himself in flesh to function on man's part; it was necessary that he might offer himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the people. *"For in that he hath suffered; being tempted; he is able to succor them that are tempted"* (2:18). Later the writer will say *"We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with our infirmities, but one that hath in all points been tempted like we are, yet without sin"* (Heb. 4:15).

Jesus: Apostle and High Priest

"Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus who was faithful to him that appointed him, even as was Moses in all his house." (Heb. 3: 1f).

The word "wherefore" ties this section to that which immediately precedes it: a section which declares Jesus to be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God; one who is able to succor man when he is tempted because He himself had been tempted. In view of Christ's serving faithfully as a mediator between man and God the Hebrew writer urges: "Consider Him".

These who are urged to "consider" Jesus are themselves addressed as *"holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling."* It has been suggested these are so addressed because he who wrote this letter was first a Jew, "fleshly brother" of those to whom he wrote; that they were "holy brethren" because they had believed on the Lord Jesus just as had the writer of the epistle. That is possible; certainly it was true (if we regard Paul as the author of the epistle). Still, Peter wrote to some who were gentiles and brethren and said, *"But, like he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves holy in all manner of living because it is written, ye shall be holy, for I am holy. And if ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's works..."* (1 Pet. 1:15-17). Peter calls Gentile believers, brethren (they have the same Father as he, although not fleshly brethren) and urges them to be holy. These were brethren in Christ; they were partakers (sharers in and of) of a calling which was from heaven or God, "holy brethren".

We are urged to consider Christ as an Apostle and High Priest. Although Christ is identified many times in this letter as a "high priest", reference to him as an "apostle" appears but this one time, in this letter. Nor is Jesus spoken of or referred to be an Apostle elsewhere.

The word "apostle" is most often applied to the twelve whom Jesus chose from among the multitude of the disciples (Mark 3:13-19). It has been properly observed that "all the apostles were disciples, but not all the disciples were apostles". The twelve were endowed with miraculous powers and were given the promise of Holy Spirit baptism, which promise God fulfilled at Pentecost (Lk. 24:48f; Acts 1:4f; 2:1-4). Yet others aside from the twelve were identified as apostles. Paul was called an apostle (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1 et al). Barnabas was called an apostle (Acts 14:4). Then, here in Hebrews three our Lord is called "an Apostle". These are all proper usages of the word for "apostle" literally means "one sent". The twelve were "sent" by Jesus (Mt. 10:5; Mk. 16: 15). Paul was sent to Gentiles by Jesus, equal to the original twelve (Acts 26: 17). Barnabas was an apostle because he, along with Saul, had been sent unto a work by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church in Antioch (Acts 13:2f). Jesus was God's apostle. God had sanctified and sent his Son into the world (Jn. 10:36). Jesus said, *"God sent not his son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him."* (Jn. 3: 17).

We should consider Jesus as the High Priest of our "confession" (profession). The writer's Jewish readers were familiar with a "high priest" for his role in their religion was very significant. Their religion evolved around the functions of such a one, a role above all others. He alone could enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. But Jesus is the High Priest of our confession: but, as the writer shall show eminently above those who served as high priest in the tabernacle or temple.

Moses A Servant: Christ A Son

"Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also was Moses in all his house. For he hath been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by so much as he that built the house hath more glory than the house. For every house is builded by some one, but he that built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which afterward to be spoken; but Christ, as a son, over his house; whose house we are..." (Heb.3:2-6a)

In these verses is continued the theme of the Hebrew writer: the superiority of Christ. Earlier the writer has shown Christ's superior nature over angels; thus his words greater than the words angels revealed. Now his aim is to show that Christ is superior to Moses just as a son is superior to a servant.

The writer does not presume to take away any honor due Moses: he accords him respect due to a faithful servant. God commended Moses' worth in

many instances and the statement. "Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant" is essentially a quotation from Numbers 12:7. The expression "faithful in all his house" is not a designation of Moses' status in his personal household: it is a declaration of Moses' faithfulness in God's house as the reference from Numbers shows. The "house" in both Moses and Christ's instance is God's. The difference is the relationship of Moses and Christ is to the house. Moses was a servant, Christ a son.

When the writer says "to have been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by so much as he that builded the house hath more honor than he than the house", it is evident that he tells us that an architect has more honor than the house he designs. It is God who designed the house; Moses "built" the "house" by revealing to Israel God's requirements of them, but God was the architect. God designed the "house" for physical Israel and the "house" for spiritual Israel. And, while Moses was God's instrument in revealing God's plan for the tabernacle and its services to Israel -- and was faithful in his revelation of that to God's people ("thus did Moses, according to all God commanded him, so did he"); Moses was part of the house itself. The sacrifices and services beneficial to physical Israel applied equally to him; but Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for others; including Moses.

"Moses was faithful ... for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken." Because Moses was faithful; Israel could believe the word he told them from God. But, he was after all, just the media through which God made his message known. Christ, as God, has spoken to man face to face. Christ is not a servant, but a Son, whose house we are.

His House, If We Hold Fast . . .

"Whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end." (Heb. 3:6).

The chief concern and primary purpose for writing this epistle is now reached and expressed in the above words. The contrast between the first and second covenants is needed for all ages, but for those who had given up the first in order to share the blessings of the second and had suffered many different persecutions for it, the reassurances, exhortations and warnings found in this epistle were critically needed. Many of them had been cut off from their families; ostracized from society; robbed of their possessions, beaten, imprisoned and/or had seen their brethren slain for their faith. Was it worth it? To the fearful, weak and doubtful, the answer to the preceding question became increasing more difficult to

decide. So, the following verses remind all his readers that being the house of God's Son was a conditional matter. To be such was contingent upon the Hebrews holding fast the boldness they had manifested when they had openly and publicly confessed their faith that Jesus the Nazarene was their long expected Messiah (we shall see appeals to bold action further in the epistle). They were God's House IF they held fast the glorying of their hope; their hope in the Resurrection, in eternal life, all through Christ Jesus, firm unto the end. (Acts 22:6; Tit. 1:2; I Tim. 1:1).

To encourage Hebrews to hold fast, first the writer cites an appeal "Wherefore, even as the Holy Spirit saith, today if ye shall hear his voice harden not your hearts, like as in the day of the trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tried me by proving me" (3:7ft). This quotation is from Psalms 95:7-9 and the writer repeatedly returns this citation, with portions of it in this chapter and the one which follows (3:5; 4:3, 4, 7). One commentary speaks of the times in the wilderness when Israel tried God as he wrote: "one provocation was in demanding bread at Sin; a second for want of water at Massah or Meribah; a third time at Sinai with the golden calf; a fourth time at Taberah for want of flesh; a fifth time at Kadesh when they refused to go up into Canaan, and the oath came that they should die in the wilderness..." - Dr. J.P. Wilson, M.S. Notes.

Because of Israel's hardness of heart; because they tried God, God said "Wherefore I was displeased with this generation and said, they do always err in their heart; but they did not know my ways; as I swore in my wrath, they should not enter into my rest." (Heb 3:10ff). Paul had earlier written the Corinthians, uttering similar warning. "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual food, and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ. Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness." (I Cor. 10:1-5).

In light of the past history of rebellious Israel, the Hebrew writer urged "Take heed brethren lest haply there shall be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in falling away from the living God: but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today, lest any one of you should be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, for we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end." (Heb 3:12-14) "Firm unto the end." This is the second occurrence of the phrase in this chapter: Both

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Needs to be Addressed Cont from page 11

preachers (2Cor.11:8) and (2) send to churches which must have help for their needy- Acts 11:27-30. A dying church surely can appoint faithful men as agents to see that their funds do the Scriptural things listed above. About twenty years ago a dying church tried to send the church here in Lawton, OK ten thousand dollars. We would NOT take it. Yes, we were still paying on our new building but how could we accept such with no Scripture? I made suggestions and the funds were sent to faithful preachers who needed support on a monthly basis until the funds were used up.

BRETHREN, THINK!

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instances follow his appeal to "hold fast." Hold fast our boldness and glorying, hold fast the beginning of our confidence.

Do we need such an appeal today? What do you think? With so many who half heartedly worship when they do come, who come sporadically on a "hit or miss" attendance, this appeal is badly needed. But, will we harden our hearts? Will we, as Israel of old, turn a deaf ear to the pleas of the Holy Spirit?

Jim McDonald

Easy Button Continued from page 13

After over 40 years of Gospel preaching, it seems like the beginning was last week. As people have obeyed the Gospel, we have rejoiced with all of them (Rom 16:19). We still rejoice to see people stand sure against temptation, evil and false doctrines (Col 2:5). Such joy in Christ is a mark of discipleship (Ac 13:52). Joy is the nature of the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17). The fellowship of righteous people is a source of joy (Phil 2:29). And for many years we have enjoyed worshiping God. Singing is enjoyed (Ps 107:22) as is prayer (Phil 1:4). Most of all, the Christian life is one of the joy of serving God (Phil 2:17-18).

So, if you are a Christian, and you are not finding it to be easier than being a sinner, maybe you are still dragging around some of those old sins. Maybe, you

need to repent and quit doing those things, confess them, and pray... and really get the load off! Or maybe you have not fully taken on the yoke of Jesus. To know to do good and not to do it is still sin (James 4:17)... and that is a heavy burden to be bearing.

If you are not a Christian, accept the Lord's invitation to a yoke that is easy and His burden that is light (Mt 11:28-30).

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yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you." (Joshua 23:16-17) Israel did become idol worshippers and served other gods and they forfeited their right to the land.

The Israel of the Old Testament Does Not Exist Today – (There is a political Israel that began in 1946, but it is not the Israel of the Old Testament and the land they occupy does not belong to them by divine right.) The Law of Moses has been taken out of the way and nailed to the cross. (Col 2:14) Christ fulfilled and removed the Old Testament. (Matt 5:17-18) He took the first covenant out of the way and established a new and better covenant by which we (all men) are sanctified. (Heb 10:9-10) The temple is gone. The Levitical priesthood no longer exists for the priesthood has been changed. (Heb 7:11-12) The theocracy (God's Old Testament political kingdom) is no more. (It died with Coniah, Ezek 21:27) The kingdom Daniel spoke of has been established and now exists. (Daniel 2: Col 1:14-15) The messiah, Jesus Christ, came, established His spiritual kingdom (John 18:36) and now rules on David's throne from heaven. (Acts 2:32-37) There is just one law: the gospel of Christ, for all and those who would be saved must be obedient to it. Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also unto the Greek." (Rom 1:16) Today there is not one law from God for the Jews and another law from God for everyone else. There is just one faith. (Eph 4:5) Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

Danny Brown

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 3 ~

by Jim McDonald

Today, If You Will Hear His Voice

"Today if ye shall hear his voice harden not your hearts, as in the provocation . . ." (Psalms 95:7ff; Heb. 3:15). This is the second time this passage from Psalms 95:7ff is found in Hebrews three. This provocation resulted with God telling Israel that they: "shall not enter into my rest."

Five questions follow this citation to establish the warning, "We are become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end" (3:14). The first question was "For who, when they heard, did provoke?" The second question "Nay, did not all they that came out of Egypt by Moses?" is the answer to the first. Two observations are appropriate just here. First, the provoking and then God's words "they shall not enter my rest," occurred after they left the land of Egypt. God had earlier decreed they should be delivered from Egyptian bondage. He sent Moses to them with the message He would fulfill the promise He had given to Abraham that he would make of him a great nation and would give a land unto his posterity. God did not promise them rest in Canaan all the while knowing they would never reach it. **LESSON FOR US:** We may begin our journey to God's rest for us with the same assurance as these, having God's promise of eternal salvation. Yet, the exhortation must not be forgotten, we must hold fast to be partaker of Christ.

A second observation is that the word, "did not all of them provoke him that came out of Egypt" illustrates that this "all" was not universal. **There were two exceptions** (Joshua and Caleb) but by and large, there was wholesale displeasure toward them on the part of God.

The third and fourth questions constitute another question answered by the following question. "And with whom was he displeased forty years? Was it not with them that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?" (3:17) The final act of provocation of Israel (thought many provocations had preceded it) that caused God to swear they should not enter his rest, was their be-

lieving the report of the ten spies "We are not able to take the land." This constituted unbelief on their part and brought about God's irreversible decree "Ye shall not enter my rest," that they should wander in the wilderness for forty years until all that generation was dead. Of course, there provocation continued again and again during those forty years of wandering and many died, not of actual causes, but of calamities visited upon them by their continual provocation of God. One consideration is appropriate. While we may not enter God's rest, that fate will not be determined until we die. So long as we live, even though we may have sinned, we can return, confess our sins and have hope of heavenly rest God has promised us. That was not true with Israel. For forty years many of these wandered, knowing they would never enter the promised land, no matter how much they plead with God.

The fifth question contains both question and answer: "And to whom sware he that they should not enter his rest, but to them that were disobedient?" And as the writer concludes "and we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief" (3:19) **Why did Israel not enter Canaan? Because of disobedience. Why did Israel not enter Canaan? Because of unbelief.** Notice how disobedience is equaled as unbelief. Why is it that men do not discern that if disobedience equals unbelief, then obedience must equal true belief?

A lesson is to be learned right here. While one may obey and yet disbelieve, none can disobey and be regarded as a believer. Words from James are appropriate: "Shew me that faith apart from thy works and I, by my works, will shew thee my faith." (James 2:18)

LET US FEAR . . .

