Hebrews - Commentaries by Hamilton Smith

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 10:1-18: The Purged Conscience

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Hebrews 10:1-4. In chapter 9 we have learned that a place in heaven is secured for every believer, not by anything the believer has done, but wholly through the work of Christ and the position He occupies before the face of God. In chapter 10 we learn how the same work is applied to the believer's conscience, in order that even now he may enjoy and, in spirit, enter this new place. To find our home with Christ in heaven itself, it is necessary to have a purged conscience. The first eighteen verses of chapter 10 plainly set forth how this purged conscience is secured.

In three passages, in chapters 9 and 10, the apostle speaks of a "perfect" or "purged" conscience. In chapter 9:9 he definitely states that the Jewish sacrifices could not make the offerer perfect as to the conscience. Again, in chapter 9:14, we read of the perfect offering of Christ purging the conscience from dead works so that the believer is set free to worship the living God. Lastly, in chapter 10:2, we are told that the worshipper who has a purged conscience is one who has no more conscience of sins. He who has a conscience of sins lives in the dread that God will one day bring him into judgment on account of his sins, and therefore cannot enjoy peace with God. To have no more conscience of sins implies that this dread of judgment is removed by seeing that God has dealt with all the sins of the believer.

Nevertheless, though God will never bring the believer into judgment for his sins, as a Father He may have to deal in chastening if, as children, we sin (chapter 12: 5-11). A purged conscience does not therefore imply that we never sin, or that we never have the consciousness of failure, either past or present, but it does imply that all dread of a future judgment on account of our sins is entirely removed. Thus a purged conscience is not to be confounded with what we speak of as a good conscience. If, by reason of careless walk, a true believer fails, his conscience will be surely troubled, and only by confession to God will he regain a good conscience. This, however, does not touch the question of the eternal forgiveness of his sins which gives him a purged conscience.

Under the law it was impossible to obtain a "perfect" or "purged" conscience. At most, the sacrifices could only give temporary relief. Each fresh sin called for a fresh sacrifice. Had the sacrifices given a purged conscience, they would not have been repeated. The law showed, indeed, that a sacrifice was needed to take away sins, but it was only a shadow of good things to come; it was not the substance. The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins.

How, then, is a purged conscience obtained? The following verses answer this question by bringing before us three great truths:

First, the will of God (verses 5-10);

Second, the work of Christ (verses 11-14);

Third, the witness of the Spirit (verses 15-18).

Hebrews 10:5-7. The will of God was written in the volume of the book. This clearly is not the volume of Scripture, for this reference to the volume of the book forms part of the quotation from Psalm 40. It would seem to be a figurative reference to the eternal counsels of God. Coming into the world, the Lord says that He has come to do the will of God. Sacrifice and offerings under the law could not carry out God's will. A body had to be prepared for the Lord so that, in accord with the counsels of God, He might accomplish the will of God.

Hebrews 10: 8-9. What the Lord said when He came into the world had already been said "above" in heaven. To carry out the will of God necessitated taking away the first covenant to establish the second.

Hebrews 10:10. In the tenth verse we are definitely told what the will of God is. There we read, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." It is in vain and needless to look within in the endeavor to find in our faith, our repentance, our experiences or our feelings, that which will bring relief or peace to the burdened conscience. This Scripture so blessedly takes our thoughts entirely away from ourselves and occupies us with the will of God and the work of Christ. God discovers to us the blessed secret of His counsels that it is His will to have us divested of every spot of sin, not through anything we have done or can do, but entirely through the work of another, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:11-14. These verses now bring before us in greater detail the work of Christ whereby the will of God is carried out. These verses are wholly concerned with Christ and His work. We have no part in this work except the sins which necessitated it. We must keep out our feelings and our experiences, and in simple faith stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

Verse 11 brings before us the utter hopelessness of Jewish sacrifices. This verse covers a period of fifteen hundred years, and with one comprehensive sweep takes in every Jewish priest, all the days of their never-ending works with the innumerable sacrifices which they offered. Then we are told that this vast parade of human energy, with the rivers of blood that flowed from Jewish altars, "can never take away sins."

Having thus in one brief verse dismissed the whole Jewish system, the apostle in verse 12 presents in contrast the mighty work of Christ. "This Man," Christ, in contrast to all the Jewish priests, "after He had offered one sacrifice for sins"—in contrast to all the Jewish sacrifices—"forever sat down on the right hand of God," in contrast to the priests who were ever standing, never having finished their work.

The blessedness of the truth of this verse is somewhat obscured by the faulty rendering of the Authorized Version. The comma, coming after the word "forever," links these words with the one sacrifice. Properly, the comma should come after the word "sin," leaving the word

“forever” rightly connected with Christ having sat down at the right hand of God. Christ might have done one work forever, meaning He would never undertake the work again, and yet that work would not be finished. If, however, He has sat down “forever” or “in perpetuity” (JND), it is the everlasting proof that His work is finished. So far as the work of atonement is concerned, He will never have to rise up. Moreover, as He has sat down at the right hand of God, we know that His work is an accepted work.

The two verses that follow set forth the result of Christ having sat down in perpetuity, both for His enemies and for believers. For His enemies it involves judgment; His work having been rejected, there is nothing more to be done to put away sins. “Henceforth” Christ is waiting “till His enemies be made His footstool.”

As to the sanctified, Christ, as risen and glorified, is perfected; and by His work He has perfected the believer. We wait to receive our glorified bodies, but our souls have been perfectly cleansed from sins in the sight of God by the work of Christ. As one has said, “The Father and the Son could do no more for our sins than is already accomplished in the sacrifice of Jesus, and revealed to our faith in the written Word.” Not only has Christ sat down forever, but believers are sanctified forever. If Christ has sat down in perpetuity, then believers are perfected in perpetuity.

Hebrews 10:15-18. The passage has presented the will of God as the source of our blessing, and the work of Christ as the efficacious means by which the blessing is secured. Now the apostle presents the witness of the Spirit as the One who brings to us the knowledge of the truth with divine authority, so that it may be possessed with divine certainty. In other Scriptures we read of the witness of the Spirit in us (Rom. 8:16); here it is the witness of the Spirit “to us.” The witness “to us” is what the Spirit has said in Scripture. Then follows the quotation from Jeremiah 31:34, already quoted in chapter 8, to present the terms of the new covenant. Here the quotation is repeated to prove that the efficacy of the work of Christ is such that God can say of believers, “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” God does not say, “Their sins and iniquities I will not remember,” but “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” The simple statement that God would not remember our sins might imply that He passed them over. But when God says that they will be remembered “no more,” it implies that they have all been remembered, confessed, borne, and dealt with in judgment. As they have been dealt with, God can righteously say they will be remembered “no more.”

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 10:19-22: The New Worshippers

Hebrews 10:19-22. The truth of the purged conscience prepares the way for worship. Already the apostle has spoken of the new sacrifice and the new sanctuary; now he presents the new worshipper. In contrast to Judaism, in which the offerer had no access to the holiest, in Christianity the believer has “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” Provision has been made to remove all that would hinder our drawing nigh to God as worshippers. Sins have been met by the blood of Jesus. Christ, having taken flesh and become Man, has opened a living way for men to enter the holiest. Our infirmities are met by our High Priest. Neither the sins we have committed, the bodies we are in, nor the infirmities with which we are encompassed, can hinder the believer from entering in spirit within the veil into heaven itself.

Let us then, says the apostle, draw near to God with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having the affections set free from a condemning conscience and our bodies set apart from every defiling practice.