" . . . Therefore, lest haply a promise being left of entering into his rest, anyone of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good tidings preached unto us even as also they: but the word of hearing did not profit them, because it was not united by faith with them that heard." (Heb 4:10)

When the writer urged the Hebrews to fear that somehow they might come short of a rest afore promised by God, he calls upon Israel to serve as an example as to what might happen if they did not fear. Israel came out of bondage, bound for the promised land. Yet most of them failed to enter Canaan, failed because of their disobedience, their unbelief. (Heb 3:18f)

The writer speaks of a promise being left of entering into his rest (4:10). It is to Christians he writes; and

this promised rest is part of the gospel's appeal. Not only can man have peace through forgiveness of sins; he can have hope of rest from the trials and toils of earth. Jesus promised, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28) Jesus promised, "In my father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you." (John 14:1f) One of the beatitudes of Revelation states, "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord, they shall rest from their labors . . ." (Rev 14:13)

The writer's warning to Christians from Israel is couched in these words, "For indeed we have had good tidings preached unto us, even as also they, but the word of hearing did not profit them because it was not united by faith with them that heard." The word "Good Tidings" is otherwise translated "gospel" and because the writer says that the "gospel" was preached unto us, just as unto them, some conclude that the wandering Israelites had had the good news of Christ's redemptive work preached to them. To so conclude is to ignore two important truths: First: Israel's promised rest was a type of the Christian's. It was "gospel" to them. Although God had promised them Canaan (which included His power and ability to give it to them) they did not believe. Second: the gospel written about Christ, the church and plans for man was a mystery, unknown and unperceived by man although prophets sought to understand it. (Eph 3:8-11; 1 Tim 3:16f; 1 Cor 2:9-10; 1 Pet 1:7-12)

It is true, of course, that God had a "greater rest" for these Israelites (as well as for us) that Israel's unbelief in the promised land of Canaan which prevented them from entering there, likewise closed the door to their entering that greater rest. The oath of God cited by David in Psalms 95:7f "Today, if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the trials in the wilderness . . . as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest: came many years after Israel's entrance into Canaan and was written to warn a generation thus settled in Canaan to take heed lest they provoke God as their fathers had provoked Him, lest they suffer the fate of their fathers, forbidden to enter his rest. Yes, ancient worthies, even before the wilderness wandering, looked or "a city which had the foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb 11:10) And, the inspired observation of the writer, "For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not of afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God" proves the accuracy of the statement that ancient worthies did look for a rest beside the rest of Canaan. (Heb 4:9f)

All which leads to this truth. If there was no real danger of falling short of entering into the promised rest, the writer wastes space and time to warn his reader against such a danger! And further, the second appeal of this chapter to us to beware lest we lose our promised rest adds to the above stated truth. The writer urged: "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest" that no one fall after the same example of disobedience (4:11). The writer's use of the word "us" shows that this warning was issued to those who were as he: Christians, children of God, save. We, as he (Paul?) can lose our rest as did Israel long ago. Are we listening to the warning of the Spirit?

The Powerful Word of God

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joint and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Heb 4:12f)

This declaration of the power of God's word follows on the heels of the writer's exhortation: "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience." (Heb 4:11) Inasmuch as the next verse begins with the word "for," the exhortation in verse eleven and the declaration of God's powerful word in verses twelve and thirteen are related. Just what is the connection between these passages?

There are three couplets given which are difficult to distinguish between the two in each couplet. The first "soul and spirit" demonstrates this difficulty. Sometimes the words are interchanged for one another. Solomon wrote "Then shall the body return unto the dust as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" and James said "he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" and while each of these is a different word (Solomon, spirit, James, soul, Eccl. 12:7, James 5:20), both had the same idea in mind. Yet, there is a difference between soul and spirit. Sometimes the word "soul" is used to describe that part of man that is physical life (1 Pet 3:20) while spirit refers to the spirit life of man. It is equally difficult to distinguish between joint and marrow, but there is a difference as physicians well know.

There is also distinction between “thoughts” and “intents” of the heart. Thoughts enter one’s heart by the windows or lamp of the heart, the eyes. Jesus said *“The lamp of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy body shall be full of light. But, if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.”* (Matt 6:22f) Jesus said *“everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”* (Matt 5:28) Think ye that thoughts of committing adultery with Potiphar’s wife entered into Joseph’s heart? (Gen 39:7-12) Doubtless so, but he weighted that thought and rejected it. He thought it, he did not intend it. But, just how does God’s word, a dividing sword, discern the thoughts and intents of the heart? God is the great heart searcher. *“I try the reins of the heart.”* He said, (Jer 11:20) In the Hebrews passage he reminds us that *“there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight.”* (4:12) His word enters the heart, and he, before whom *“all things are naked and laid open,”* sees how that heart reacts to His word which has entered it. Thus the connection between the exhortation and His word: don’t follow the same example of disobedience as ancient Israel in the wilderness, which disobedience was the natural consequences of their unbelief. Does He who has “searched us and knows us” see the unbelief in the heart before it becomes open rebellion, disobedience? You know that He does!

The Function and Qualifications of a High Priest

Christ is our high priest. This truth first is introduced in Hebrews 2:17 and referred to again in Chapter three. Now in chapter four and five the functions and qualification of a priest are set forth. *“For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with our infirmities, but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”* (Heb 4:15) *“For every high priest being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring . . .”* (Heb 5:1f) Summed up, these verses teach us that a high priest stood between men and God, that he offered (for man) gifts and sacrifices in things pertaining to God, that he must bear gently with the ignorant and unstedfast. We are repeatedly assured in various places that Christ is our mediator and advocate. (1 Tim 2:5; 1 Jn 2:1) We are told that Christ gave himself for us . . . that he is the propitiation for

our sins and for those of the whole world (1 John 2:2) We are reminded many times of the tender care our Savior has for us, that we are to cast all our cares upon him, because he cares for us. (1 Pet 5:7) He knows and fills our needs. Because of his adequacy in filling all the needs of man, he is perfectly suited to function as our high priest.

But the Hebrew writer was addressing a Jewish audience and while Jesus might perfectly function as a high priest, it was necessary that he meet God’s qualifications to be a high priest. The writer was keenly conscious of this and elsewhere showed that the priesthood of Christ was in heaven, that he could not serve as a priest on earth because Moses spake nothing about one from Judah serving as priest. The writer tells that *“The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of law.”* (Heb 7:15)

Our writer shows that, despite the fact that Christ was of a different tribe than that from whence priests were to be taken, that did not disqualify him serving as a priest. To be a high priest, one must have a divine call – Aaron did and so did Jesus. *“So Christ also glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but he that spoke unto him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee, as he said also in another place ‘thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’”* (Heb 5:51)

Discerning Jewish scholars must have pondered the significance of the passage from Psalms: *“Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”* Many questions must have flooded their minds. What was the significance of a priest different from that of Aaron? Who was this to whom God swore these words? In addition, Zachariah must have likewise baffled them when he spoke of the man called the Branch (a clear reference to the Messiah whom all acknowledged was to come from David, from Judah). Of that one, Zachariah declared that the man called the Branch would be a priest upon his throne. (Zach 6:12f) Surely this was at odds with the accepted tribe, Levi! Who was this man to whom God swore *“Thou art a priest forever”*? This man was the man the Psalmist early spoke of *“The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet.”* (Ps 10:4) No Jewish scholar could dispute God had spoken of a high priest other than from the tribe of Levi, and the Hebrew writer’s affirmed that just as God called Aaron to be a priest, so He called his Son to be our high priest today. Jesus is eminently qualified both by his call and from the functions he fills, to be an adequate high priest for us!

Jim McDonald

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 4 ~

By Jim McDonald

"IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH"

"who, in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death" (Heb. 5: 7).

The Hebrew writer in this section is outlining the qualifications that Jesus possessed to be our high priest and mentions, in an almost offhanded way, the humanity of Jesus in saying "in the days of his flesh". Such opens to us several thoughts to pursue touching that statement. First, "in the days of his flesh" tells that Christ came to the world possessing a fleshly body. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he spoke of the mystery of godliness "He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). John wrote in his gospel *"In the beginning was the word...and the word become flesh and dwelt among us"* (John. 1:1, 14). How definite are these words! How strange that there should have been any who denied this fundamental, necessary truth concerning Jesus being incarnate. Yet, deny such, some did.

There were those in the closing decades of the first century who believed flesh was inherently sinful and because they believed Christ to be sinless, were forced to conclude he did not actually possess a fleshly body; he only appeared to possess one. It was against such teaching that much of John's epistles were directed. His first letter begins *"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard; that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld; and our hands handled, concerning the word of life."* (1 John. 1:1). Nor was John content to affirm the truth; he hastened on to deny the error of those who denied that truth, speaking of such as antichrist. In 1 John 4:2 he said *"Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*

is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh..." He wrote in his second epistle *"For many deceivers are gone forth in to the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist"* (2 John 7). Of the Nicolaitans (a sect believed to have held the "Gnostic" views) John wrote Jesus "hated" their doctrine (Rev. 2:6).

Some would dispute these conclusions. They refer to Philippians 2:5-8 where it is written of Jesus *"... who existing in the form of God, counted not being on equality with God a thing to be grasped; but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man..."*. From this is pressed the idea that Jesus was not really flesh, he only appeared to be flesh. . that he was made in the likeness of man, in the form of a servant. But, to such argument must be countered: if Jesus was not really flesh, because he was in the likeness and form of man, he was not really God because he had existed in the form of God. What proves ones proves the either. Jesus was God and Jesus became man. He had a fleshly body!

The words "in the days of his flesh" clearly spells out the truth the humanity of Jesus. But, what about now?

JESUS---NOW?

The question mark placed after "now" is not intended to imply there is a question about the present existence of Jesus. He is the *"first and the last, and the living one, and I was dead and behold; I am alive for evermore..."* (Rev. 1:17f) The question mark is placed there to investigate whether Jesus presently has a body. The Hebrew passages speak of the "days of his flesh" emphatically telling us Jesus once had a body of flesh (Heb. 5:7). Still, Bible students know that his taking on the body of flesh came when he humbled himself to become human but that prior to his earthly sojourn he existed in the form of God (Phil. 1: 5-11). This earthly advent was spoken of further in Hebrews when the writer said *"a body didst thou prepare for me"* and John writes of the fulfillment of it when he said: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."*, (Heb. 10:5; John. 1:14). But, Jesus no longer dwells on this earth. His disciples saw him ascend into heaven where he is now by the right hand of God. Does he have a body now?

This subject must be approached with extreme reverence and caution for it is of God and His nature we seek

to learn. And, whatever we write must be tempered with the sober knowledge that we have not seen him. Whatever conclusion is reached must be reached according to what the scriptures reveal to us about Him.

First, Jesus had a body after his resurrection. It was a body that might be touched (In. 20:26). He was able to eat in that body (Luke. 24:41f). It was a body which allowed him to pass through a wall into a room where all doors were shut (In. 20:19). Still, does that mean he now possesses such a body, or a body at all? We know that angels are spirit beings, but they sometimes took on the appearance of human form and even ate with humans (Gen. 18:4-8). The fact that Jesus had a body after his resurrection does not necessarily argue he has a body now. The apostles were to be witnesses of his resurrection and they could only witness according to their five senses. Let us consider two passages which touch upon the question at hand. *"For our citizenship is in heaven, whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory."* (Phil. 3:20f). Paul says essentially the same thing as John who wrote: *"Beloved; now are we children of God; and it is not yet manifest what we shall be. We know that if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him, for we shall see him, even as he is."* (1 John. 3:2f). These two verses tell us that 1) we do not know what we shall be like but 2) we shall be like him and that 3) the body of our humiliation shall be conformed to the body of his glory. These passages SEEM to imply that Jesus now has a glorious body. But, we dare not be dogmatic. Our confidence is that we shall be like him, for we shall see him, even as he is!

THE PERFECTING OF JESUS

"..though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all those that obey him the author of eternal salvation..." (Heb. 5:8f).

In this Hebrew passage the writer tells that Jesus "learned obedience" by the things which he suffered. Before Jesus came to this world, he existed in the "form of God", on an equality with Him. The Philippi an writer said *"...have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who existing in the form of God; counted not the being on equality with God a thing to be grasped; but emptied himself; taking the form of a servant be-*

ing made in the likeness of man" (Phil. 2:6f). Of this word "equality" Vine defines it thus "the same in size, number, quality, etc." Jewish leaders determined to kill Jesus because *"he made himself to be equal with God"* (John. 5:18).

Jesus surrendered his equality with God. He did not cease to be God (He could not cease to be what he eternally is); but he took on an added aspect to himself. He became "incarnate". Webster defines this word to mean: "invested with flesh or bodily nature or form". This word is not found in our English Bibles but it does define Christ's sojourn on this earth. When he took upon himself the form of man, he took on himself the duty to "obey" God in the things God purposed that his role should be on this earth for he became a "servant", literally, a "bondservant". As the writer shows in Chapter ten, the Father prepared a "body" for the Son. *"Wherefore when he cometh into the world he saith 'sacrifices and offerings thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me, in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure: then said he, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God'"* (Heb. 10:5-7. In taking on himself the body of man, he took on himself the role of a servant: one who obeys another, who does the will of his master whether that will be contrary to or coincides with his own will. Throughout his earthly sojourn he exhibited this spirit. He taught his disciples to have the same spirit, teaching them this by the model prayer. *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Mt. 6:0). Always he prayed *"Not my will but thine be done"* (Mt. 26:30). And when he had the cross and its agony even in full view, he said *"I have completed the work which thou hast given me to do."* Always, every step of the way, he yielded himself to the Father's will: He learned obedience to the greatest degree, by the things which he suffered. Although he despised the cross and the shame attached to it; he steadfastly submitted himself to whatever the consequences were from faithfully performing the Father's will. (Heb. 12:2). He "learned" obedience because he experienced all the injuries that His (and our) adversary thrust upon him!

"And having been made perfect.." There was never a time in Jesus' life on earth nor his eternal existence either before or since his "being made flesh" that there were flaws or faults in our Savior's life. The word "perfect" indicates completeness and Jesus used it elsewhere of himself to indicate completeness. When he was warned that Herod sought to kill him, his answer was *"... Go and say to that fox, Behold, I cast out demons*

and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am perfected' (Luke. 13:31t). By this he meant his work in Galilee would be finished, completed. It was by his suffering that Jesus was made "perfect". He came to "seek and save that which was lost"; to "give more abundant life" to believers (Luke. 19:10; John. 10:10). But, Jesus could not give abundant life to man until he, himself, had made the supreme sacrifice which made that salvation possible. Through his suffering (and death) he was made perfect, and became thereby "the author of eternal salvation to all them who obey him." (Heb. 5:9). The earthly advent; the temptations, trials, death and resurrection of Jesus were all necessary ingredients in equipping him in perfection, making himself truly a high priest after the order of Melchezdek.

DULL OF HEARING

"of whom we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing you have become dull of hearing. For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God, and have become such as have need of milk and not of solid food." (Heb.5:11f).

Hebrews 5: 11 is a continuing thought, tied to the preceding phrase where of Jesus is said to be "named of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Hb.5:10). The Hebrew writer affirmed he had many things to say about Christ and his priesthood but such would prove hard of interpretation (hard of understanding) because his readers had become dull of hearing. He does not say that what he had to say about Christ's priesthood was hard to understand; Hebrews would have difficulty understanding because of their own mental block; dullness of perception.