Here we may well pause and ask ourselves, How much do we know of this drawing near, of entering within the veil? We may, indeed, know something of that other exhortation of which the apostle speaks in chapter 4, when he says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” That is fleeing to a refuge to escape the storms of life: this is turning to our home to bask in the sunshine of love. There is a vast difference between a refuge and a home. A refuge is a place to which we flee for a shelter in the time of storm. A home is a place where our affections find their rest. We all know Christ as a refuge to whom we flee in our troubles, but how little we know Him as the home of our affections. Christ is indeed “an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest... a great rock in a weary land” (Isa. 32:2). And blessed indeed, as we pass through this world with its withering blasts, its barrenness and weariness, to have One to whom we can turn for shelter and relief. Let us, however, remember that, if we only flee to Christ as a shelter in the time of storm, when the storm is passed we shall be in danger of leaving Him. Alas! this is what happens too often with each one of us. We turn to Him in the storm; we neglect Him in the calm. But if our affections are drawn to Him where He is, if we see that His place is our place in heaven itself then the place where He is will become the home of our affections, where we can have fellowship with Jesus in a scene on which no shadow of death will ever fall, and where all tears are wiped away.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 10:23-29: The Path and Its Dangers

Hebrews 10:23-25. The more we realize and use our privilege of drawing near to God within the veil, the better we shall be able to face the path with its dangers through the wilderness. Thus the exhortation, “Let us draw near,” is followed by the exhortation, “Let us hold fast the confession of the hope” (JND). There is a bright hope set before us, and He that has given the promise of the hope will be faithful to His word. But there is the danger of giving up “the confession” of the hope by settling down in this world. It is only as we look to Him who is faithful that we shall be able to hold fast without wavering.

Moreover, in the midst of sorrows, difficulties and dangers, we shall need the mutual support of one another. We may at times be tested by isolation, but practical fellowship is God’s way for His people. Let us then consider one another and not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. The vanity and self-sufficiency of the flesh may esteem the help of others of little value; but a true sense of our own nothingness will lead us, not only to look first, and above all, to the One who is faithful, but also to value the support of our brethren. And those we value we shall consider, seeking to draw out the love we need and the practical help of their good works. Alas! how easily the flesh, carried away by a little bit of spite, can indulge its spleen to provoke a brother by deliberately and needlessly saying what is known to be offensive. Let us rather seek to provoke to love by showing love.

None can neglect the gathering together of God's people without loss. To forsake the gatherings of the saints is a sure sign of waning affection. Oftentimes a course of habitual neglect of the meetings precedes leaving an assembly to turn back to the world or worldly religion. As "the day"—the day of glory—approaches, the difficulties will increase, making it all the more needful that we should seek the support of one another and not neglect the assembling together of the saints.

Hebrews 10:26-31. The apostle has considered the danger of letting go our hope, slighting one another, and forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. Now he warns us of the more serious danger of apostasy that assails the Christian profession. The willful sin is apostatizing from the Christian faith. The apostle is not speaking of a backslider who may go back into the world, like Demas, of whom we read in another epistle. Such an one can be recovered. The apostate not only gives up Christianity, but he takes up some human religion after having professed Christianity. He practically says, "I have tried Christianity, but I find Judaism, or Buddhism, or some other religion, better." For such there is no more sacrifice for sin, only a fearful looking for of judgment. Such an one treats with contempt the Son of God, despises the sacrifice of Christ, and insults the Spirit of grace.

The apostate must be left to God. It is not for us to take vengeance. God cannot trust us with vengeance. We are definitely told that vengeance belongs to the Lord. The apostate will find that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10:32-34. Further, the apostle warns us not to be discouraged by sufferings, reproaches and afflictions. There is the ever-present danger of shrinking from the path of faith because of the reproach and suffering entailed. These believers had begun well. Having been enlightened by the truth, they at once found themselves in conflict for the truth. But in that conflict they endured, and whole-heartedly associated with those who were suffering for Christ's Name. They even took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing they had in heaven a better and enduring substance.

Hebrews 10:35-39. Such confidence will have its bright reward, but in the meantime we need patience to submit to the will of God while waiting to receive the promise. The waiting time is but a little while, then "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Until He comes, the path of the believer is a path of faith. It ever has been for, in days of old, it was as true as it is today that, according to the words of the prophet Habakkuk, "The just shall live by faith."

God will have no pleasure in the one who draws back. The apostate draws back to perdition: but of those to whom the apostle is writing, he can with confidence say, "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 11:1-3: The Path of Faith

Hebrews 11:1. The introductory verses present the great principles of faith. The first verse is hardly a definition of faith, but rather a statement of the effect of faith. It tells us what faith does, rather than what faith is. Faith substantiates things hoped for. It makes very real to our souls the things to which we look forward. It gives us the conviction of things not seen. The unseen things become as real to the believer as though present to sight, "yea, much more so because there is deception in things seen" (JND).

Hebrews 11:2. By faith the elders obtained a good report. It was not by their works or by their lives but by their faith that they obtained a good report. They were men and women of like passions with us, and their lives were often marred with many a failure, and their works were on occasion to be condemned. Nevertheless, in spite of all failure, they were marked by faith in God; and after hearing their report, we are again reminded at the end of the chapter that it was by faith they obtained a good report.

Hebrews 11:3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God. The natural man, with enmity to God in his heart, seeks by reason to account for the formation of the universe without God. He would feign find the origin of the world in matter and forces of nature. The result is that he gropes in the dark and finds no certainty in his speculations. The theories that are hailed with delight as the last word in wisdom by one generation are rejected as untenable nonsense by the following generation. Man is only occupied with the things that appear. God definitely states that what is seen does not take its origin from things which appear. By reason men lead themselves into a sea of conflicting speculations: by faith the believer understands how the worlds were framed. We know that the origin of matter is not from matter, for things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. Faith knows that all the worlds came into being "by the Word of God."

Thus the introductory verses present three great principles of faith: first, faith makes real to us things unseen; second, faith obtains for its possessors a good report; third, faith leads us to understand things that lie outside the comprehension of the natural mind.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 11:4-7: Faith Drawing Nigh to God

Passing from the introductory verses we come to the first main division of the chapter, in which faith is seen to be the great principle of approach to God, as set forth in Abel; of deliverance from death, as exemplified in Enoch; and of escape from judgment, as presented in Noah. Thus by faith the individual believer is set in right relationships with God.

Hebrews 11:4. In Abel we have set forth the only way in which a sinner can approach God. Abel knew that he was a sinner and that God is a holy God who cannot pass over sins. How, then, was he to be right with God? By faith he took the only possible way for a sinner under the sentence of death. He came to God on the ground of the death of a victim to which no sin attached. His sacrifice to God spoke of Jesus, the Lamb of God, and thus Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts. God did not testify of his life, or even of his faith, but of the sacrifice which his faith brought. This is still the way of blessing for a sinner, and the only way. The one who believes in Jesus, and pleads His great sacrifice, obtains witness that he is righteous. The word to such is, "in Him every one that believes is justified" (Acts 13:39). Thus it is that Abel being dead yet speaks. He still speaks of the way of faith by which a sinner can obtain blessing.

Hebrews 11:5-6. In Enoch we have presented another great trait of faith: it delivers from death. Of Enoch we read that by faith he was translated that he should not see death. In spite of sight and reason, and contrary to all experience, he looked to be translated without seeing death. Only faith could look for an event that had never taken place before in the history of men. So the believer today looks, not for death, but translation. We wait for an event that has no parallel in the history of Christendom. We wait for the sound of the trumpet and the voice of the Lord to call us to meet Him in the air. The natural man looks with dread for death to close his history on earth: only faith can look to be translated without passing through death.

In the history in Genesis, nothing is said of the faith of Enoch, but we are twice told that he “walked with God.” It is to this fact that the apostle apparently refers when he says that, before Enoch’s translation, “he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Upon this testimony the apostle argues that he must have had faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God. The one who comes to God must believe, not only that God is, but that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:7. In Noah we see how faith escapes the judgment of God. He was warned by God of coming judgment when outwardly there was not the slightest sign of impending doom for, when God gave the warning, the coming judgment was “not seen as yet.” As far as things seen were concerned, everything went on as usual. The Lord tells us that the men of that day ate and drank, married wives and were given in marriage. Nevertheless, the man of faith believed the warning of God and, moved with fear, availed himself of the provision that God made, and thus escaped the judgment that overwhelmed the world. By the course he took in faith, he condemned the world that refused to believe the testimony of God to coming judgment, and became the heir with that long line of believers who, by their faith in God’s Word, are accounted righteous.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 11:8-22: Faith Laying Hold of the World to Come

With verse 8 we enter upon another division of the chapter setting forth the faith that embraces the purpose of God for the world to come, enabling the believer to walk as a stranger and a pilgrim in this present world. In this division, extending to verse 22, five Old Testament saints are mentioned by name: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, each having their distinguishing marks of faith, but all looking on to the future world of glory.