Isaiah had warned of the dangers of this mental malady which troubled his own nation. The problem plagued Jesus' generation for he explained his "shift" to speaking in parables by quoting Isaiah's words "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and should turn again and I should heal them." (Mt. 13:14f; Isa. 6:9f). This citation from Isaiah is found in all the gospels and quoted by

Paul when he received mixed reception from those he preached to in Rome (Mk. 5:12; Luke. 8:10; John. 12:40; Acts 28:26). In all these passages it is apparent that the difficulty of understanding the word, **lay not with the word**, but with the hearer.

Sometimes the problem in understanding arises because one's mind is filled with care and other matters and the word cannot thrive in that heart. Although Moses assured Israel God would "bring you in unto the land which I swear to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" Israel "hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage." (Ex. 6:8f). In Jesus' parable of the sower, he spoke of the failure of the seed to be fruitful because "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word" (Mt. 13:22).

Sometimes men fail to understand because they see an implication not intended. Once "the disciples came to the other side and forgot to take bread and Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees and they reasoned among themselves, we took no bread. And Jesus perceiving it, said "ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because we have no bread? Do ye not perceive, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets ye took up...?" (Mt. 16:7-9a).

Likely the most frequent reason for dullness in hearing is seen in God's statement to Ezekiel. "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. Should I be inquired at all by them?" (Ezek. 14:3). Whatever the reasons for the dullness of hearing of the Hebrews, the fault lay with themselves, not with God.

The Hebrews had retrogressed: gone backward rather than forward. Instead of advancing in grace and knowledge as all Christians should, when they ought by reason of time to have been teaching others, they had need that someone teach them even the basic elements of the gospel. How sad! Hebrews had reverted to infancy. They could not tolerate strong meat but required milk. Dullness of hearing was a shameful thing to them.

A sobering question to those of us who have been members of the church for many years should be "Are we as the Hebrews?" Are we, who have long been part of Christ's body, not only able, but actually teaching others the gospel of Christ? Or, perish the thought, are we still, babes--babies?!

Jim McDonald

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 5 ~

By Jim McDonald

LEAVING THE DOCTRINES OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF CHRIST

"Wherefore leaving the doctrines of the first principles of Christ, let us press on unto perfection, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the teaching of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit." (Heb. 6:1-3)

The writer has just concluded a reprimand of his hearers, reminding them that while he had many things to yet say about Christ, his priesthood of Melchizedek and obviously other matters; his readers would find such hard of interpretation because they had become dull of hearing. They ought to have been teachers of others, yet they still needed someone to teach them, even the basic rudiments of the doctrine of Christ. Thus the urging of his appeal *"Wherefore leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ..."*

There are six things these brethren were to lay aside as they sought perfection or full growth-- 1) repentance from dead works; 2) faith toward God; 3) teaching of baptisms; 4) laying on of hands, 5) resurrection of the dead and 6) eternal judgment.

Understand that when Hebrews are urged to *"leave the doctrine of the first principles"* the writer means neither they were to forget nor deny them. Their knowledge needed to include more than the first principles which he herein spelled out. As the writer continued his appeal to them the subjects he wrote about were things they obviously needed understanding in. They were - - -

"Not to lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works." This phrase has lent no little problem to Bible students. It is generally agreed the expression "dead works" should literally be "works that make dead". With such an understanding, some questions still remain, but not as many. What are these "works that make dead"? Two logical thoughts emerge. It is possible that "works that make dead" could be

reference to the works of the law. We do know in that 2 Corinthians Paul spoke of the law when he said *"the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life"* (2 Cor. 3:6.) It is likewise remembered that in the Roman letter Paul speaks of himself in his innocence when he wrote *"...I was alive apart from the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the commandment which was unto life, this I found to be unto death"* (Rm. 7:8f). Nevertheless, it could hardly be said necessary that man repent of the works of the law for in the apostle's words *"...the law is holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good"* (Rm.7:12)

It seems most logical that the "works which make dead" of which the Hebrews had repented, were the sinful works in which they formerly walked. True, the letter was directly primarily to a Jewish audience but it is universally true that man's works of disobedience brings death to him and of those works all need to repent. Paul wrote the Ephesians *"and ye did he make alive when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins among whom we also once lived in the desires of the flesh and of the mind"* (Eph. 2:1-3).

"Faith toward God." Certainly faith was not to be discarded. The writer has urged them to have faith to enter the rest God has prepared and later he dwelt extensively on the necessity of faith in Chapter Eleven. Faith is the foundation of all good things and without it man cannot please God. But faith in God not only demands faith in God's existence, but full confidence in all the things he has revealed about His Son, Jesus Christ.

"The teaching of baptisms." Jewish readers, particularly those who resided in Judaea, would be familiar with early teaching of the Pharisees regarding the *"washing of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels"* (Mk. 7:4). Those who taught them the doctrine of Christ had shown that such items were of no spiritual value. Jesus said *"there is nothing from without the man that going into him can defile him: but the things which proceed out of the man are the things that defile the man."* (Mk. 7:15). Further the Hebrews would have been familiar with the baptism of John: many of them might in fact have been baptized by him. They would have learned that it, too, was no longer valid (Acts 19:3-5). Then, some might have been in Jerusalem on Pentecost when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit or had marveled greatly at the astonishing news of the similar experience Cornelius (a devout Gentile) and his household experienced when Peter had visited them in Caesaria (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48). Perhaps some of them had been part of the 3,000 on Pentecost who, when pricked in their hearts by Peter's sermon, had gladly received his instructions *"repent and be*

baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37f). But, baptism is the doorway into Christ, his death and his body and they were not to dwell on these fundamental matters but grow in grace of God (Rm. 6:3f; Gal. 3:26f; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Pet. 3:18).

"Laying on of hands." This expression is found frequently in the New Testament and denotes a variety of things. It is used to signify arrest (Acts 4:7); to accuse (1 Tim. 5:22); to effect a healing (Mt. 9: 18); to ordain to an office or task (Acts 6:6; 13:3) or to impart a spiritual gift (Acts 8: 18). With most of these different usages the Hebrews would be aware. Those that would affect them most directly would be either the laying on of hands to impart to them a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:1ff); perhaps to be healed from some disease or to have witnessed the appointing of the seven to serve the needs of the widows which men they had themselves participated in the selection of. But, whether the receipt of a gift or the setting into office an elder or deacon; the work which was to be done was imminently of more importance than the moment of setting them into that work.

"Of the resurrection of the dead." Hebrew Christians were well aware of the doctrine of the Sadducees: that there was no resurrection of the dead. They would equally remember Jesus' astonishing response to the Sadducees on the great day of questions when Christ showed from the scriptures the falseness of their doctrine (Mat. 22:22-33). More than that, they had been led to be Christians through the preaching of the gospel which fundamental doctrine is based upon the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). They were well aware that the resurrection of Christ was a promise of their own, for he not only promised a general resurrection, but was himself the firstfruits of it (In. 5:28; 1 Cor. 15:20). Their conviction in the resurrection of Christ and subsequently their own resurrection was an anchor to their souls. Still, they must proceed further than this: they must grow in knowledge and faith and godliness so that they hope might be realized.

"Of eternal judgment." Prediction of a final judgment had been part of their remembrance. Solomon had spoken of it, as well as Jesus (Eccl. 12: 13f; Mt. 26:31-46). But the phrase "eternal judgment" does not mean a judgment which goes on eternally; it means that the decree of that judgment is eternally sealed: the righteous into eternal life; the wicked into eternal fire. (Mt. 25:46f). These thoughts are sober, but we must go on beyond them to a higher knowledge of the true God. With the Hebrew let us say: "And this will we do, if God permit".

Prospects for Apostates

"For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakes of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:4-6).

There are at least two passages in Hebrews which should strike terror to the hearts of any apostate: the passage cited above and a similar one in Hebrew 10:26-31. These passages are cause for sober reflection to any believer in Christ Jesus.

The warning of the present text reads *"as touching those who were once enlightened."* To be enlightened is to have come to an understanding of Christ's teaching and by inference, to also become a disciple, a saved one. Peter, in his second letter, spoke of similar fallen believers: *"For if after they have escaped the defilement's of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse than the beginning."* (2 Pet. 2:20)

We have written, "by inference...a saved one" which inference is borne out when the writer states the "enlightened one" has *"tasted of the heavenly gift"*. To "taste" means to experience, to know first hand. The Psalmist urged *"Oh taste and see that the Lord is good"* (Ps. 34:8). Jesus promised his apostles that some would not *"taste of death"* until the kingdom came (Mk. 9: 1). Earlier the Hebrew letter states that Jesus *"tasted of death"* for every man (Hb. 2:9). To taste the heavenly gift is to experience it. What is this heavenly gift the Hebrews tasted of?

Commentaries differ. Barnes acknowledges it can be a special favor bestowed on a sincere Christian. McKnight opines it is "freedom from the yoke of the Law." Another suggests it is to partake of the Lord's supper; another concludes it is the Holy Spirit. It seems evident that the next phrase *"and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit"* implies that the heavenly gift was something aside from the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The "heavenly gift" is a gift which comes from heaven. Jesus told the Samaritan woman *"If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water"* (In. 4:10). The Bible's golden text declares *"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son"* (In. 3: 16). Paul wrote *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life"* (Rm. 6:23). Whatever else this heavenly gift involved;

remission of sins, salvation was obviously part of it. Calvinists are reluctant to acknowledge this: such flaws their doctrine of "once saved, always saved".

"And were made partakers of the Holy Spirit." To partake is a synonym for "taste": both indicate one experiences or shares in the thing tasted or partaken of. In this instance those of whom the Hebrew writer wrote had been "partakers of the Holy Spirit." Is this "the gift of the Holy Spirit" of Acts 2:38 or one of the spiritual gifts of I Cor. 1:21. Certainly, either is possible. It seems the writer indicates these of whom he wrote shared to the fullest extent all the blessings of first century Christians and would include the supernatural gifts bestowed by the laying on of apostolic hands. It would brand "unrecoverable" anyone who had received and exercised one of the nine gifts who, by his apostasy, denied the power he had experienced.

"And tasted the good word of God." This could refer to the goodness of the thing taught or to experience the blessings the taught word conferred. Such ones knew first hand "the good word of God": knew first hand God's assurances and promises were true. They had seen unfolded that God's word is quick and powerful. It was no "hearsay" with him.

"And of the powers of the age to come." This phrase is joined to the preceding one, thus it is clear that the writer means these "tasted" the powers of the age to come, just as they had "tasted" the good word of God, the Holy Spirit and the heavenly gift. The expression "the last days" refers to the Messianic age--our present time; but "the world (age) to come" refers to heaven. Those who sacrifice for His kingdom shall receive eternal life "in the age to come" (Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:3). Men marry in our present age, but in that world are as the angels (Lk. 20:34t). Thus, those who tasted of the powers of the age to come had a foretaste of what awaits the faithful child of God.

It is Impossible to Renew to Repentance

"and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God: but if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end is to be burned." (Heb. 6:6-8).

How fearful these words! How disturbing, how alarming! Is there no hope for one who begins and then sins or falls away? How many Christians are there who have not sinned? (I Jn. 1:8).

That this warning does not include all who have begun and then stumbled is evident. Peter denied the Lord three times, yet he was restored. Simon the sorcerer sought to buy the gift of God with money and he was told *"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray the Lord if perhaps the thought of thine heart might be forgiven thee"* (Acts 8:22). In John's first general epistle he said *"If we say we have no sin we deceive 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"* (I Jn. 1:8f). James wrote *"Confess therefore your sins one to another and pray one for another. The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working"* (Jms.5:16). James then added *"My brethren, if any among you err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins"* (James. 5:19). This latter passage deals with brethren who sin and brethren who seek to restore them. The happy result is that a soul is saved from death and a multitude of sins is covered. Obviously, from these cited passages, it is not of any who sin or backslide that it can be said *"it is impossible to renew them unto repentance."* Who, then are these of whom the Hebrew writer spoke?

In past articles these of whom the writer speaks had been enlightened; tasted of the heavenly gift; were made partakers of the Holy Spirit; tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come. It appears that these were those who had shared in the miraculous gifts given by the apostles. When these, who had these gifts, then turned away, they in essence denied what they knew to be true and real.

The passage does not say it is impossible for God to forgive them; the passage reads *"it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance."* In the seventh chapter the writer speaks of the effectual value of Christ's blood when he wrote *"Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw nigh unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"* (Heb. 7:25). Jeremiah spoke of a like condition in his day. *"Stand in the ways and see and ask for the old paths wherein is the good way, and walk therein and ye shall find rest unto your souls. But they said, we will not walk therein"* (Jer. 6:16) In both these passages God's forgiveness is promised to those who will *"draw nigh to him"*, who will *"ask for the old paths and walk therein."* Yet, although forgiveness was extended to God's fallen children (at least in the case of the Jews of Jeremiah's day) that forgiveness hinged upon people

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Fellowship Halls

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supper) as following a service which consisted of the reading of Scripture, prayers, and exhortation.' (I.S.B.E. revised. 'Agape', p. 66) (3) Someone also pointed out that from simply reading 2 Peter 2:13 or Jude 12 (if this was a social meal) the text says absolutely nothing about where these feasts took place. Did such feasts take place in private homes or were they church funded? (4) A recognized method of interpretation is to let the Bible interpret itself. (a) The social meals of the early church in Jerusalem happened in the private homes of the members. (Acts 2:46 'and breaking bread from house to house') (b) Paul places all social meals outside the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34).

B. The Use of the Word "Fellowship":

It is a common assumption that the word "fellowship" includes social meals. I think many members of the church picked this up from the denominational world. Unfortunately, the word "fellowship" as used in the Bible is never used or attached to social meals or a dining hall. I find the word used for sharing in spiritual things. (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 2:1; 1 John 1:3) I also find the word used in reference to the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:16).