Hebrews 11:8. Abraham is the main witness to the faith that lays hold of the purposes of God, leading him to look on to another world and walk as a stranger in this world. He was called to go out of the country in which he had lived in view of another country which he would afterward receive. If God calls a man out of this present world, it is because He has a better world into which to bring him. It will be remembered that Stephen commences his address before the Jewish council by saying, “The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham.” That is a wonderful statement, but the statement at the end of the address is more wonderful, for Stephen, looking up steadfastly into heaven and seeing Jesus standing on the right hand of God, can say, “I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.”

The beginning of the call is that the God of glory appears to a man on earth: the end is that a Man appears in the glory of God in heaven. Directly the Lord Jesus takes His place in glory, we see clearly what Abraham saw dimly—the full result of the call of God. We, like Abraham, have been called according to the purpose of God (2 Tim. 1:9); but this means we have been called out of this present world to have part with Christ in the home of glory where He is, to be actually with Him and like Him—conformed to the image of God’s Son (Phil. 3:14; Rom. 8:29; 2 Thess. 2:14).

Moreover, in Abraham we have not only a striking illustration of the sovereign call of God, but also a bright example of the response of faith. First, we read, “He went out, not knowing whither he went.” To leave your country, not knowing whither you are going, would appear to the natural man simple madness and contrary to all reason and prudence. This, however, is the very occasion for faith to shine. It was enough for the faith of Abraham that God had called him, and God knew whither He was leading him At times we want to see what will be the result of taking a step in obedience to God’s Word; consequently, we hesitate to take the step. Human prudence would carefully weight up results: divinely given faith leaves the result of obedience with God.

Second, Abraham not only went out in faith but, having left the old scene, he walked by faith before he obtained the new. Thus, together with Isaac and Jacob, he put on the stranger and pilgrim character. To him the land he was in was a strange country and he himself a pilgrim dwelling in tents. Is not this the true position of the Christian today? We have been called out of the world around us; we are not yet in the new world to which we are going. In the meantime we are strangers in a strange world, and pilgrims going on to another world.

Third, Abraham looked for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Here we learn what it was that sustained him as a pilgrim in a strange land: he looked on to the future blessing which God has for His people. He was surrounded by the cities of men which, in that day as in this, had no righteous foundations. For this reason the cities of men are doomed to destruction. Abraham looked on to the city of God which, founded on righteousness, will never be moved. We know from verse 16 and also from chapter 12:22 That this is “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Thus Abraham takes the path of faith in the light of the world to come.

But faith looks on to the city of God—the heavenly Jerusalem; and when that fair city comes into view, with all its glory and blessedness—the city where there is no sorrow, no crying, no death and no night— then it will be seen how right and how wise was Abraham, and how wise are all those who follow in his steps, in letting go this present world and walking as strangers and pilgrims to the city of God.

Hebrews 11:11-12. In Sarah we further learn that faith not only looks to God in the face of pressing difficulties, but trusts in God in spite of natural impossibilities. She did not look at the ordinary means of obtaining a son or reason, “How can this be?” Her confidence was in God, that He would faithfully carry out His own Word in His own way. God honored her faith by giving her a child “when she was past age.” Thus God secures a great company of people according to His purpose, but does so in His own way, from one “as good as dead.” As so often in the ways of God, He carries out His plans by vessels of weakness in circumstances that seem hopeless. He brings strength out of weakness, meat out of the eater, life out of death, and “so many as the stars of the sky in multitude” from one as good as dead. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

Hebrews 11:13-16. Further, we are told that these saints not only lived in faith, but they also “died in faith,” not having received the promises. They having died, God gives us a wonderful summary of their lives. In their history we know that there was much failure, for they were men of like passions with ourselves, and their failures have been recorded for our warning. Here the failure is passed over, and God records all that in their lives was the fruit of His own grace. These verses are God’s epitaph upon the Patriarchs.

First, we are told that they looked beyond things seen. They saw the promises “afar off.” They were persuaded in their minds of the certainty of the future glory and they heartily embraced the hope of glory.

Second, the future glory being heartily embraced produced a practical effect in their lives—they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Third, confessing themselves to be strangers and pilgrims, they gave a clear witness to God, “For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek [their] country.”

Fourth, they overcame the opportunities to return to the world which they had left. Those who answer to the call of God and separate from this present world will find that the devil will seek to draw them back into it by giving them opportunities to return. The lust of the flesh, the attractions of the world, the claims of natural relationships, the business circumstances of life, will in various ways and at different times open to us opportunities to return. Abraham declared plainly that he was a stranger and a pilgrim: Lot declared plainly that he merely followed a man, for three times it is recorded that he went with Abraham. So, when the opportunity came, Lot embraced it and returned to the cities of the plain, while Abraham passed on to the city of God. Alas! how many since Lot’s day, not having embraced the promise, have embraced the opportunity to turn from a path which is impossible to nature and a constant trial to the flesh.

Would we escape the opportunities to return, then let us see that we declare plainly that we are on the Lord’s side. Would we declare plainly, then let us definitely accept the path of separation from the world as strangers and pilgrims. Would we be truly strangers and pilgrims, then let us look on to the vast vista of blessing that is opened to us in the new world; let us be persuaded of the reality of the coming glory and heartily embrace it in our affections.

Fifth, having refused the opportunities to return to their own country, they were free to press on with “desire” to a “better country,” that is “an heavenly.”

Sixth, of men whose lives are thus characterized we read, “God is not ashamed to be called their God.” In the details of their lives there were many failures, and much of which they doubtless were ashamed, but the great governing principles of their lives, which moved them and gave character to their walk, were such that God was not ashamed to own them and to be called their God.

Seventh, for such God has prepared a city, and in that city all in their lives that was of God will have a glorious answer.

If these things mark us in this our day, may we not say, in spite of our many failures, our weaknesses, and our insignificance in the eyes of the world, God will not be ashamed to be called our God?

Hebrews 11:17-19. The life of Abraham illustrates another phase of faith. If the life of faith is tried by the opportunities to turn back which are presented by the devil, it will also be tested to prove its worth by trials sent from God. So we learn that Abraham “was tried” when he was told to offer up Isaac, his only begotten son—the very one through whom the promises were to be fulfilled. His faith answered to the test and enabled him to offer up his son, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead.

Isaac is next brought before us as an example of one who walked in the light of the future, for we read that he “blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.” The history of the blessing of his sons is given in Genesis 27; as we read that sad chapter, in which every member of the family breaks down, we can discover little evidence of any faith. There, Isaac appears to be governed by his appetites and seeking to act according to nature. Here, God, who sees behind all outward failure, lets us know it was by faith Isaac blessed his sons concerning things to come.

Jacob is next mentioned amongst the elders who obtained a good report through faith; but apparently, in his case, God waits until he is dying before He records the act of faith that gave Jacob a place amongst the elders. His course as a saint was marred with many a blemish. A deceiver of his father, a supplanter of his brother, an outcast from his home, a wanderer in a strange land, serving a master whom he cheated and by whom he was deceived, his children a grief to him, Jacob ends at last his checkered career as a stranger in Egypt. Nevertheless, he was a true saint of God, and his stormy life had a bright sunset. Rising above nature, he acts in faith in blessing the sons of Joseph. Nature would have given the first place to the elder, but Jacob, knowing by faith that God had purposed the younger for the chief place, crossed his hands, and, in spite of the protest from Joseph, he gives the younger the first blessing.

Lastly, Joseph is brought before us as an example of faith looking on to the future, for we read that, when dying, he made mention of the departing of Israel. Never had man wielded such power or occupied such a place of worldly glory as Joseph in Egypt, yet when he is dying all the glory of this world fades from his vision. Instead of looking back to the past glories of Egypt, Joseph is looking on to the coming glories of Israel. At that moment it looked very unlikely that Israel would ever leave Egypt. They had settled down in Goshen and we read that “they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly.” However, faith saw that one hundred and fifty years hence Israel would be delivered from Egypt to enter their own promised land, and faith gave commands in view of their departure.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 11:23-40: Faith Overcoming the Present World

The early part of the chapter presents the faith by which a believer draws nigh to God on the ground of sacrifice and finds deliverance from death and judgment (verses 4-7); then there passes before us the faith by which the believer walks through this world as a stranger and a pilgrim in the light of the world to come (verses 8-22); in the third division of the chapter, commencing with verse 23, we see the faith that overcomes this present world. In the second section, Abraham was the great example of one whose faith laid hold of the world to come, the heavenly country, and the city which has foundations. In this last portion, Moses is the outstanding example of a believer who, by faith,

overcomes the present world.