Note: If a social meal can be called "fellowship", then it also can be called "communion" for that is one way in which this word can be translated. I even find the word "fellowship" being used of sharing in physical things. But in those instances, the sharing was always to relieve a definite pressing need. (Romans 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13; Phil. 1:5; Heb. 13:16; 1 Tim. 6:18)

C. The Church Sponsored Meals of Acts 6:

Points to Note: (1) Such meals were for benevolent purposes. We have clear Scriptural authority for the church to use its funds to house, cloth, feed, etc., members who are in need. (1 Cor. 16:1-2) But modern day church dinners and "fellowship halls" are not for benevolent purposes. (2) Such meals were only for needy Christians. Carefully note that the apostles never started the modern practice of using free food and recreation to draw non-Christians.

(To be continued)

Hebrews

Cont from page 21

coming to God, which, in the case of Jeremiah's day, they would not do so. The passage of Hebrews *does not speak of the impossibility of God to forgive*; it speaks of the impossibility of man to repent!

When men know their duty and steadfastly refuse to do it; when they refuse to refrain from cursing, fornicating, stealing, neglect of worship and of a true commitment to God, they are treading on dangerous ground. They are hardening their hearts, they are searing their consciences. They are approaching the point of no return. Has it happened unto you, dear brother or sister? Is there no longer tinges of accusation in your heart when you willfully do that you know to be wrong? Turn back now, while you can. God is *"longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9). You do not know how long you yet might live, but you do know that God has said: *"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord...It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Heb. 10:30)."

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EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 6 ~

by Jim McDonald

We are Persuaded Better Things of You!

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak: for God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister, and we desire that each one of you may show the same diligence unto the fullness of hope even to the end: that ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Heb. 6:9-12).

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you." The writer had spoken in grave tones of some who have been enlightened and now fallen away, declaring it was impossible to renew such ones again unto repentance. He did not, however, believe these had yet reach that point: he was persuaded better things of them than that they were ungrateful for the blessings God had bestowed upon them; he was persuaded that better things; things which accompanied salvation would be demonstrated by them. The things which accompanied salvation were fruits which were borne by them, which in times past they had manifested and still were manifesting.

"God is not unrighteous to forget your works and the love which ye showed toward his name." God is fully aware of every thing Christians do because they respect the name (authority) of Christ, which things they do, not because they feel they must, because they want to. The writer gave an illustration of the things he had in mind "in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister". Very likely the writer had reference to the early days in the infancy of the Jerusalem church when there was such a closeness and care the brethren had for each other. Luke records it thus: "and all that believed were together and had all things common; and they sold their possessions, and parted them to all, according as any man had need";

"and the multitude were of one heart and soul, and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own", (Acts 2:44f; 4:32). This early attitude was still present with those who received this letter for the writer called attention both to past and present actions.

"And we desire that each one of you may show the same diligence unto the fullness of hope even to the end." The exhortation to diligence is urged in many passages. The Roman letter said: "In diligence, not slothful" (Rm. 12:11). Peter urged "Giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure", having earlier urged "Adding on your part all diligence, adding to your faith" (2 Pet. 1:10; 5). Later, Hebrews were reminded that "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6) In this passage (Heb. 6:9-12); the writer urges the same diligence, that is, as they had ministered to the saints in times past and still did; they were to show the same diligence in seeking other things. This carefulness in all things (including ministering to the saints) would bring about fullness of hope: the realization, the attaining of their hope.

"That ye be not sluggish." A sluggish car is one which evidences struggles in running. The exhortation to these brethren is that the incumbrances which were impeding their full power were to be laid aside; that they were to be "imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Calls to imitation are made in other scriptures. Christ "left us an example that we should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Timothy was to be an ensample to "the believer in word, manner of life, love, faith and purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Paul urged "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Christians are to let our light so shine before men that others "seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Mt.5:16). Those whom we are to imitate are those who "through faith and patience, inherit the promises."

The Hebrews letter is "chock full" of appeals to faith and patience, highlighting their importance and need. The Hebrews are long since dead, but we live and there is still an ever present need for us to reflect faith and patience, that we also might inherit the promises!

He Sware by Himself

"For when God made promise unto Abraham, since he could swear by none greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying, I will multiply thee. And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise." (Heb.6:13-15).

The word "for" in the beginning of this quotation ties these three verses to the preceding ones. In the

preceding passage an appeal had been made to Hebrews that they not be sluggish but imitate others who through faith and patience, inherited the promises. He then gave a specific instance of one who inherited promises given through just such faith and patience: their father Abraham! The specific, quoted promise which Abraham received had to do with material promises: God would bless Abraham and multiply his seed. The passage is found fully in Genesis 22:16f. The Genesis passage includes the promise of the Messiah but the abbreviated quote in Hebrews speaks of Abraham's natural seed. It was twenty five years from the time God made His promise of children to Abraham before Isaac was born and while Abraham did not live to see his posterity reach the numbers they did in Egypt at the Exodus, the birth of Isaac and then Jacob lent assurance to Abraham that God's promises would be literally fulfilled.

Abraham wavered not and the promises were secured to him just as God had said. This was a demonstration to the Hebrews that God would fulfill His promises to them; promises which were also incorporated in God's promise to Abraham, the Messianic promise.

"For men swear by the greater: and in every dispute of theirs the oath is final for confirmation. Wherein God, being minded to show unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed with an oath..." (Heb. 6:16f). Again "for" appears in the text which tells that the material which follows still is linked with the subject presently being dealt with: patience in service in order to receive the promise. In this latter instance the writer alludes to a common practice of man to insure certainty and confidence in taking of an oath. In relationships between two parties, certain matters are regarded to be true and either will be done or not done, by the invoking of an oath which binds a party to his word. When men take oaths, it is recognized they are swearing by someone greater than themselves (let atheists take note) by the calling of the third, higher person to witness the oath they have made.

Because men are assured by the receiving of an oath, God yielded to this infirmity of man, swearing to Abraham he would fulfill his promises. However, in the case of God, there is none greater, so he swore by himself. We see frequent reference of God's oaths to men commonly appearing thus *"As I live, saith the Lord."*

"that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to the take hold of the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:18). The word "immutable" indicates something unchangeable, that which cannot be voided. Here two immutable things are mentioned, in which in both things, it is impossible that God should lie. Those two things are 1) His promise

and 2) His oath. God will keep his word! He did for Abraham. He promised he would for the Hebrews. He will for us!

These two immutable things are our encouragement and the foundation of our hope. This hope is the anchor of our soul, and is an anchor which will hold in the storms of life, so long as we have confidence in God's promises and his oath!

Melchizedek

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God most high, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham divided a tenth part of all (being first, by interpretation, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually" (Heb. 7: 1-3).

The close of chapter six tells that Christ, as a forerunner, entered into that which is within the veil *"Having become a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek"* (Heb. 6:20). The writer has frequently spoken of Jesus as a priest, but it is not until the fifth chapter is reached that he likens Jesus as a high priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 5:1; 5:5; 10; 6:10). Now in chapter seven the writer lists those areas in which Melchizedek and Jesus are alike. There are at least three common similarities: both were kings and priests simultaneously; both were said to have neither father, mother or genealogy and both were said to have an abiding or unchanging priesthood.

"Melchizedek: king of Salem, priest of God most High." This characteristic of Melchizedek made him different from the priesthood initiated under Moses, the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood. During the long history of Israel from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Calvary, Israel had a continuing priesthood of succeeding priests and high priests, many in number although all were from the tribe of Levi. However, there was not a single king chosen from their number. After God rejected Saul (who was from Benjamin) as king and then chose David, Judah always produced the legitimate heir or king for the nation. Melchizedek was a priest of God but he was also king of Salem (peace, Jerusalem). This uniqueness of the Messiah was prophesied. While he was to come from Judah (Gen. 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:14); he was also destined to be priest. Zachariah had spelled out that the man called the Branch (ie, the Messiah) would be a priest upon his throne (Zech. 6: 12t). Because

Jesus is now Priest, he also is now King. There is no future, earthly reign of Jesus, save in the imagination of deceived and deceiving teachers of the doctrine of Premillennialism.

“Without father, without mother, without genealogy.” This is the second of the common characteristics of Melchizedek with Jesus. We must understand the object of this writer’s argument. The very nature of a priest is to be a mediator, a “go-between”; one who shares the nature of those for whom he mediates (Heb. 2:17; 4:14, 1 Tim. 2:5t). Melchizedek was a man; yet he left no record behind of any who came before or followed him. No items of his birth, death nor the length of his life. He appeared as a meteor on the pages of history and these things lacking of his history, made him a perfect type for Him who had no beginning, no ending, (although in his human role one can read of his genealogy, his birth and death). Because he is God, thus forever and ever, He, as God, was not begotten by anyone for, like the eternal father and Spirit, he also is eternal.

“Abideth a priest continually”. This is the third common quality of Melchizedek and Jesus. There is no record that anyone was priest before or after Melchizedek in his order. He was “one of a kind”. The writer uses this point extensively later in the book. He became typically an eternal priest of Christ who is eternal. Because Jesus is eternal, he is always able to serve as a priest for his people and his one-time sacrifice is continually called upon to obtain forgiveness for the sins of man. (Obviously in this latter respect, Melchizedek was no different than the priests of Aaron. He did not, and could not offer blood that would forever remit man’s sins. Had that been possible, there would have been no need for Christ’s priesthood!) Still, his was a true type of the priesthood our Lord.

Tithes of Levi

“...and, so to say, through Abraham even Levi, who receiveth tithes, hath paid tithes; for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him.” (Heb. 7:9-10).

Levi was the third son of Jacob and Leah and from him sprang many great and honorable men, the greatest perhaps was Moses. Through the direction of God, this tribe was set aside to function as priests for the nation of Israel, and although the actual functioning in priestly capacities was confined to Aaron’s descendants, all Levites served in various religious duties incumbent upon Israelites: slaying of animals and other items related to religious service. The sustaining of this tribe was the

responsibility of the other eleven tribes. This provision was made in a number of different ways: a portion of sacrificed animals belonged to the officiating priest (Lev. 5:13, 16). Tithes of all their produce and flocks were also the Levites. (Lev. 18:21-24). The Levites had no tract of land given to them (they were God’s heritage, Dt. 10:91) but each of the other tribes were to set aside cities in their midst for the Levites. All in all, forty eight cities were given to the Levites from the other eleven tribes (Num. 35:6), although not each tribe was required to allocate the same number of cities to them. Thus, the tribe was scattered throughout the whole of the nation, which was the fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy about his sons, when he blessed them shortly before he died. *“Simeon and Levi are brethren; Weapons of violence are their swords. O my soul, come not thou into their council; Unto their assembly, my glory, be not thou united, For in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hocked an ox. Cursed by their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.” (Gen. 49:5-7).* The cruelty of which Jacob spoke, was the massacre of the Schechemites through the hands of Levi and Simeon (See Genesis 34).

Yet, while Levi was designated to receive tithes, symbolically speaking, he, himself “paid tithes” representatively through his father Abraham for he was not yet born. Of this truth the Hebrew writer dwelt upon when he wrote *“Now consider how great this man was, unto whom Abraham gave a tenth out of the chief spoils, and they indeed of the sons of Levi that receive the priests’ office have commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though these have come out of the loins of Abraham: but he whose genealogy is not counted from them that hath taken tithes of Abraham, and hath blessed him that hath the promises. But without any dispute the less of blessed of the better.” (Heb. 7:4-7).*

The writers’ argument is this: Melchizedek met Abraham and blessed him. The less (Abraham) is blessed of the greater (Melchizedek). Since Levi was yet unborn, he likewise paid tithes to Melchizedek. When Melchizedek blessed Abraham, he blessed Abraham’s descendants. The less (Levi and his priesthood) is blessed of the better (the priesthoods of Melchizedek and of Christ).

As was noted in an earlier article, Christ was designated as a priest early on in the letter. He was called a *“Merciful and faithful high priest”* in 2: 17. He was called the *“Apostle and High Priest of our confession”* in 3: 1. Two references are made of Jesus’ priesthood in chapter four; verses 1, 5. Only when we reach the fifth chapter is Jesus’ priesthood identified with the priesthood of Melchizedek and his being priest is shown to be the

fulfillment of David's prophecy in Psalms 110:4. *"Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek"*.

In this sixth chapter the writer's aim was to prove the superior nature of Christ's priesthood over that of Levi. In the first three verses he has shown that Christ has an unchanging priesthood versus the changing priesthood of Aaron; and in verses four through ten his design was to show that because of "less is blessed of the better"; Melchizedek (thus Christ) was "better" than Levi. In the chapters which follow (chapters seven through ten, verse twenty three), the writer will show just how and why the priesthood of Christ was greater than the priesthood of Levi and why that priesthood was removed by God.

When Moses Spoke Nothing

"...Now if there was perfection through the Levitical priesthood (for under it hath the people received the law), what further need was there that another priesthood should arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be reckoned after the priesthood of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of law. For he of whom these things are said belongeth to another tribe, from which no man hath given attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests..." (Heb. 7:11-14).

The writer continues to build his case for the priesthood of Christ. He has shown the difference between the priesthood of Levi and Melchizedek in that the priesthood of Levi was always changing because of men dying, while the Melchizedek priesthood was unchanging (7:3f). He has shown the inferiority of the Levitical priesthood to that of Melchizedek in that Levi "paid tithes" through Abraham to Melchizedek and *"without dispute, the less is blessed of the better"* (7:7). Now in this section (Heb. 7: 11-14), he cites two more major arguments to bolster his claims.

First, indisputably Old Testament scriptures projected another priesthood to arise which would be different: the priesthood of Melchizedek. Jews could not argue with this truth without arguing with their own scriptures for the Psalmist had written *"Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek"* (ps. 110:4). Another priesthood was coming and Jews could ill afford to dispute that fact. Their own scriptures declared so.

Secondly Jews conceded that the Psalms passage regarding Melchizedek's priesthood was a reference to

the coming Messiah. The earlier portion of that Psalm certainly was so understood. *"The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand till I make all thine enemies the footstool of thy feet"* (Psalms 110:1). Furthermore, the prophet Zachariah had distinctly shown that the Messiah was to be a priest. He wrote *"Thus speaketh Jehovah of Hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place: and he shall build the temple of Jehovah, even he shall build the temple of Jehovah, and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both"* (Zech.6:12f).

It is universally recognized among Jewish scholars that reference to one called the "branch" was reference to the Messiah, a branch from David, from Jesse. Isaiah refers to the *"branch of the Lord"* (4:2) and to a *"branch that would grow out of his roots"* (11:1). Jeremiah has two references to such a man (Jer. 23:5; 33:13). Zechariah only lends support to the fact that the Psalmist reference to the priesthood of Melchizedek was a reference to the priesthood of the Messiah.

Be it further recognized that universal agreement among Jewish scholars was that the Messiah should spring out of Judah. In addition to such a promise given to Judah (Gen. 49: 10), there were continued references both to David and to him who was to be his Son. Thus, although it is unlikely that Jewish scholars were conscious of the ramifications of their concession that the Messiah was to be a priest would signal the end of the Levitical priesthood; that was the ultimate conclusion for *"the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of law"* (Heb. 7:12). Why? Because Moses spoke nothing concerning priests from the tribe of Judah of which tribe the Messiah descended.

What a powerful argument this is! For Christ to be priest, the law had to be changed! Why? Because Moses forbade it? To the contrary, it was necessary that the law be changed because of the silence of Moses' words! Let all those who argue for anything upon the basis "God has not forbidden it" take note!

A Disannulling Of A Foregoing Commandment"

"For there is a disannulling of a foregoing commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness (for the law made nothing perfect) and a bringing in thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw nigh unto God..." (Heb.7:18f).

The word "disannul" in this text means "a setting aside, abolition". It is evident that Hebrews 7:18 is in

the midst of an ongoing argument: the word "for" ties it to the prior statements. The "aforegoing commandment" which was disannulled was a commandment which pertained to the provision for priests for Israel, which priests were to be the lineal descendants of Levi, through Aaron. That commandment is called "*the law of a carnal commandment*" in verse 16. It is called "carnal", not to signify sinfulness, but rather because all serving priests had to be fleshly descendants of Aaron. It is called "weak" and "unprofitable" because the constant deaths of priests prevented them from continuing to serve. It was "unprofitable" because it lacked the power of eternal cleansing: the blood of bulls and goats could not remove sins. (Heb. 10:4).

The parenthesis "(for the law made nothing perfect)" is likewise part of the writer's argument. Reference to a "commandment" is specific allusion to the command which specified that Aaron's sons should serve as priests; referral to "law" is reference to the system or covenant in which that specific commandment was found. Earlier in the chapter the writer stated "*For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law*" (7:12). Certainly the law which pertained to the priesthood had to be changed because the priesthood had been changed, but is this the only law the writer had in mind, the law which pertained to the priesthood? No, the writer has the whole system in view for he says in verse 22 that "Jesus became the surety of a better covenant" (7:22). Since it is the new Covenant versus the Old Covenant that the writer will discuss and elaborate on at length in chapter eight; comments on that will be reserved for that chapter. Since the writer elaborates further on the worth of Christ's priesthood versus the weak and unprofitable priesthood of Aaron, further comments in this article will be confined to that.

Because Christ has an unchangeable priesthood (and, we might add, permanent atonement through his sacrifice) the writer declares "*Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw nigh to God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*" (Heb. 7:25). The effectual worth of Christ's blood is seen in these words "able to save to the uttermost". The assurance is that all who draw nigh to God through him can have their sins remitted no matter what those sins might be. The key, of course, is that those whom he saves to the uttermost are they who draw nigh to God through him.

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THE WORD OF GOD (1)

by W. P. Risener

I believe no truth is more clearly taught in the Bible that is also more difficult for humans to observe than that people cannot direct themselves religiously or spiritually and please God. From the example of Cain, Gen. 4: 3-5 to the present, the urge to do one's own thing in religion seems to be almost irresistible. A look at the world's religions will show this to be true. Even among those supposed to be Bible based, the new and novel are all the current rage and, sadly, our brethren are not immune to the problem.

There was a famine of hearing the word of God in the days of Amos the prophet, 8: 11, and the people were destroyed for lack of knowledge of God's word, Hos. 4: 6. It appears that the law of Moses in written form was almost lost at the time when Hilkiyah, the priest, found a copy, 2 Chron. 34: 14. Our problem is somewhat different. Our nation is overflowing with Bibles, but people don't seem to read them much anymore. The result is that there seems to be such a lack of Bible knowledge and conviction that we seem on the verge of becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Though the Israelites were grossly disobedient, 2 Kings 17: 7-17, scholars have been impressed with how carefully and accurately they copied the Old Testament scriptures. They also, about two or three centuries BC, translated the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language in what is called the Septuagint translation. And since this was used by Jesus and His apostles, it might be cited as divine authority to translate the scriptures from one language into another. Nevertheless I am convinced that but for the oversight of divine providence we would not have the Bible as we do now.

But if we are not spirits, in God's image and His offspring, Gen. 1: 27; Acts 17: 29; Heb. 12:9, and thus different from animals, we would not need God's word to guide us. Jesus taught, Matt. 4: 4, that aside from physical food there is in humans that which depends for life upon all the words that come from God. He referred to Deut. 8: 1 - 3, where the passage indicates that God brought the Israelites into a condition of total dependence upon Him for physical food in order to teach them something. The lesson was that just as they were dependent upon Him for physical food they, likewise, were dependent for spiritual life upon all His words. Though the Israelites failed to heed this lesson, as their history clearly indicates, Jesus did not. I ask

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 7 ~

by Jim McDonald

“Christ: A Minister . . . The True Tabernacle”

“Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this: we have such a high priest who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (Heb. 8:1-2).

Many have been the contrasting points the writer has made as he compares the priesthood of Christ with that of Aaron. One dominant fact overshadows all these comparisons: the Aaronic priesthood was just a type, a shadow, a copy of heavenly things. The effectual cleansing which makes possible man’s reconciling with God, comes only through the priesthood of Christ’s sacrifice: the Aaronic priesthood with its gifts and sacrifices typified the real thing.

First, the writer in the section states that we have a high priest who has *“sat down on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens”*. In this statement the writer makes direct reference to Psalms 110:1 *“The Lord said unto my Lord; sit thou at my right hand until I make all thy enemies the footstool of thy feet”* for it is in that same psalm that the Holy Writer wrote: *“The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalms 110:4)*. Zachariah states the same *“He shall be a priest upon his throne” (Zach.6:12f)*. Thrones are associated with kings the one suggests the other. Priests are connected with sacrifices and like thrones suggest kings; so sacrifices suggests priests. Our Priest, however, reigns. And, the scripture links these functions together; priest, king: king, priest. His priesthood lasts so long as does his kingship. His kingship last so long as does his priesthood. Christ is to sit at the Father’s right hand until all his enemies have been subjected to him, which final enemy (according to Paul), is death (1 Cor. 15:26f). When that final enemy is defeated Christ will return the kingdom back to God and be subject to him (1 Cor. 15:24). The throne

upon which our priest reigns is in “the heavens”. Note that fact carefully. If his throne is in the heavens, it is not, nor can it be, upon the earth. The writer makes a partial reference to this in verse four *“Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, seeing there are those who offer gifts according to the law.”* Since the priesthood of Christ and the kingship of Christ are concurrent, just as he cannot be a priest on the earth, he cannot be a king upon the earth.

“Christ is a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man”. (8:2). “Sanctuary”, “tabernacle”. These two words have different ideas. “Sanctuary” meant a place set apart (denominations have their “sanctuary”) and in the wilderness the sanctuary was comprised of the holy place and most holy place. But both compartments were “set aside” for service to God. The sanctuary into which our Priest entered, alludes to the most holy place, compare 9:17-12; 23-24.

Tabernacle was the portable tent which Moses was instructed to make. As Israel moved from place to place in his wilderness wanderings, that tent was taken down, then “pitched” again in the place of their encampment. Just as we long for *“a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens”*; so our tabernacle in which our high priest ministers also is not “pitched by man”, but is pitched by God (2 Cor. 5:1).

The priesthood of Aaron, with all its gifts and sacrifices, was only a copy of the coming priesthood of Christ. Monet was a master artist and original paintings from his brush commands hundreds of thousands of dollars, even millions. There are many copies of his works, but none have the value of those original paintings. IN the same way the priesthood of Aaron and the sacrifices and gifts alluded thereto, were copies of the priesthood of Jesus with the gifts and sacrifices he made. And, just as copies of Monet’s works are worthless, compared to the original; so the sacrifices of Aaron were worthless compared to the sacrifices of Christ. The worthlessness of that system will be addressed in the next two chapters as our writer continues to show the greatness and sufficiency of the priesthood of Jesus.

“If That First Covenant Had Been Faultless . . .

“then would no place have been sought for a second.” (Heb. 8:7).

The writer has been leading up to this conclusion: there was fault with the first covenant, else it would not have been removed. He had written *“Jesus became the*

surety of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22); and he hath "obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises." (Heb. 8:6). Twice in these verses the writer calls the covenant of which Jesus is mediator, better. Since two covenants are being compared and the second is better than the first, he therein implies that the first covenant was not without fault.

Some object to this conclusion. Because the word "covenant" in verse seven is a supplied word and verse eight reads "for finding fault with them, he saith, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah"; they insist that the fault was not with the covenant God made, but with the people with whom it was made. Still, despite the fact that the word "covenant" in verse seven is a supplied word and verse eight indicates God did find fault with the people, this does not remove the obvious conclusion the writer had earlier made and will further reach in this section. In both chapters 7:22 and 8:6 the word "covenant" is in the original language and the word "better", found in both verses, describes the covenant made by Christ, necessarily implying two covenants were considered and that the second was better than the first. The conclusion which the inspired writer made, must stand. And while, admittedly, the word "covenant" in verse 7 is a supplied word, its addition to the English verse supplies an accurate and current thought: it was of a covenant the writer did speak.

Some object that David claimed perfection for God's law and that if there was fault with that covenant it would not have been perfect. Truly David wrote: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Ps. 19:7). The old Covenant did perfectly what it was designed to do. The fault with the Old Covenant lay not with imperfections within itself; the fault lay with what that covenant could not do: all highlighting the worth of the ministry and mediatorship of Christ.

Hebrews 9:15 sets forth the better quality of the second covenant. He wrote "and for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." The implication of the verse is clear. Without Jesus' sacrifice made, the blood of the better covenant, those who were part of the first covenant could not have had their transgression forgiven nor could they have receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Those under the first covenant broke God's covenant and God found fault with them. Those under the second

covenant also break that covenant and God finds fault with us. The inherent fault of the first covenant lay in the fact that when men broke it, nothing could be done to permanently remedy that fault; whereas under the new covenant which when men break, there is remedial power to permanently correct the fault God finds with those who break it. It is of this inherent weakness of that first covenant of which Paul spoke. "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid.. for if there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law." (Gal. 3:21).

A New Covenant . . ."

"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers..." (Heb. 8:8-9a).

Jeremiah's prophecy, quoted here and again in part in Hebrews ten, is another of the things the writer has cited to show the superior nature of the religion of Christ over the Mosaic order. To this point Christ has been shown to be better than angels, Moses and Aaron and in this chapter His covenant is said to be superior to the covenant given by Moses.

In the past decade much controversy has centered on this prophecy from Jeremiah. There are those who teach that God has one covenant of salvation which is unchanged and they have labored much with this passage. These teachers insist that Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled in 536 BC when the exiled Jews were released from Babylonian captivity. According to this doctrine, there is nothing really new about the new covenant of Christ, contrasted with Moses' covenant and with the promise God gave Abraham. Of course they concede that the prophecy was fulfilled in a secondary sense when Jesus gave his law but they insist that the "new covenant" is new only in the sense that it has gone "through another cycle". They illustrate this argument thusly: "every month there is a 'new moon'; yet the moon is not really new. It has just gone through another cycle." They conclude their argument by saying that the covenant God made with Abraham went through a cycle when God gave the law on Sinai, then through another cycle when Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, then through another cycle when Christ gave his new testament. This is an ingenious explanation and is wholly false.

There are two Greek words for "new" which the Holy Spirit used to describe the New Covenant God would make with "Israel" and "Judah". The first of these words is KAINOS and is found here in Hebrews 8:8, as well

as in verse 13 and also in 9:15. Those verses read: *"In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old..."* and *"...for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."* The Greek word in these three instances is the same and "denotes new, of that which is unaccustomed or unused, not newness in time, recent, but new as to form or quality..." (W.E. Vines, Ex. Dictionary of N. T. Words, Vol. III, p. 109). This same word is found in John 19:41 where it is said that Jesus was buried in a "new" tomb. The tomb had likely been dug for some time, thus not new in that sense: it was new in that it was unused.

The second Greek word translated "new" is NEOS" and its also was used by the Holy Spirit to describe the new covenant God would make with Israel. That word is found in Hebrews 12:24 *"and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaking better than that of Abel."* This Greek word means "new in respect of time, that which is recent; it is used of the young..." (ibid, p. 110). Mr. Vine makes this comment of the difference in use of these two words: "The new covenant in Heb. 12:24 is new (NEO) compared with the Mosaic, nearly fifteen hundred years before; it is new (KAINOS) compared with the Mosaic, which is old in character, ineffective, 8:18, 13:9: 15). (IBM).

Jeremiah had indicated that the new covenant God would make with Israel and Judah would be different from the first when he said "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers..." (Heb. 8:9). With those who insist the new covenant is not really different from the first save in time and place, we must disagree. Jeremiah had said that new covenant would not be according to the first and as Mr. Vine has shown by his definition of the words "new", it would be new in "form and quality."

"...Not According to the Covenant..."

"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers..." Heb. 8:6f.

The two Greek words for new: "NEOS" and "KAINOS", are both used to describe the covenant God would make with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Heb. 8:8; 12:24). These two words teach us the New Covenant is new both in "form and quality"; that it truly would be different from the first covenant. Following are

some of the ways in which the new covenant is different from the first.

It was made with a new Israel. The first covenant was made with physical, fleshly Israel. The second covenant is made with spiritual Israel; those who are sons of Abraham through faith (Gal. 3:7). That there is such an Israel one only need read Romans 2:28f; Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:2f.

The emphasis of the New Covenant is upon the heart, not the flesh. *"I will put my laws into their mind and on their hearts also will write them" (Heb. 8:10b).* This is not to say that the heart was not involved in the first covenant. It was. But the greater emphasis of the first covenant was external while with the new covenant the emphasis is internal. The Corinthian writer had this in mind when he wrote "Not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh" (2 Cor. 3:3b).