Hebrews 11:23. In connection with the birth of Moses, we are reminded of the faith of his parents which not only led them to ignore the king's commandment but to overcome fear of him. It is the fear of some impending evil that is often more difficult to overcome than the evil itself. Strangely enough, as we might think, what drew forth the activity of their faith was the beauty of their child. They acted in faith "because they saw the child beautiful" (JND). Apparently, it was faith working by love.

Hebrews 11:24. Passing on to Moses himself, we have a striking witness to the way faith overcomes this present world with all that it can offer in the way of attraction and glory. The parents overcame the fear of the world; their son overcame its favors. This makes the faith of Moses all the more striking, for we may overcome the fear of the world and yet fall under its favor.

In order to realize the fine quality of this man's faith, it is well to recall what Scripture presents as to his remarkable character, as well as the high position he occupied in the world. Stephen, in his address before the Jewish council, gives a brief but remarkable summary of the character and position of Moses (Acts 7:20-22). There we are told that he was "exceeding fair," that he "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." Here, then, was a man whose appearance was attractive, whose mind was well-stored with all the learning of the leading country of the world in that day, who could apply his wisdom with weighty words, and follow up his words with mighty deeds. Moses, then, was in every way fitted to fill with distinction the highest position in this world. Moreover, this great position was within his grasp, for he was by adoption the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and thus in the direct line to the throne of the Pharaohs.

Under circumstances so favorable to advancement in this world, how does Moses act? First we read, "When he had become great"—when the moment was favorable for him to take advantage of his great abilities and position—he turned his back on all this world's glory and "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

Hebrews 11:25. Second, we learn what he chooses, and his choosing is as striking as his refusing. In his day there were a large number of people who formed the lowest class in Egypt. They were unwanted foreigners, treated with the utmost rigor as slaves. Their lives were made bitter by reason of their hard bondage as they labored at brick-making and worked in the fields under the scorching sun (Ex. 1:13-14). But, in spite of their low estate and hard bondage, these slaves were the people of God. With these people Moses chose to throw in his lot, preferring to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

In the presence of this remarkable "refusing" and "choosing," we may well ask what was the spring of his actions? In one word we are told that it was faith. In faith he refused the world; in faith he chose affliction with the people of God. Moreover, he acted, as faith ever does, in the face of providence, in spite of the dictates of natural feelings, and in a way that appeared to outrage common sense.

Against the course he pursued, providence might very well have been pleaded. Could it not have been argued, with every appearance of reason, that it would be wrong to ignore the remarkable providence by which God had placed a man, doomed to death by the command of the king, in the highest position before the king? Right natural feeling could have been urged, for it might very well have been said that gratitude to his benefactress demanded that he should remain at court. Reason and common sense could be urged, for it could be said that his great abilities and his high position with its consequent influence could surely be used to promote the interests of his poor brethren.

Faith, however, looks to God, knowing that while providence, right natural feelings and common sense may have their place, yet they cannot be a true guide or rule of conduct in the path of faith; hence if providence brought Moses into the court of the king, faith led him out. By faith he refused his providential connection with the greatest people in the world to choose a path of identification with the most despised in the land.

Hebrews 11:26. If faith acts thus, there must be some hidden power—some secret motive—that enables faith to take a path so contrary to nature. This brings us to the "esteeming" of Moses. Verse 24 gives us the "refusing" of Moses; verse 25 the "choosing" of Moses; verse 26 the "esteeming" of Moses, which discovers to us the secret of his refusing and choosing.

This esteeming will show that faith is not a step in the dark. Faith has its secret motives as well as its outward energies. Faith forms a deliberate estimate of values, faith has a long outlook, and faith has an object. The faith of Moses formed a true estimate of things seen and unseen. On the one hand, there was his great position in the world, and connected with it all the pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt. On the other hand, connected with the people of God, there was at that time suffering and reproach. Having considered, he refused the world and chose to suffer with the people of God.

Why did he thus act? Because his faith had a long outlook, for we read, "He had respect unto the recompence of the reward," and again, "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." He looked beyond the treasures and the pleasures of Egypt on the one hand, and beyond the suffering and reproach of the people of God on the other. By faith he looked on and saw "the King in His beauty" and "the land that is very far off." In the light of the glory of that land, and attracted by the beauty of the King, he abandoned all the glory of the world. In the light of the coming world he formed a true estimate of the present world. He saw that connected with the reproach of Christ there were greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt.

He saw that over all the glory of this world there was the shadow of death and judgment. He saw that the pleasures of this world are only for a season, and all the treasures of Egypt end in a grave. Even so had Joseph found in an earlier day, for he too had occupied a great place in Egypt. Next to the king he had wielded a power that no mortal man before or since had ever wielded in this world. Nevertheless, it all ended in a coffin, for the last words of the Book of Genesis are these, "Joseph died... and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." So much for Egypt's pleasures and Egypt's treasures. "Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away." All the glory of this world at last sinks down to a coffin. Pharaoh's mighty empire contracts to a narrow grave.

How different with God's people! Their portion in this world is one of suffering and reproach; but to suffer with Christ in reproach is to reign with Christ in glory, for is it not written, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him"? To the man of the world, the refusing and the choosing and the esteeming of Moses seem the height of folly. Let us see, then, how it works out in the case of Moses. Pass on one thousand five hundred years from the day of his refusing and choosing, and we shall begin to see the recompense of the reward. Turn to that great scene described in the opening verses of Matthew 17 and we shall see that the land that was far off has drawn nigh and the King is displayed in His beauty. We are carried above the earth into a high mountain apart, and for a moment we see Christ in His glory, when the fashion of His

countenance is altered. The face once marred more than any man's now shines as the sun. The garments of humiliation are laid aside and the garments that shine as the light are put on. This was a wonderful appearance, but there are other wonders to follow, for we read, "Behold, there appeared...Moses and Elias talking with Him." Fifteen centuries before, Moses disappeared from the sight of the world and this world's king to share the reproach of Christ with His poor and despised people: now he appears again, but this time to share the glory of the King of kings in company with a prophet and apostles. There was a time when he endured as seeing Him who is invisible; now he is "with Him" in glory. In the light of this recompense of the reward, who will say that Moses missed his opportunity when he refused the world and chose to identify himself with the suffering people of God?

Hebrews 11:27. Well it is for us to profit by this shining example of faith. Good indeed if we weigh the riches of Christ against the treasures of this world and esteem the former greater than the latter. Well, too, if we look beyond all self-denials and world-refusals and see the recompense of the reward in the coming glory; above all, well if we endure in the presence of all opposition, insults and reproach, by seeing Him who is invisible. In the presence of the opposition and insults of his enemies, Stephen endured without a word of anger or resentment by seeing Him who is invisible, for we read, "He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus" (Acts 7:55). Let us not be content with knowing that He sees us, but let us seek to walk in the energy of the faith that sees Him. It is a great thing to realize that He sees us; it is yet more to walk as seeing Him by faith, while waiting for the moment when we shall actually see Him face to face,

There are, moreover, further lessons for us in the story of Moses. We have seen that his faith lifted him above the fear of man; we are now to see that it leads to the holy fear of God. Faith recognizes that we are sinners, and that God is a holy God who cannot pass over sin. Israel as sinners were under judgment equally with the Egyptians. How, then, were they to escape the destruction of their firstborn? God provides a way of shelter from judgment—the blood of the lamb—and God says, "When I see the blood, I will pass over." Faith rests, not on our estimate of the blood of the Lamb, but on God's perfect estimate. Thus by faith Moses "kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them."

By faith in God's value of the blood, the children of Israel were passed over in Egypt; then, by faith "they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land." God was met as a judge in Egypt: He intervenes as a Savior at the Red Sea. There the people were told to "stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah;" and there God held back the waters of the Red Sea so that His people passed through on dry land. Sheltered by the blood from judgment in Egypt, they were saved from all their enemies at the Red Sea.

By the death of Christ the claims of a holy God are met, and by the death and resurrection of Christ the believer has passed through death and judgment. In type the passover presents Christ offering Himself without spot to God: the Red Sea presents Christ delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. The Egyptians assaying to pass through the Red Sea were drowned. For nature to face death without faith is certain destruction. Alas! how many there are today who make the outward profession of Christianity yet attempt to obtain salvation by their own efforts, and face death apart from faith in the blood of Christ, only to meet destruction.

If by faith the people of Israel were saved from judgment and delivered from Egypt, so by faith they overcame the opposition of the enemy that would prevent them entering the promised land. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." Israel adopted an unheard of method of besieging a city; it was not simply walking round the city for seven days that brought down the walls, but faith that obeyed God's Word.

Faith, moreover, obtains for a woman with a disreputable character a place amongst these Old Testament worthies. "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not." As a harlot she would come under the condemnation of men. By faith she comes into the great cloud of witnesses that obtain a good report from God.

Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, David and Samuel complete the list of the men of faith mentioned by name. It has been remarked that in this list of names the historical order is not followed. In history Barak came before Gideon, Jephthae before Samson. This may be to emphasize the fact that in the days of the Judges the faith of Gideon was of a brighter order than that of Barak, and that Samson's faith exceeded that of Jephthae. David may be classed with the Judges as himself a ruler; and Samuel may be mentioned last to connect him with the prophets who came after the kings.

Hebrews 11:33-34. In the closing verses the apostle refers to signal acts of faith to set forth the striking qualities of faith. First, he refers to incidents that emphasize the power of faith that subdues kingdoms and overcomes armies; that is strong in weakness and valiant in fight; that triumphs over the power of nature, as represented by the lion, and quenches the violence of the elements such as fire; and that even obtains victory over death.

Hebrews 11:35-36. Second, the apostle passes before us the endurance of faith that in torture refused to accept deliverance, and in trial endured mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonments.

Hebrews 11:37-38. Third, he speaks more particularly of the sufferings of faith. "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword."

Lastly, we see the reproach of faith. The world drove the men of faith from their midst, treating them as despised outcasts. They became wanderers in the earth. By its treatment of God's worthies, the world proved itself to be unworthy. In condemning the men of faith, it condemned itself

Hebrews 11:39. Nevertheless, in spite of their acts of power, their endurance, their sufferings and their reproach, they did not in their day receive the promised blessing. In the past they lived by faith; today they have a good report; in the future they will enjoy the recompense of the reward when they enter upon the promised blessings. Great will be the blessing of these Old Testament saints; yet God has provided some "better thing" for the Christian. When God has completed His purpose in calling out the church, the Old Testament saints together with the church will enter upon the fullness of blessing. They wait, and we wait, for the resurrection morn in order to be "made perfect."

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 2:1-4: The Authority of the Word of the Son

Hebrews 2:1. The first chapter has asserted the fame of the Son when come into the world. As the exceeding glory of the speaker is recognized, it becomes the hearers to take earnest heed to what is said. To make a profession of hearing and afterward neglect the great salvation announced by the Lord by going back to Judaism was fatal. The snare was not merely letting slip the things they had heard, but the far greater danger of the professors themselves slipping from Christian ground by returning to Judaism. This would be apostasy. (See JND translation.)

Throughout the epistle the writer is addressing Jews who have made a profession of Christianity, and among them he includes himself. In the first chapter he says, God has “spoken unto us”; here he says, “We ought to give the more earnest heed.” Others have pointed out that in this epistle the church is not addressed as such, but rather believers individually. They are viewed as having made a profession which is presumed to be real unless, by turning back from Christ, it is proved to be merely outward.

Hebrews 2:2. God maintained the authority of the word communicated by angels by attaching a just punishment to every transgression of and disobedience to that word. How much more will God maintain the authority of the word of the Son. If there was no escape from the consequences of disobeying the law given by the disposition of angels, still less will there be any escape for the one who, having nominally made a profession of Christianity, treats the word of Christ with indifference and gives it up to return to Judaism.

Hebrews 2:3-4. In its strict interpretation, the salvation of which the writer speaks is not the gospel of the grace of God as presented today; nor does it exactly contemplate the indifference of a sinner to the Gospel. Yet an application in this sense may surely be made, for it must ever be true that there can be no escape for the one who finally neglects the gospel. Here it is the salvation which was preached by the Lord to the Jews, by which a way of escape was opened to the believing remnant from the judgment about to fall on the nation. This salvation was afterward preached by Peter and the other apostles in the early chapters of the Acts, when they said, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” This testimony was borne witness to by God with “signs and wonders” and “divers miracles.” This gospel of the kingdom will again be preached after the church has been completed.

To have broken the law was solemn; to turn from the preaching of grace is worse; but most solemn of all is to profess to believe the word, and afterward treat it with contempt by giving it up and turning back to Judaism or some other religion. This is apostasy; and for the apostate Scripture holds out no hope.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 2:5-18: The Glory of the Son of Man

Having asserted the authority of the word of the Son, and warned us against neglecting His word, the writer continues to unfold to us the glories of Christ. Already he has passed before us His glories as the Son of God in eternity, and as manifest in flesh: now we are to learn His glories as the Son of Man.

Hebrews 2:5. His glory as the Son of Man will be brought into display in the world to come though, even now, faith can see Jesus crowned with glory and honor.

It would seem that “the world to come” can hardly be heaven. We cannot speak of heaven as “to come.” We have yet to come to heaven, but it exists and always has existed. Scripture speaks of three worlds: the world before the flood, of which Peter writes, “the world that then was”; the present world, “the heavens and the earth which are now” (2 Peter 3:6-7); and, in this passage, “the world to come.”

“The world to come” refers to the millennial earth, introducing an order of blessing which does not yet exist. This new world of blessing will be in subjection to the Son of Man and thus the scene for the display of His glory. In one sense, the present world is placed in subjection to angels, who are used as instruments in God’s hand for carrying out His providential government for the protection of the heirs of salvation as they pass on their way to glory. In the world to come the angels will give place to the rule of the Son of Man.

Hebrews 2:6-9. To bring out this great glory of Christ, the writer quotes from Psalm 8, where the question is raised by David, “What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?” The question brings out the littleness of man. the answer, the greatness of Christ, the Son of Man. David, when contemplating the moon and the stars, feels his own insignificance in comparison with their immensity, and exclaims, “What is man?” Looking at man fallen, he is indeed very small: looking at man according to the counsels of God as set forth in Christ, the Son of Man, he is very great. Led by the Spirit of God, the writer of Hebrews sees Christ in the Son of Man of Psalm 8, and can say, “We see Jesus.”

David says, “Thou hast put all things under His feet.” The Spirit of God tells us that this is Jesus reigning in the world to come, and that the “all things” include, not only things on earth, but the whole created universe, and every created being, for “He left nothing that is not put under Him.”

David says, “Thou hast made Him a little lower than the angels.” The Spirit of God says that Jesus was “made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death.” In a world where God has been dishonored, the Son of Man perfectly glorified God and vindicated His holy character by suffering death. Man tastes death as the result of sin: the Son of Man tastes death by the grace of God. He tastes death for all, so that grace might flow out to all.

David says, “Thou... hast crowned him with glory and honor.” The Spirit of God leads faith to say, That is Jesus and “We see (Him) crowned with glory and honor.” God has thus counseled that, in the Person of Christ, Man is to be Lord of all. The Maker and Upholder of all, having become Man, will be the Center and Head of the vast universe. This is a glory that eclipses the glory of angels. No angel has, or ever will have, the place of universal dominion.

There thus passes before us the past, present and future glories of the Son of Man. In the past He tasted death for everything; in the present He is crowned with glory and honor; in the future the whole universe will be brought into subjection to Him.

Hebrews 2:10. Verses 5-9 have unfolded the glories of Christ in connection with the world to come. From verse 10 to the end of the chapter we learn the further glory and blessedness of Christ in connection with the many sons who are being brought to glory.

The quotation from Psalm 45 in the first chapter has already told us that it is the purpose of God that Christ should have companions to share His coming glory. In the remaining portion of this chapter these companions are referred to as the “sons” of God, and the “brethren” of Christ. Further, we learn all that Christ has passed through to deliver His brethren from death, the devil and sins, as well as His present service to succor and sustain them as He leads them on to glory.