Those with whom the new covenant is made are members by virtue of a spiritual birth, not a physical one. *"and they shall not teach every man his fellow-citizens and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord: For all shall know me, from the least to the greatest of them."* (Heb. 8:11). To this end Jesus told an astonished and perplexed Nicodemus *"Except one be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3).* When Nicodemus expressed his bewilderment and asked *"How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"* Jesus answered *"Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn. 3:4-6).* Those of the new covenant are members of that covenant willingly; those of the first covenant had no choice in being part of it.

The grace of forgiveness would be permanent *"For I will be merciful to their iniquities and their sins will remember no more" (Heb. 11:12).* There is no dispute that sometimes in the Old Testament promise that sins would be "remembered no more" was made. (Isa. 43:25). On the other hand, it cannot be disputed that there was a "remembrance of sins, year by year" (Heb. 10:8). The forgiveness of sins of those of the first covenant was not fully realized until Jesus died on the cross. The writer earlier wrote *"and for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Hb. 9:15).* If complete forgiveness of sins under the first covenant had already occurred, Jesus would not have died for the redemption of them. It must be

evident that, whatever understanding of forgiveness Israel had; true, real and complete forgiveness did not come until Jesus' blood was shed on Calvary.

"He hath made the First Old"

"In that he saith a new covenant, he hath made the first old. but that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away.. " (Heb. 8:13).

These are the final words on this subject of the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah in this section. Although the writer will have occasion to mention it further in the epistle, he now will turn to another subject. The Hebrew writer comments that the first covenant waxeth aged and was nigh unto vanishing away. When were these words applicable: at the time of the writing of the Hebrew epistle or earlier when Jeremiah uttered them? This latter is true. When Jeremiah uttered these words 600 years before Christ, promising a new covenant, it was then the first covenant was made old and from thence was nigh to disappearing. It would be almost six and one half centuries before this would transpire, but with God, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. True, remnants of that covenant remained when the epistle was written: the temple and Jerusalem still stood; the priesthood and sacrifices still remained, but, for all practical purposes, the first covenant had vanished away.

It had vanished away because a new covenant had already been given and the new could not be given until the first was removed. In Hebrews ten these words are found *"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second" (Heb 10:9f)*. The two laws could not exist simultaneously. Paul told the Romans *"Wherefore brethren, ye are made dead to the law, through the body of Christ, that ye should be joined to another..." (Rom. 7:4)*. The Galatians were told *"So that the law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come we are no longer under a tutor". (Gal. 3:24f)*. The law was a tutor, a schoolmaster. When the faith of Christ came, the schoolmaster, the tutor, the law, was done away.

The Ephesians were told *"He is our peace who hath made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself of the two, one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God, through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:14-16)*. Look at the tense of these words: "broke down"; "abolished"; "having slain": words signifying action already completed. The law was a partition between Jew and Gentile and Christ

tore it down at the cross. The first covenant had already vanished away when the Hebrew writer wrote.

Consider Colossians 2: 14 *"having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, that was contrary to us, and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross"*. Once more, look at the past tense of these words: "blotted out"; "taken away". These words speak of completed action: the bond which was against us, the law, was blotted out, taken away, nailed to the cross.

To a church leaving the gospel they had embraced for a different gospel which could not avail, Paul gave an allegory of Abraham' two wives and two sons. The women stood for two covenants: Hagar for the first given at Sinai; Sarah for the new covenant. (Gal. 4:21-21). The two sons stood for those who were in the covenant God had made: Ishmael stood for fleshly Israel; Isaac stood for spiritual Israel. Paul quoted the words of Sarah regarding Hagar: *"Cast out the hand maid and her son."* Paul's application is plain. Cast out the law. We are under it no more. The first covenant vanished away when Jesus died on the cross and those who seek to be justified by it are, in Paul's words, fallen from grace! (Gal. 5:4).

"The Imperfection of the First Testament . . ."

"Which is a figure for the time present; according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect..." (Heb. 9:9).

In the previous chapter the writer has discussed Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant, which prophecy was introduced by the statement: *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second..." (Heb. 8:7)*. In chapter nine the writer concedes that the first covenant had *"ordinances of divine services, and a sanctuary of this world" (Heb. 9: 1)*. He then specified the items in that sanctuary and discussed how both priests and high priests functioned in that sanctuary.

Yet, although the first covenant had "ordinances of divine services" something was lacking. The Holy Spirit had not yet made manifest the way into the true holy place (9:8). That sanctuary (tabernacle) was a "figure for the time present" and while gifts and offerings were made, they were only copies of the true cleansing which was to come through Christ: *"which gifts could not as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect."* But what those copies could not do, as far

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Faith In Baptism

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not have faith in baptism—that God “forgives all our transgressions” when a believing, repentant person submits to it.

What was the urgency to the Ethiopian? What was so important to the members of the jailor’s family? They wanted God’s surgery. They wanted the circumcision performed by Christ, the Son of God – the forgiveness of all their transgressions! With that faith in baptism, they found no good reason to put off being baptized into Christ. Acts 22:16, “And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

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From Out of the Past

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day sun when it says, “Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins,” and here on the other side is man’s prejudiced opinion equally clear when it says, “Baptism is not for the remission of sins.” The choice as to which we will believe is given by God to all of us. He will not compel us to accept His Truth, but he leaves the decision up to us. In that sense, everyone has a right to his own belief.

But here is the truth that is overlooked-if, when one stands up in the face of God’s clearly revealed Word and ridicules the command of Christ to be baptized and scoffs at its importance, and then to ease the conscience he tries to pass it off by saying, “Well, we all have a right to our own belief in religion,” he ought to realize before he stands before the Christ in judgment that he is fooling nobody but himself. If, by his affirming that he has a right to his own belief, he implies that at the judgment he will stand just as acceptable and approved as the man who had enough faith to obey that command, he is unmistakably wrong!

My sincere plea to all is: let us not use the liberty that God has given us to choose between truth and error to believe and practice that which is false, because it is possible for us to believe a lie and be damned.

Hebrews

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as the conscience was concerned, Christ could do who “*through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God*” (Heb. 9:14).

The Old Covenant, with its sanctuary, sacrifices and priests were just copies of the heavenly things later to be revealed and because they were copies, it was never intended that they should be permanent. In the writer’s words, they were “only (with meats and drinks and divers washings) carnal ordinances, imposed unto a time of reformation” (Hb.9:10).

That day of reformation has come for Christ has come “*a high priest of the greater things to come*” (Heb. 9:11). He has entered into that greater and more perfect tabernacle, which tabernacle had been kept in secret while the first tabernacle stood, and the tabernacle into which Christ has entered is one not made with hands, as contrasted with the tabernacle the priests entered; that one was made by human hands (Heb. 9: 11). Nor did Christ enter that heavenly tabernacle with the blood of bulls and goats, but rather it was his own blood which he carried into that holy place, which blood was shed once for all (Heb. 9:12). The blood he offered was that which secured eternal redemption through the Spirit, for while the blood of goats and bulls and ashes of a heifer cleansed the flesh, the blood of Christ is able to cleanse the conscience which, having already been noted, the first services were unable to claim (Heb. 9:14). The effectiveness of the blood of Christ in cleansing the conscience will be noted in chapter ten for there, all are urged to “*draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water*” (Heb. 10:22).

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~ Part 8 ~

by Jim McDonald

“Where a Testament Is”

“And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant that a death having taken place for the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it. For a testament is of force where there hath been death: for it doth never avail while he that made it liveth.” (Hb. 9:15-17).

There are many passages in the Hebrew letter which produced problems for translators and this is one of them. In this chapter the words “covenant” and “testament” frequently occur. “Covenant” appears five times in the English text (vs. 4, 15, 20); and was supplied in two other verses, I, 18. “Testament” appears in two instances in the English translation (verses 16, 17). yet both these words are translations of the same Greek word “*diatheke*”. The translators of the ASV translate the word “*diatheke*” covenant in many other passages (7:22, 8:6, 7, 9, 10, 10:6) to name a few. However the translators digressed from their usual rendering of “*diatheke*” as “covenant” to make it “testament” in the two verses cited above. Why did they differ in this passage? Why did they not uniformly translate “*diatheke*” as “covenant” as they did in the vast majority of other places where the word is found? Why do other translations frequently do the same? Obviously there was a reason for the translation and that lay in what they understood the text to say. It was the translators’ firm conviction that in these two exceptions “testament” conveyed a truer meaning of what the Hebrew writer meant; that “covenant” did not give as exact a thought as “testament”. The integrity of the translators is shown in that they supply a footnote acknowledging that both words came from the word “*diatheke*”.

The reason why the ASV translators chose the word “testament” in these two verses is seen in that which

the Holy Spirit was revealing: a death had taken place granting unto the heirs of that testament certain benefits, certain blessing. “Covenant” does not convey to the English mind the same thought that “testament” does.

A death has taken place for transgressions which were under the first covenant. This tells that whatever promises and assurances of forgiveness those under the first covenant had; actual forgiveness did not occur until Jesus died on the cross. Two things contribute to this conclusion: there must be blood shed for remission of sins and the blood of bulls and goats cannot remove sins (Hb. 9:22; 10:4). There was not remission of sins until Jesus died on the cross. This is the significance of verse 16: “*For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it. For a testament is of force where there hath been death. It doth never avail while he that made it liveth*”.

But, how can we explain why different ones under the first law were told they were forgiven, if their sins actually were not forgiven? There is no more difficulty understanding this than in understanding God’s promise to Abraham: “*A father of a multitude have I made thee*” (Gen. 15:5). This promise was not realized until Abraham had been dead nearly 500 years. Yet, God said “*I have made you (past tense) a father of multitudes*”. In the same place God told Abraham “*I have given to you this land*” (Gen. 15:5)

Yet, the land of Canaan did not actually become the possession of Abraham’s seed until Israel entered and conquered the land 400 years afterwards. Just remember that God may “*call the things that are not as though they were*” (Rm. 4: 17). God, because of his Sovereign Power, may speak of things as having already been done because, in his infinite wisdom, he knows they will be done. Abraham was the father of multitudes in promise, the realization of which took place 400 years later. Abraham was the possessor of Canaan in promise; the realization of which promise can when Israel entered Canaan 400 years later.

Those under the first covenant were given forgiveness in promise, the realization of which came when Jesus died on the cross.

“It Was Necessary, Therefore . . .”

“that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Hb. 9:23).

The writer has shown that a death has taken place for the transgressions which were under the first covenant;

that even that first covenant had itself been dedicated by blood, (9: 18), concluding with the thought that “[*]* *may almost say, all things are cleansed by blood, and apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission.*” (Heb. 9:22).

Since, therefore that the whole system of the law; the tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the covenant, “typified” that which was later to come, it was necessary that there be blood to “cleanse” or sanctify that first covenant. Thus he writes “*For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses unto all the people according to the law, he took scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkled both the book itself and the people, saying This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded to youward*” (Heb. 9:19f, Ex. 24:8).

But, as the writer repeatedly has shown, since these things were only a shadow or copy of that which was to come, the blood used to cleanse these copies was ineffectual. While all things are cleansed by blood and apart from the shedding of it, there is no remission; the blood of bulls and goats cannot itself remove sins (Heb. 10:4). It was necessary that better sacrifices be made to cleanse the heavenly things of which the tabernacle, with the priesthood and sacrifices, were copies of. “*For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us; nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the Holy Place year by year with blood not his own, else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world, but now at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*” (Heb. 9:24-26).

The necessity of better sacrifices than those under the law was mandatory. If the heavenly things of which the tabernacle, et al were copies of could do no more than that its copies, what was the purpose of making that sacrifice? IF the blood of animals could accomplish as much in cleansing and forgiveness as the blood of Christ, why should he die? The justification for the offering of Jesus is based upon the thought that such a sacrifice was necessary, that there was eternal benefit from that sacrifice, not found in the sacrifices made which preceded his. The constant sacrifices offered under the law would mean Christ must die often, if this eternal quality of forgiveness was not found in his blood.

“*And inasmuch as it is appointed unto man once to die, and after this cometh judgment, so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sins, to them that wait for him unto salvation*” (Heb. 9:27t). This statement, so often cited as proof of judgment coming after death; actually is made to establish the writer’s

point of the necessity for a better sacrifice. Men do not die multiply times before judgment; Christ does not die many times to accomplish man’s cleansing! His next appearance will not be to accomplish cleansing for men! His next appearance will be to gather to himself those cleansed by his one sacrifice, offered one for all.

“A Body Didst Thou Prepare For Me . . .”

“Wherefore when he cometh into the world he saith; sacrifices and offerings thou wouldst not, but a body didst thou prepare for me, in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure: then said I, Lo I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, o God. Saying above, Sacrifices and offering and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou wouldst not, neither hadst pleasure therein (the which are offered according to the law), then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hb. 10:5-10).

Our writer has shown the necessity of animal sacrifices under the first covenant since they typified the Grand Sacrifice which was to come. but, while the sacrifices were necessary to picture the Coming Sacrifice, they were ineffectual so far as cleansing was concerned. The writer earlier observed that although the law was a shadow of the good things to come, it could “*never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh*” (10:1). This truth is shown in that if they could make the worshipper perfect they would have ceased to be have been offered because if the worshipper had been truly cleansed, he would have had no more consciousness of sins (10:2). To the contrary of this he remarks “*But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance of sins year by year*” (10:3). The reason is apparent: “*For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins*” (10:4)

The writer’s citation of Psalms 40:6-8 “*Sacrifices and offerings thou wouldst not, but a body didst thou prepare for me*” (10:5) is one of those passages which show the preexistent nature of Jesus. The passage presents the Son as saying to the Father “*a body didst thou prepare for me.*” Other passages do show more emphatically the eternal coexistence of the Son with the Father (John 1:1-3 and Philippians 2:5-11 for instance): but this passage also show that he existed before his earthly sojourn.

The Psalmist declared that God had no pleasure in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin -- because of their ineffectualness, of course. The purpose of God in preparing a body for the Son was so that men might be sanctified through the offering of that body for our sins.

Jesus came to do the will of God. Immediately he adds: *"he taketh away the first that he may establish the second"*. His *"taketh away the first that he may establish the second"* must therefore have been the will of God.

In order to comprehend what the writer had in mind when he speaks of "first and second", we must realize that "first" and "second" have been mentioned already numerous times in chapters eight through ten. To what did they refer in earlier citations?