If, however, many sons are to be brought to glory, it must be in a way that becomes the holy character of God. So we read, “It became Him”—God—“for whom are all things, and by whom are all things” that Christ should not only taste death but, in order to be the Leader of His people, enter into their circumstances and sufferings, and through these sufferings be perfected. Ever perfect in His Person, He was perfectly fitted to fill the position of Leader of His people through the wilderness with all its sufferings. He thus becomes the “Leader of their salvation.” He is able to save them from every danger on their way to glory.

Hebrews 2:11. From verse 11 onwards we learn the blessed results that flow to believers through Christ having entered into their position, borne the consequences of that position, and in it maintained the glory of God.

First, the Sanctifier, Christ, and the sanctified, believers, are viewed as all of one. This wonderful expression would seem to indicate that Christ, having come into our position and borne the consequences, has so truly brought us into His position before God, as Man, that He and His own—the Sanctifier and the sanctified—are viewed as forming one company before God. It is well to remark, however, that the Word of God never says of Jesus and of men that they are all one, but that “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one.” For this cause, because of the position into which He has brought them through His sanctifying work, He is not ashamed to call them “brethren.”

Believers are sanctified; being sanctified they are brought into the same position before God as Christ—all of one; and, being all of one, He is not ashamed to call them brethren. We know from the Gospels that it was not until Christ was risen that He called His disciples “brethren.” The Lord Himself ever walked in relationship with God as His Father. Never once in His path do we hear Him address God as “My God”; it is always “My Father.” Only on the cross, when made sin, does He say “My God.” We, however, are brought into this relationship, not by incarnation, but through redemption. It is therefore not until He is risen that the Lord can say, “I ascend to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God;” and speaks immediately of His disciples as “My brethren.”

Hebrews 2:12-13. Three quotations from the Old Testament are given to prove how blessedly the Sanctifier is identified as one with the sanctified—His brethren. First, in Psalm 22:22, the Lord declares in resurrection, “I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee.” Here the Lord identifies Himself with His brethren: on God’s side to declare the Father’s Name; on our side to lead the praise of His people to the Father. That which was foretold in Psalm 22 is expressed in John 20 and expounded in Hebrews 2.

Second, in Isaiah 8:17 (Septuagint version) we read, “I will put My trust in Him.” Taking a position as Man, the Lord identified Himself with His own in the only proper life for a man to live—the life of dependence upon God.

Third, in Isaiah 8:18 we read, “Behold, I and the children that Jehovah hath given Me.” Here again we see the identification of Christ with the excellent of the earth—not with the children of men—but with the children that God had given Him.

Hebrews 2:14-15. Verses 12 and 13 have shown how blessedly Christ has identified us with Himself in His position before God. Now we are to learn the further truth that He has identified Himself with us in our position of weakness and death before God. If the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He likewise partakes of the same. If they are under the dominion of death and the devil, He, having taken flesh and blood, is able to enter into death to annul the devil who had the power of death, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. The devil knows that the wages of sin is death, and is not slow to use this solemn truth to keep the sinner in the fear of death and its consequences all his life. The Lord, on whom death has no claim, goes into death and bears the death penalty that was upon us, and thus robs the devil of his power to terrify the believer with death. We may indeed pass through death, not as the penalty of sin leading to judgment, but only as the gateway out of all suffering into the fullness of blessing.

Hebrews 2:16-18. It was not to the help of angels that the Lord came, but to take up the cause of the seed of Abraham. To do this it behooved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren. Thus He fully enters into their position, though not their state. Here, for the first time in the epistle, we learn of His gracious work for us as a merciful and faithful High Priest. In order to exercise this needed service He must, through His life of humiliation and trial, enter into all our difficulties and temptations. Then, when that perfect life is finished, He goes into death to make propitiation for our sins, in order that they may be forgiven. That great work being accomplished, He is able from His place in glory to exercise His priestly grace, and in mercy and in faithfulness succors them that are tempted, because He Himself has suffered being tempted.

The suffering is through not yielding to the temptation. If we yield, the flesh does not suffer; on the contrary, it indulges itself by the temptation, finding its pleasure in the thing by which it is tempted. It enjoys the pleasure of sin at the moment, though for the sin it will finally have to suffer. The Lord was tempted, only to bring out His perfection that never for a moment yielded to the temptation. This entailed suffering. He endured hunger rather than yield to the devil’s temptation. Having thus suffered in the presence of temptation, He is able to succor His people and enable them to stand firm in the presence of temptation. With a perfectly tender heart He enters into our temptations and succors us with mercy and faithfulness. Too often we can show mercy at the expense of faithfulness or act in faithfulness at the expense of mercy. He, in the perfection of His way, can show mercy without compromising faithfulness.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 3:1-6: The High Priest of Our Profession

Hebrews 3:1-6. The latter part of chapter 2 has shown the gracious way the Lord has taken in order that He may exercise His priestly sympathy with His suffering people. In the opening verses of this chapter the House of God is introduced to show the sphere in which His priesthood is exercised.

Hebrews 3:1. In the introductory verse the Jewish believers are addressed as “holy brethren” and “partakers of the heavenly calling.” As Jews they had been accustomed to being called “brethren” and were partakers of the earthly calling. As Christians they are “holy brethren” and, in

common with all other Christians, are the subjects of the “calling on high of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

The glories of Christ having been set before us in chapters 1 and 2, we are now exhorted to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus.” The title Apostle is especially connected with the truth of the Son of God presented in the first chapter, in which the Son is seen coming to earth and speaking to men on behalf of God. The title High Priest is connected with the second chapter, in which the Son of Man is presented as going from earth to heaven to serve before God on behalf of men. The true end of all ministry is not simply to occupy hearers with the truth ministered, but to bring them into touch with the end of all ministry – to leave them “considering” Jesus.

It should be noticed that here it is Jesus, not “Christ Jesus” as in the Authorized Version. Every Jew would own the Messiah, but only the Christian would recognize that the Christ had come in the Person of Jesus.

Hebrews 3:2-6. The Spirit of God alludes to Moses and the tabernacle in the wilderness to show that Moses is surpassed by Christ, and that the tabernacle was only a testimony of things to be afterward revealed. Moses was never a priest; his service was rather apostolic in character. He came to the people on behalf of God: Aaron, the priest, went to God on behalf of the people. Moses, under the direction of God, built the tabernacle in the wilderness. Jesus, the true Apostle, is the Builder of the whole universe, of which the tabernacle was a testimony. Moreover, if God dwells in the heaven of heavens, it is also true that He dwells in the midst of His people who today form His House. The House in its present spiritual form is one of the things of which the material tabernacle was a figure. Moses was faithful in God’s house in the wilderness as a servant. Christ is over God’s House —composed of God’s people — as Son. Thus the introduction of the people of God as forming the House of God shows the sphere in which Christ exercises His priesthood; and therefore a little later we read that we have a great High Priest over the House of God (Heb. 10:21).

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 3:7-19: The Wilderness That Calls for the Service of Christ

Hebrews 3:7-19. The allusion to Moses and the tabernacle very naturally leads to the wilderness journey of God’s people. If the tabernacle is a type of the people of God, the wilderness journey of Israel is typical of the journey of God’s people through this present world with all its dangers. This wilderness journey becomes the occasion that calls for this priestly grace.

Moreover, in the wilderness, the reality of our profession is put to the test by the dangers we have to meet. These Hebrews had made a public profession of Christianity. With profession there is always the possibility of unreality, and hence the “ifs” come in. So the writer says that we are the House of God “if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end.” This is not a warning against being too confident in Christ and the eternal security that He obtains for the believer for, it has been truly said, “There is no ‘if’ either as to Christ’s work or as to glad tidings of God’s grace. There all is unconditional grace to faith.” The warning supposes that those addressed have this assurance, and they are warned against giving it up. That the true believer will hold fast, or rather that God will hold him fast through the priestly grace of Christ to the end, in spite of many a failure, is certain. The believer’s reality is proved by his enduring to the end. The wilderness that tests the true believer exposes the unreality of the mere professor.