In chapter 8:7 he wrote: *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second"*. Again, *"In that he saith a new covenant, he hath made the first old"*. (Heb. 8:13) In chapter nine he told that the first covenant having ordinances of a divine sanctuary (10:1). In 9:15 he wrote that Christ had died so that those under the first covenant could have redemption of their transgression. Now again in 10:9 we are told *"He taketh away the first that he might establish the second"*. The appearance of the words "first" or "old" in the first four citations all directly or indirectly describe the covenant God gave Israel through Moses. It refers to the same thing in its fifth appearance, as well.

By God's will the removal of the first covenant, the establishing of the second were both done so that we might be sanctified. And, while many and often sacrifices were made under that first covenant, they could "never take away sins". Yet Christ, by one offering, one sacrifice, was able to do what the multitude of sacrifices of the first covenant were unable to do! This wondrous grace was possible because God prepared a body for Christ *"whereby he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw nigh to God through him"* (Heb. 7:25). *"For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified"* (10:14).

"A New and Living Way . . ."

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our body washed with pure water" (Heb. 10: 19-22)

Once more we meet a "therefore" in our study. The appeal which follows *"having...boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Christ"* is made in view of an earlier statement. The statement which produced such an appeal is, first, his citation of Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant *"and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more"* with the following assertion *"Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin"* (10:18). Since the blood of Jesus is able to forever remove sins and iniquities--all sin; past, present and future, there is no need that Jesus make a further sacrifice of Himself. His Sacrifice was "once for all", "one time for all time" which offering opened for us a "new and living way" by which way we are urged to enter the holy place.

The writer's urging that Hebrews enter "into the holy place", is an appeal for them to enter heaven, just as his appeal that they give diligence to enter into his rest was an appeal to enter heaven (4:10f). Earlier Christ has been described as "a minister of the true tabernacle" (8:2). It was said that Christ *"entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true, but into heaven itself"* (9:24). While the first tabernacle stood *"the way into the holy place had not been made manifest"* (9:8). Since the holy place is heaven, we are urged to enter it, through a new way, through the blood of Christ. Entrance into it was not possible by the inferior blood of animals.

We draw near to heaven through the Great High Priest, God appointed for us, Jesus Christ. We draw near with a true heart, not a feigned or impure one, in fullness of faith. We draw near, having our heart sprinkled from an evil conscience. How interesting to compare the Hebrew writer's comments here with those Peter made in 1 Peter 3 :21. *"Which after a true likeness doth save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation (answer, KJV) of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"*. The Hebrew writer tells of an "evil conscience" being sprinkled. To what end? Obviously it was sprinkled that it might be a "good conscience"! In chapter nine the writer said *"how much more shall the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself, without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* (9: 14).

The element in which the conscience of Hebrews was cleansed was the blood of Jesus. Earlier it was said *"the law...can, never make perfect them that draw nigh. Else would they have not ceased to be offered.? because the worshippers, having been once cleansed would have had no more consciousness of sin"* (10:1f). It is the blood of Christ in which this wondrous work of grace is

wrought and several passages speak of the "sprinkling of the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2, Heb. 12:24).

It is important to know when this cleansing, this "sprinkling" of the blood of Jesus occurs. In Hebrews our hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience at the same time our bodies are washed with pure water; an obvious reference to water baptism. Peter concurs. *"baptism doth now save you... the answer of a good conscience toward God"*. And while we believe Paul the author of the Hebrew letter, his words in Romans 6:3-4 add further strength to this. *"Or, are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death.."* When one is immersed in water, Christ "sprinkles" his blood upon his heart, cleansing it from an evil conscience. How simple. How plain. And yet how often disputed!

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works..." (Heb. 10:24).

This is the third of three exhortations in this section. The first two were directions to give attention to ourselves: *"Let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith"; "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not"*. Taking heed to oneself is a first priority. To those disposed to remove a mote from a brother's eye, Jesus said *"Cast out first the beam that is in thine own eye, then thou shalt see clearly the mote out of thy brother's eye."* (Mt. 7:5). Paul instructed Timothy *"Take heed to thyself and to thy doctrine"* (1 Tim. 4:16). When one seeks to have a true heart and hold unswervingly to his hope, he is therein taking heed to himself.

Still no man is an island. We interact with others and we must be as concerned for their well, being as for our own. *"Not looking each of you to his own things, but also to the things of others"* (Phil. 2:4). The golden rule is *"All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets."* (Mt. 7: 12). And it was the law and the prophets! The law gave specific instructions that should one see a loose animal not his own, even though it belong to his enemy, he was to pen it and keep it until its owner secured it. (Ex. 23:4) The tears of Jeremiah were for his rebellious brethren upon whom God had unveiled to Jeremiah the sorrow and anguish which awaited them. Paul said *"I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* (Rom.9:2f). He wrote: *"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, weep with them that weep"* {Rm. 12:15}. One should expect that although we are commanded to

watch our selves; we should likewise be commanded to care for others. This is the root of this third exhortation *"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works"*.

The word "provoke" usually carries the sense of one who stirs up another in a an evil way. Paul commands *"and ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath..."* (Eph. 6:4). While "provoke" in Hebrews 10:24 and Ephesians 6:1 are from two different Greek words, the English word each of them are translated into is "provoke". Israel, by her idolatry and infidelity, provoked the Holy One of Israel (Is. 65:3). Still, although the thought of "stir up" is inherent in both passages, it is used in a bad sense in one but a good sense in the other. Peter used the word "stir up" in a good sense when he wrote to *"stir up your sincere minds by putting you in remembrance"* (2 Pet. 3:1). There are two things the Hebrews were to stir up in others--- TO:

Love. Love what? He does not say. Certainly to love God, for this is the great commandment. To love God's Law, for it is a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105). To love Christ's church, for we cannot love Christ unless we love that which He loved and He loved His church (Eph. 5:25). To love to praise God; to love others and the souls of men. We can stir up others to love by reflecting love for them. Did not John say *"We love, because he first loved us"?* (1 Jn. 4:19). How can one not be moved to love another who *"doeth him good and not evil all the days of his life"?*

Good works. Good works naturally follows love. Where good works do not follow, that love is pretended and feigned. *"We know we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. But whoso hath this world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God dwell in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth."* (1 Jn. 4:14-18). Just as James showed that faith without works is dead, so John shows that love without works also is dead.

So, let us stir up one another to love and good works. Let the word of Christ dwell so richly in us that we become rich in good works. There is nothing more conducive toward being rich in good works than to see the same richness of works in others. Jesus, the Master Teacher, said: *"Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven"* (Mt. 5: 16).

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of God have the right and responsibility to rely upon their Father for help, and to petition him for it. And so we have the exhortation here to do so, with the added assurance that their efforts - "ask- seek-knock" - will be rewarded - "given - find- opened." Even man would do so: "Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone, or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent?" Verses 9-10. Of course, they would not do so.

Can we expect any less of the Father? Certainly not, and so had they been taught. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father (notice again the established relationship) who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him." Verse 11. Because of the nature of God, even the present children of God can expect the same: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." James 1: 17. In describing them as "evil," he was not using it in the sense of their being full of iniquity, but of their limited ability, frailty and weakness, in contrast with the ability of the Father. "Ye...know how to give good gifts... how much more shall your Father ...?"

And now we get to the Golden Rule. "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." Verse 12. The "therefore" shows the connection of this thought to the foregoing. It is a conclusion based upon the preceding remarks having to do with the conduct of the Father. Since the Father will act in this way toward you, you ought to act in this way toward others. Others had made similar statements to this, but none of them have the golden quality this has. A Jewish teacher, Hillel, had said, "Do not do to thy neighbor what is hateful to thyself." The Greek philosopher Socrates wrote these words: "What stirs your anger when done to you by others, that do not to others." Aristotle's version was, "We should bear ourselves toward others as we would desire they should bear themselves toward us." And the Chinese teacher Confucius, said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." But there is a radical difference. These are negative and passive. What Jesus said is positive and active. You do that which is good for others, rather than just not harming them.

"For this is the law and the prophets." This is what had already been commanded in the law of Moses and the writing of their prophets. In answer to the question by a lawyer, Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus quoted Leviticus 19: 18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" This is much like what Jesus said here. And he said on that occasion, "On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets."

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 9 ~

by Jim McDonald

"NOT FORSAKING OUR OWN ASSEMBLING TOGETHER"

"Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." (Heb.10:25)

There is, perhaps, no passage more familiar from Hebrews than this one just quoted. It was evident that the exhortation was needed then, just as it is needed today. The gravity of the problem is seen in the warning which followed "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries..." (Heb. 10:26f). How tragic that these words go unheeded by so many today.

Frequently the question is asked "Do I have to attend every service of the church?" This is a question which produces great sadness to God. To those who love God, who are conscious of His love and care for man; who realize that one's personal salvation can never come on the basis that one has earned it; to one who is conscious of his own sins and shortcomings; attending service is never a matter of "have to" -- "punching my time card for one more week": attending services are a privilege and joy. Would to God that all His children would see attendance in that light.

"Not forsaking...as the custom of some is". When concern is shown and voiced to perpetual absentees their reply most frequent is "I haven't quit the church". No? Many are hanging on by the "skin of their teeth". They miss more than they attend. The slightest excuse makes them decide not to "attend today". Maybe they feel like just staying in bed all day. Or, they're just not "in the mood". Or perhaps they stayed up so late the night before watching TV or, worse still (God forbid) hanging out at some club, that they're just too sleepy to come, and after all, what good will it do to come and

sleep through the whole service? When will we awaken to the fact that our excuses are transparent to God? He sees through them and knows the real reasons why we are not present. And He does not regard it a slight offense when we prefer not to assemble with his saints. He knows that the real reason why one is absent is because he has no real commitment to God, nor love for God. For shame.

"As ye see the day approaching". What day? Different answers are offered. Some say "The Sunday assembly". Read the text again. It reads, "The assembling of ourselves together". Yes, it does include the first day assembly (Acts 20:7) but not that exclusively. The assembling of ourselves together is the assembling of ourselves together! When is that? Whenever we assemble ourselves together! The Day approaching of Hebrew 10:25 is not just "The first day of the week".

Some say "the judgment day". The judgment day is coming and it ought to provoke concern and care in us all. And, the apostle does call up visions of judgment with his words *"a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries"*. The problem with this explanation is that Jesus gave no signs which would tell us when that day will do. He warned *"But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only"* (Mt. 24:36). He added *"Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh"* (Mt. 24:42).

Some (including myself) think "The day approaching" was the day for the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus had given signs for that day (Mt. 24:14~15). When this letter was written to the Hebrews the clock was ticking toward the lateness of the hour. Its reception by the Hebrew could not have been much more than seven - eight years before the destruction of Jerusalem. The apostle warned in chapter thirteen *"For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come"* (Hob. 13:14).

Wake up, Christians; wake up to the eternal consequences of what our neglect will bring to our souls. *"When Jesus comes to reward his servants, whether it be noon or night. Say will he find us watching, with our lamps all trimmed and bright?"*

"For if we Sin Willfully"

..after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversary..." (Heb. 10:26f)

These are sobering words, calling to remembrance an earlier warning from chapter six, verses 3~6 of those

who were once enlightened and yet who fell away that it was *"impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame ."* What is the significance of the warning here in chapter ten, and who are these to whom the warning is directed? ‘

The writer speaks of sinning "willfully". There is more involved in a willful sin than just doing wrong and knowing at the time one does it, that it is sin. Surely none would charge David with ignorance that his sin with Bathsheba and then his subsequent deeds were violations of the law of God! Nor would any excuse Peter's denial of Christ as ignorance. Both men sinned yet were conscious at the time that that which they did was wrong. Both were "surprised" into sin, from which sins one can be restored (Gal. 6: 1). To sin "willfully" means that we choose that course, rejecting the authority of him who has declared our actions to be sin. Such was the case from Hebrews, the one who sins willfully who knowingly treads under his feet the Son of God. He holds Jesus in utter contempt. He (knowingly) regards the blood of the covenant by which he was once sanctified as being without power; he counts it no different than the blood of some animal who was killed by accident or by another animal or by man. He willfully does despite unto the Spirit of grace. Shameful indeed, and fearful the end for such a one! *"a man who hath set at naught Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God..."* (10:28f). The writer added *"For we know him that said; vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense. And again, the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Heb. 10:30f).

Just who is this one who sins willfully? Does the apostle give any implication as to whom he had in mind? Indeed he does. He begins this fearful warning with the word "For": "For if we sin willfully." The word "for" tells us we must look back to the preceding verse(s) to identify the one whom the apostle speaks of as "sinning willfully". What does the preceding verse tell us? *"Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is..."* (10:25).

The one who "forsakes the assembling of our own selves together" is not just the disciple who lets the cares of the world, the pleasures of life, or just one who is weak and still a babe interfere with his assembling with saints. Ask some of those who miss week after week or ever cease to meet: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" "do you still regard Christ as the only way to heaven?" Most of these will acknowledge their faith in Jesus and his way. These, too, are jeopardizing their

future rest with God; they need to “awake” from the Stupor which neglect, carelessness and being preoccupied with other things has cost them. While they yet have time, and before they reach a State in which they renounce all ties of faith with the Savior, they need to come home. For, mark it well, a hardened heart will someday bring them to a point of no return. When that day comes (and it will come if they continue in their indifference), there will remain no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fierceness of fire which devours the adversary. Dh sister, brother, why will we sell our soul for a “mess of pottage”?

Wake up, Christians, wake up to the eternal consequences of what neglect will bring to our souls. *“When Jesus comes to reward his servants, whether it be noon or night. Say will he find us watching, with our lamps all trimmed and bright?”*

Call to Remembrance

“But call to remembrance the former days in which after ye were enlightened, ye endured a great conflict of suffering; partly, being made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly becoming partakers with them that were so used. For ye both had compassion on them that were in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions, knowing that ye have for yourselves a better possession, and an abiding one. Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward..” (Hb.10:32-34).

This lengthy quotation begins with these words *“Call to remembrance the former days...”* We are called to remember things: how we look (Jms. 1:26); the suffering of Christ (1 Cor. 11:24); the poor (Gal. 2: 10); the words of Christ (Acts 20:35). Here Hebrews were called to remember the “former days”. These “former days” were “after they had been enlightened”. To have been enlightened meant simply they had come to understand. The writer does not specify what they had come to understand -- such would have been redundancy. Their enlightenment was the full discovery and appreciation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Since the letter was to Hebrews (Jews) and apparently to those of Jerusalem, the former days would be direct allusion to the days of the early church, recorded (at least in part) by Luke in Acts 2 - 7. What a glorious, exciting time it must have been to have been a part of those early disciples who perhaps heard Peter’s grand Pentecost sermon and witnessed the daily additions to the church (Acts 2:47).

Amid those warm and happy memories of the early days and rapid growth of the church were other memories; memories which brought stabs of pain by calling them to mind. For amid the “heydays” of the rapid advance of the gospel were those recollections of how

quickly Satan - our great adversary - had brought suffering and trials to those first Christians in Judea. Many years later Jesus would unveil, through John, similar memories to the churches of Asia. As the Lamb opened the seven seals, the first seal was that of a white horse, whose rider had a bow and who came forth “conquering and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2). As the Hebrew letter recalls the gospel as it was first preached in Jerusalem; so John records the spread of the gospel through Asia, primarily through the tireless efforts of the Apostle to the Gentiles. The opening of the second seal revealed a red horse and whose rider took peace from the earth, who had a great sword with which he slew mankind (Rev. 6:4). Satan never takes lightly the spread of the gospel. He has many weapons in his arsenal: opposition, compromise; complacency, and he does not shrink to use any of them in his war against the Lamb. Early Christians, both in Jerusalem and Asia, experienced one of his first weapons of opposition; tribulation and suffering.

Hebrew Christians were to remember they had endured a great conflict of suffering: they had been made a gazing stock, partly by reproaches and afflictions. A “gazingstock” means one who has become publicly displayed in a demeaning way: such is Satan’s tactics. Shame and embarrassment cause both discouragement and sometimes abandonment. These tools Satan easily used, first on the apostles, then later on the disciples. The phrase “reproaches and afflictions” spells out the growing intensity of pressure placed on the brethren. The apostles were first threatened, and when that failed to stop their preaching, were beaten (Acts 4:21; 5:40). At this time persecution seemed to have been confined to the apostles: authorities hoped to intimidate the multitude by giving them silent warning of what might likewise happen to them. It was not until it was apparent that apostles had no intention of ceasing their preaching that the fury of the authorities turned upon the disciples. With the death of Stephen (Acts seven) a great persecution arose against the church which was in Jerusalem. The Hebrew writer’s exhortation to call to remembrance the former days brought floods of memories of those persecutions and the dispersion of disciples throughout the region. A natural thought after the lapse of many years would be, “Was it worth it?” Would not Satan’s nagging, jarring whisper be “Of course not, you suffered needlessly”. He whispers the same to us today. Oh Christian, heed not his voice. **It is worth it.** The inviting, open door of heaven, with its invitation of rest and peace, tells us “Heaven will surely be worth it all.”

Jim McDonald

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

~ Part 10 ~

By Jim McDonald

“Cast Not Away Your Boldness”

This appeal is made in light of the writer's reminding Hebrews how they had acted in the former days immediately after their obedience to the gospel. Then they endured a great conflict of suffering, partly they were made a gazingstock by both reproaches and afflictions; partly they stood by the side of those who suffered similar reproaches. Further he reminded them they had had compassion for those in bonds, taking joyfully the spoiling of their possession for they believed they had a better, abiding one. It was at this point he injects these words *“Cast not away your boldness which hath great recompense of reward.”* (Heb. 10:45)

He reminds them that what they had once done, they must continue to do. *“For ye have need of patience, To receive the promise, the prized possession; the better, abiding one as they had once regarded it; depended upon them holding steady to their course.*

He reminded them *“For yet a very little while, he that cometh shall come and shall not tarry, But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrink back, then hath my soul no pleasure in him”* (Heb. 10:37). This passage is quoted in an abbreviated form in both Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians, saying *“The righteous shall live by faith”* (Rm. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). The reference in all three instances is to Habakkuk 2:3f Habakkuk was a pre-exile prophet who was warned of an impending invasion of the Babylonians, and their subsequent victory over Judah. The prophet had difficulty understanding why God would allow a much more wicked people than Judah to defeat her. He had to learn to live by faith that what God did was best, even though he could see no logical reason in it.

The promise was *“Yet a very little while my righteous one shall come”* and with his coming deliverance would come to God's people. Our problem is that God's *“very little while”* could seem eternity to time-conscious men. The promise to the martyred saints was release from persecution and was conveyed in these words *“rest a little while”* (Rev. 6:11). That *“little while”* of bitter persecution would stretch for more than two hundred plus years, reaching far beyond their lifetime. Some, then (as well as now) give up on his coming for Peter wrote of mockers who would come with mockery, saying *“where is the promise of his coming?”* (2 Pet. 3:3f). Now, as then, we must not forget, that *“one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day”* (2 Pet. 3:8).

How tempting to *“shrink back”!* Thus we are urged *“Remember Lot's wife”* and that *“No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven”* (Lk. 17:32; 9:62). We must not forget that *“if he shrink back then hath my soul no pleasure in him”*. How sad to have nearly made it home but to stumble and refuse to run all the way! God's confidence in these was *“But we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition, but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul”* (Hb. 10:39)

Can our God have the same confidence in me? In you?

Now Faith is”

“. . . assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen. For therein the elders had witness borne to them. By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made of things which appear.” (Heb. 11:1-3).

Occasionally, in the scriptures, passages will occur which cause the reader to tremble with the force of the words and language. What wonders are produced by such passages as 1 Corinthians thirteen? How comforting and consoling to believers is the shepherd Psalm (Ps. 23)! The resurrection chapter (1 Corinthians 15); and the excerpt of Paul's revelation to Thessalonians what will occur at Christ's return (1 Thess. 4:13-18). All these passages lift us to exhilarating heights. Surely, no chapter is more eloquent than the chapter we have now reached in our short discussions of different, thought provoking passages. This chapter

of faith names fourteen men from the distant past who excelled in the challenges of life through their faith. But excellent faith is not confined simply to men, it thrives also in women to an admirable degree so our writer calls two women to the fore to bear witness of things which can be wrought through faith.

This chapter was prompted because the writer had expressed his confidence in the steadfastness of those to whom he wrote. Thus he said "But we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39). So our author launched into examples of faith of their ancestors, showing the many and varied accomplishments of the distant past wrought by the faith of these worthies

First, he defines faith. "Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen..." While I prefer the American Standard translation above all other translations of our scriptures, the King James Versions translation of the verse seems more meaningful. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Substance and assurance carry similar thoughts and faith is the substance, assurance of things hoped for. Hope cannot exist when one holds possession of what he might hope for. "Hope that is seen is not hope for who hopeth for that which he seeth?" (Rom. 8:24) On the other hand, one does not hope if he does not have faith that the thing he might hope for is attainable. That which hope rests upon is faith for faith is the conviction of things not seen.

How important is faith! We are saved by faith, justified by faith. (Acts 16:30f; Rm. 5:1). We live by faith (Rm. 1:17) We walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith is the victory which overcomes the world (1 In. 5:4). The believer is given the right to become a son of God (In. 1: 12). Those who believe are walking in the steps of Abraham. (Rm. 4:12). The chapter which stretches before us (Hebrews 11); is a grand chapter to review. Continue with us as we look at the wondrous examples of faith that moved the men (and women) of old, and should move us today!

"By Faith We Understand"

"that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear." (Heb. 11 :3)

That our world was framed by the word of God is a tenet of faith which is expressed from the very first chapter in Genesis and repeated through various passages till this text in Hebrews.. At least ten times the expression "*and God said*" is found in Genesis one, the result of which was that something either came into existence from nothing or else order resulted out of disorder. David knew and believed this. He wrote "*For he spake and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast*" (Ps. 33:9) It is no mere coincidence that in John's prologue to his gospel he wrote "*in the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that hath been made*" (In. 1:1-3). Jesus is the Word of God. He is the perfect expression of God's will and God's essence and through his utterances, our world was formed. God's word was an active agent in the world's formation; remains an active force in its present workings, moved in the revelation of God's will, acts in the regeneration of man and will be the culminating force in the consummation of our world.

By faith we "understand" this. Since no man was present to witness the beginning of our world, all "understand its formation by faith" whether he views the world's existence as the fiat act of an Intelligent, Eternal Being (God) or subscribe to the view that our world is the result of an accident from the collision of lifeless matter. Either position is understood by "faith" on the part of him who accepts either view, for whatever we teach as truth, but which we did not personally witness with our eyes, is a declaration of our faith. The evolutionist who derides the Christian for his "blind" faith, has his own "blind" faith!

"So that, what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear". What evolutionist can deny this statement? Even he must acknowledge that the atom from which our world is made, is not discernible to the naked eye.

Contrary to all natural rhyme and reason, something is eternal. It matters not whether we view Life (God) as eternal or Matter as eternal, the axiom is true "Something is, therefore something always was". "Cut it" or "slice it" anyway one wants; there is no other alternative. The evolutionist "explains" the existence of life as a happenstance; he cannot accept that there has always been life. So, he has his "explanation" for

the "origin of the species". He solves nothing for were his hypothesis true, he must still explain the origin of matter. He will not let me assume that Life is eternal, I will not let him assume that Matter is eternal! So, we reach an impasse. How is it to be resolved?

The resolution as to whether it is matter or intelligent Life that is eternal can only be resolved by testimony: testimony our world gives about itself. That testimony is given by design. Design testifies of plan, a Planner. And design is there for those to see who are willing to see. "*The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork*" wrote the Psalmist (Ps. 19:1). Gentiles were inexcusable for their rejection of God for "*the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity..*" (Rom. 1:20). In his sermon to idolaters in Lystra, Paul said that God "*suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways. And yet he left not himself without witness...*" (Acts 14: 16f). It is just as reasonable to believe in an Eternal Mind as it is to believe in Eternal Matter! Frankly, to believe in Eternal Matter demands a greater stretch of imagination and faith that to believe in an eternal Being. You believe in one or the other. Which is it?

"By Faith

Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts, and through it, he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death and he was not found because God translated him: for he hath had witness borne to him that before his translation he had been well-pleasing unto God..." (Heb. 11:4-5).

There are two words which identify both Abel and Enoch (although they were separated by many hundreds of years), those words being "faith" and "witness". The first verse of this significant chapter defines faith; the second verse read "*For therein (viz-in faith) the elders had witness borne unto them*". The sixth verse cites the absolute necessity of faith: "*and without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing unto*

him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

From the ages long since past, Abel has been a shining example of one who believed God. In this he was vastly different from his parents who fell into sin and death by their disobedience--unbelief. God had said "*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat.. for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*" (Gen. 2:17). Satan came, lied to them, tempted them and they fell. They did not walk by faith. For Abel to have offered by faith a more excellent sacrifice than Cain necessarily implies that 1) a sacrifice had been commanded and 2) God had equally designated the kind of sacrifice he wished for faith "*cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Rm. 10:17). God had commanded some kind of sacrifice. One can hardly suppose that both Abel and Cain spontaneously offered a sacrifice to God without some instructions from God that they do so. It was the kind of gift they offered that on the part of Abel was a gift of faith; but on the part of Cain, a gift of unbelief.

Through Abel's gift he had witness borne to him he was righteous; agreeing with verse two "*therein the elders had witness born to them*". The Genesis record tells us only that God had respect unto Abel's gift; but that he had not respect for the gift of Cain (Gen. 4:4f). How did God manifest this "respect" or "regard"? The Holy Scriptures do not tell us. Did God send fire from heaven to consume his gift (as he had done unto the sacrifice of Elijah many millenniums later, 1 Kings 18:38) while the sacrifice of Cain was not so accepted? The scriptures do not tell us. But, whatever and however God revealed both his pleasure for the gift of Abel and his displeasure with the gift of Cain, both of Adam's sons were aware of God's approval and disapproval. Otherwise, Cain would not have been filled with wrath, would he? Nor do we know whether it was at the first offering the sacrifices were shown to be accepted or rejected, or after the offering of more. We do know that the record tells us of the "gifts" (plural) of Abel.

While there are many things we do not know, some things we do know. We know that although he is now dead, Abel still speaks to us today. His message is: "Walk by faith". "Live by faith". This is what is pleasing to God!

“These All Died in Faith

not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own.” (Heb. 11:13-14).

The words “these all died in faith...” is direct allusion to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: it does not refer to others who were earlier mentioned in the text for, as Barnes observed, to make it refer to all the worthies previously mentioned, would necessarily include Enoch, who did not die. It is of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to whom these words allude. when he wrote “*These all died in faith, not having received the promises.*”

Not having received the promises, cannot mean no promises were given them, for surely they were, but “*not having received the promises*” means they had not received the fulfillment of the promises. The word “promises” is found twice in the chapter, “promised” is found once; “promise” appears three times.

As the phrase “received not the promises” relates to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, notice that the three all dwelt in the “*land of promise*”, that Isaac and Jacob were heirs with Abraham of *the same promise*. God promised Abraham (and then Isaac and Jacob) that he would give Canaan to their posterity. They never possessed the land themselves. Certainly the spiritual promises “*in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*” was not received by them. It was given to them, but they did not receive the fulfillment of it.

As the writer commended the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so he also commended the faith of some of their posterity. “*And what shall I more say for the time would fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthat, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouth of lions... and these all, having had witness born to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect*” (Hb. 11 :32,33, 39, 40).

It is interesting to note that while it was said of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that they “*received not the promises*”; the same was not said of their descendants.

Rather, the writer wrote of these latter ones that “*they received not the promise*”. What is the difference, if any?

There is a difference. In the case of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the promises of a great multitude, land, blessing through the seed of Abraham were all yet to be realized. But that was not true of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthat, David and Samuel for they were part of a nation which dwelt in and possessed the land God had sworn to give their father. What remained was the promised blessing through the seed of Abraham!

Already chapter nine, verse 15ff have been commented upon but refreshing our mind of the passage is appropriate just here. “*And for the cause he is the mediator of a better covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*” It took the death of Christ for those under the first covenant to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. “Promise” in both instances is single and refers to the blessing to be bestowed in Abraham’s seed. Christ did not shed his blood so that Abraham’s family would become a great nation and inherit Canaan. Were those promises the only promises made to him, Jesus would not have died. However, it was necessary that Jesus die that the blessing for all nations be secured. And it was not until the death of Jesus that forgiveness was an accomplished fact. Earlier forgiveness rested only upon God’s promise, not upon reality for the Hebrew writer words are empathetic “These received not the promise”.

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