Hebrews 3:7-11. To encourage us to hold fast, we are reminded by a quotation from Psalm 95:7-11 of the warnings given by the Spirit of God to Israel in view of the coming of Christ into the world in glory and power to bring the nation into rest. Today is a day of grace and salvation in view of sharing the glory of Christ in the world to come. In such a day of blessing they are warned against acting as their fathers in the wilderness. Israel made the profession of leaving Egypt and following Jehovah through a wilderness scene which abounded with dangers, and in which confidence in God could alone support them to the end. For forty years they saw God’s works of power and mercy providing for their needs and preserving them from every danger. Yet, in spite of every token of His presence, they tempted and put God to the test by saying, “Is Jehovah among us, or not?” They thus proved the hardness of hearts untouched by God’s goodness. Seeking only their own lusts, and ignorant of God’s ways, they clearly showed that, whatever profession they had made, they had no real confidence in God. Of such God said, “They shall not enter into My rest.”

Hebrews 3:12-13. In these verses, the warnings of Psalm 95 are applied to professing Christians. We are to “take heed” lest, through an evil heart of unbelief we turn away from the living God to put once again our confidence in dead forms, thus showing that, whatever profession may have been made, the soul has no confidence in Christ and the grace that, through His finished work, secures to the believer salvation and forgiveness. However, what is contemplated is hardly the adding of Jewish forms to the Christian life, bad as this is, but the giving up of Christ altogether and turning back to Judaism, which is apostasy.

Further, we are not only exhorted to take heed to ourselves but to “exhort one another” each day, while it is still a day of grace and salvation, lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of doing one’s own will. Here it is not the deceitfulness of committing sins, solemn as this is, for one sin leads to another: it is the principle of sin of which the writer speaks, which is lawlessness. We little think how we harden our hearts by doing our own will. We are thus to take heed to ourselves and care for one another. Love should not be indifferent to a brother slipping away by doing his own will.

Hebrews 3:14-19. Believers are not only the House of God, but are also the companions of Christ. Here again it is not the body of Christ, and the members of His body as united to the Head by the Holy Spirit, in which nothing unreal can come. Profession is still in view, assumed to be real, but leaving room for unreality. Therefore it is again said, “if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.” This is not assurance founded on anything in ourselves, which would only be self-righteousness. The assurance insisted upon is grounded upon the Lord Jesus, His propitiatory sacrifice, and the accepted efficacy of His work. Such assurance we are not blamed for having: on the contrary, we are exhorted to hold it fast.

Then referring again to Israel in the wilderness, the writer asks three searching questions to bring out the hardness, sin and unbelief of Israel. First, who was it that, when they heard the Word of God speaking of a rest to come, did provoke? Was it only a few of the people? Alas! it was the great mass, “all that came out of Egypt.” Second, with whom was God grieved forty years? It was with those who, by reason of the hardness of their hearts, chose their own sins. Third, to whom did God swear that they should not enter into His rest? It was to those who believed not. Thus we learn the root sin was unbelief. The unbelief left them exposed to their sins, and sins hardened their hearts.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 3:1-4:16: The High Priest of Our Profession

Hebrews 3:1-4:16. The first two chapters unfold to us the glories of the Person of Christ, and thus prepare us for entering into the blessedness of His service as our great High Priest. In this fresh division of the epistle we learn, first, the sphere in which the priestly service of Christ is exercised—the House of God (3: 1-6); second, the wilderness circumstances which call for this priestly service (3: 7-19); third, we are told of the rest to which the wilderness leads (4:1-11); finally, we learn the gracious means God has provided to preserve us in the wilderness (4:12-16).

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 4:1-11: The Rest to Which the Wilderness Leads

Hebrews 4:1-11. The wilderness journey of the children of Israel, of which the writer has been speaking in chapter 3:7-19, was in view of the rest of Canaan. Into this rest those who came out of Egypt could not enter because of the hardness of their hearts, their sin and their unbelief (Heb. 3:15,17,19).

Like Israel of old, believers today are passing on their way through a wilderness world to the rest of the coming glory. This rest is the great theme of the first eleven verses of chapter 4. Let us note that it is God's rest of which the writer speaks. It is called "His rest" and, in the quotations from the Old Testament, "My rest" (Heb 3:18; 4:1,3,5).

This rest—the rest of God—is wholly future. It is not the present rest of conscience that faith in the Person and work of Christ gives the believer, according to the Lord's words, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Nor is it the rest of heart that is the daily portion of the one who walks in obedience to Christ, submitting to His will, again according to His Word, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29). Nor is it the temporary rest of a tired laborer, of which we read in the Gospels, when the Lord said, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while," words which imply that we must be working again (Mark 6:31).

God can only rest in that which satisfies His love and holiness. God's rest will be reached when God's love has fulfilled all His mind for those He loves. When righteousness is established, and sorrow and sighing flee away, God will "rest in His love" (Zeph. 3:17). "Holiness cannot rest where sin is; love cannot rest where sorrow is" (JND).

The Christian is called out of this world of unrest to have part in the rest of heaven. For the moment he is in the wilderness—neither of the world he has left, nor in heaven to which he is going. Faith keeps in view the heavenly rest to which we are going, which Christ has secured for us, and where Christ is; as we read a little later, He has entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24).

Hebrews 4:1-2. Having this blessed promise, we are warned of seeming to come short of God's rest. The mere professor, who gives up his Christian profession and returns to Judaism, would not only seem to come short; he would actually do so, and perish in the wilderness. But the true believer may appear to come short by turning back to the world and settling down on earth. Of old, Israel heard the good tidings of a land flowing with milk and honey, but they hearkened not to the word. (Compare Heb. 3:18 (JND) with Deut. 1:22-26.) The Christian has still more glorious tidings of yet greater blessedness in heaven's eternal rest. To faith, these coming glories are real. If the Word is not mixed with faith, it can no more profit the hearer now than of old.

Hebrews 4:3-4. Nevertheless, though some in days of old did not believe the glad tidings of the Canaan rest, and though the vast profession today may not believe in the glad tidings of the heavenly rest, the blessed fact remains that God has a future rest, and believers are to enter into that rest. Every step they take is bringing them nearer to God's rest. The mere professor, without personal faith in Christ, will irretrievably fall in the wilderness. God's oath, "If they shall enter into My rest," (a quotation from the Septuagint version of Psalm 95:11) actually means, "They shall not enter into My rest."

The writer refers to creation to show that from the beginning God has had before Him "rest," and to manifest the character of God's rest. After the world was formed and man was created in the image and likeness of God, the creation works of God were finished. This led to creation rest with its two distinctive marks: first, God's satisfaction in all that He had made, as we read, "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good"; second, the entire cessation from all His creation work, as it is written, "He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made" (Gen. 1:31; Gen. 2:2). Thus we learn the two great truths that mark God's rest: the absolute complacency in the result of the labor; and satisfaction being reached, the absolute end of all toil.

Hebrews 4:5. The creation rest is a foreshadowing of the eternal rest. The creation rest was broken into by sin. Nevertheless, God does not give up the settled purpose of His heart to have a rest—an eternal rest—which no sin will ever mar. Thus again, in the days of Joshua, God's rest is kept before us, for once more there is the good news of rest, even though the unbelief of Israel hindered the enjoyment of the Canaan rest, so that God has to say, "They [shall] not enter into My rest" (Psa. 95:11).

Hebrews 4:6. In spite of the fact that sin had broken the creation rest and unbelief marred the Canaan rest, God assures us that He still has a rest before Him, which He calls "My rest," and that there are some who will enter into God's rest, even though those to whom it was first preached missed the rest through their unbelief. God's purpose to secure a rest according to His own heart is not to be thwarted by the sin and unbelief of man.

Hebrews 4:7-8. If the creation rest is marred and the Canaan rest is lost, what is the rest of God which those who believe are to enter? Joshua had failed to bring the people into the Canaan rest. David, therefore, long years after, speaks of another rest in "another day." To set forth this rest, the writer quotes Psalm 95:7-8. This Psalm is a call to Israel to turn to Jehovah with thanksgiving in view of the future coming of Christ to earth to bring the nation into rest. In view of the glad tidings of this fresh day of grace, Israel is warned not to harden their hearts as

in Joshua's day. To refuse this fresh appeal would be to miss the earthly rest under the reign of Christ.

Hebrews 4:9-10. The writer concludes his argument by saying, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God," and the great characteristic of this rest will be cessation from toil, for "he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works." Thus the great truth is established that, whether it be God's heavenly rest for a heavenly people or God's earthly rest for an earthly people, the rest is still future. It is a rest to which faith is pressing on. Moreover, it is not rest from sin, but rest from labor, and not rest from labor because the laborer is tired, but rest because his work is finished. As one has said, "No present rest is the rest of God; and the futurity of that rest is a grand safeguard against the snare for any Christian, most of all for a Jewish one, to seek it now here below. As God cannot rest in sin or misery, neither ought we to allow it even in our desires, still less to make it our life. Now is the time for the labor of love if we know His love, now to seek true worshippers of the Father as He is seeking Himself" (W.K.).

Hebrews 4:11. As the rest is future, and the blessedness of the rest, we are exhorted to labor or to use diligence to enter into the rest that lies before us. Later in the epistle we are again exhorted to "work and labor," to "diligence," to "be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:10-12).

There is the danger that we may despise the rest of God that lies at the end of the journey or grow weary of the labor of love on the way. Israel did both. Let us then beware lest any of us fall after the same example of unbelief. The two great exhortations are, "Let us... fear" lest we despise the promise of the rest (verse 1) and "Let us labor" on the way to the rest (verse 11).

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 4:12-16: God's Provision to Maintain Us in the Wilderness Journey

Hebrews 4:12-16. The concluding verses of the chapter bring before us the two great means by which believers are preserved as they journey through the wilderness to the rest of God: first, the Word of God (verses 12-13); second, the priestly service of Christ (verses 14-16).

Hebrews 4:12-13. We are reminded that the Word of God is not a dead letter; it lives and acts by penetrating the heart of man. The result for the one whose conscience and heart come under its influence is twofold: first, it reveals the thoughts and intents of the heart; second, it brings the soul into the presence of God with whom we have to do.

The Word exposes to us the hidden lusts of the "soul" and the reasonings and unbelief of the "spirit," so revealing to us the true character of the flesh by searching the secret thoughts and intents of the heart. Here it is not a question of outward sins, but rather the hidden motives and springs of evil. The Word discovers to us the hidden depths of the heart, making manifest how much of "self" is the secret motive of the life. Moreover, it brings us into the presence of God. It is God speaking to me, laying bare my heart in His presence, there to confess all that the Word detects. How was it that Israel fell in the wilderness? Was it not because "the word preached did not profit them"? Had they by faith let that Word have its place in their hearts, it would have led them to discover and judge the secret roots of unbelief that hindered them from entering into rest.

Thus everything that would hinder us pressing on to the rest of God, everything that would tempt us to settle down in this world, is detected and judged by the Word, in the presence of God, so that the soul may be set free to pursue the pilgrim path, and labor of love, having the rest of God in view.

Hebrews 4:14. The Word of God, by leading us to judge the secret working of our wills, prepares us to profit by the priestly help and sympathy of Christ. We have not only to contend with the hidden roots of evil in our hearts, but we are encompassed with infirmities and faced with temptations. To deal with the secret evil of our hearts we need the Word; to support us in the presence of infirmities and temptations we need a living Person, One who represents us, One who at every moment knows and interests Himself in all our difficulties and weakness, and One who can sympathize with us, inasmuch as He has experienced the temptations and difficulties that we have to meet.

Such a High Priest we have, "Jesus the Son of God," who has been before us in the path that leads to the rest of God. He has traveled every step of the way; He has passed through the heavens; He has reached the rest of God. In all our weakness He can support us as we tread the wilderness path until we rest where He rests, above and beyond every trial and temptation, where toil has forever ceased.

Having such a High Priest, we are exhorted to hold fast our confession. This is not simply holding fast to the confession that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, blessed and important as this is, but rather the confession that we are partakers of the heavenly calling. Our confession is that, as partakers of the heavenly calling, we are to enter God's rest. The danger is that in the presence of temptation we may, by reason of our infirmities, give up our confession of the heavenly calling and settle down in a round of busy service, if not in the world itself.

Hebrews 4:15. We need the succor and sympathy of our great High Priest, first, because of our infirmities and, secondly, because of temptations we have to meet. Infirmities are the weaknesses that belong to us as being in the body with its varied needs and liability to sickness and accident. Infirmity is not sin, though it may lead to sin. Hunger is an infirmity; to grumble because of hunger would be sin. Paul, learning the sufficiency of the grace of Christ in the presence of his infirmities, can even say, "I rather glory in my infirmities," and again, "I take pleasure in infirmities" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). He would not have gloried in sins or taken pleasure in sinning.

As to temptations, we have to remember that the believer has to meet two forms of temptation: the temptations from the trials without and the temptations from sin within. Both forms of temptation are brought before us by the apostle James. First, he says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." There are various external trials by which the enemy seeks to turn us aside from the heavenly calling and hinder us from pressing on to the rest of God. Then the apostle speaks of a very different character of temptation when he says, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." This is temptation from sin within. (James 1:2,14.)

It is the first form of temptation that comes before us in this passage in Hebrews—the temptation to turn from the path of obedience to the Word of God. Further, the devil would seek to use the infirmities of the body to turn us aside by his temptations, even as he sought to use hunger to tempt the Lord from the path of obedience to God. In this form of temptation we have the sympathy of the Lord, as He Himself has been "in all points tempted like as we are." Of the second form of temptation He knew nothing for, while it is said that He was "in all points

tempted like as we are," it is added, "sin apart."

Hebrews 4:16. In the presence of these infirmities and temptations we have a resource. Whatever the difficulties we may have to meet, however much we may be tried and tested, whatever emergency may arise, there is grace available to enable us to meet the trial. The throne of grace is open to us. We are exhorted therefore to draw near to the throne of grace, that is to God Himself. We are not told to draw near to the High Priest, but to God, and we can do so boldly because the High Priest represents us at the throne of grace. Drawing near we obtain mercy, not because we have failed, but in order that in the trial we may not fail.

The time of need is not here the time of failure, but the time when we are faced with trials and temptations which may lead to failure.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 5:1-10: Christ's Sufferings and Call to Priesthood

The apostle has shown us the sphere in which the priesthood of Christ is exercised—the House of God; and the circumstances of His people which require His priestly service—the wilderness journey. Now he unfolds to us the sufferings that Christ passed through in view of His priestly service and the call to the priestly office.

Hebrews 5:1-4. To develop the blessedness of the priesthood of Christ, the apostle refers in these verses to the Aaronic priesthood as setting forth general principles as to priestly service. At the same time he shows by contrast the superiority of the priesthood of Christ over that of Aaron.

We must definitely recognize that these four verses refer, not to Christ and His heavenly priesthood, but to Aaron and the earthly priesthood. The apostle calls attention to the person of the earthly priest, the work of the priest, the experiences of the priest, and the appointment of the priest.

As to his person, the high priest is taken "from among men." This is in striking contrast to the priesthood of Christ. Truly Christ is Man, but He is much more. The writer has borne witness, and will yet do so, that the Christ who is our High Priest is none less than the Eternal Son.

As to his work, the earthly priest is established for man in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins, and exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and the erring. Here there is the shadowing forth of the priestly service of Christ. As the High Priest He acts on behalf of men—the many sons that He is bringing to glory—to keep them from failing and maintain them in a practical walk with God. Christ has offered gifts and sacrifices for sins to bring His people into relationship with God, and having accomplished the great work that removed their sins, He now exercises His priestly work in intercession, sympathy and succor on behalf of His ignorant and erring people.

As to the personal experiences of the earthly priest, we read, "He himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." Here there is partial analogy, and definite contrast, to the priesthood of Christ. It is true that, in the days of His flesh, Christ was found in circumstances of weakness and infirmity; but, in contrast to Aaron, His was sinless infirmity; therefore it could not be said that for Himself He offered for sins.

As to the appointment of the earthly priest, "No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." Here again there is an analogy, as we are at once reminded, to the priesthood of Christ. No one can truly take the place of priest, in any sense of the word, who is not called of God. The intense solemnity of neglecting this great truth is seen in the judgment that overtook Korah and those associated with him, who sought to establish themselves in the priesthood without being called of God. Jude warns us that in Christendom there will be many who, in like manner, will appoint themselves priests without the call of God, and will perish in the gainsaying of Core (Num. 16:3,7,10; Jude 11).

Here, then, we have the character of the earthly priesthood according to the mind of God, and not as illustrated in the history of failing Israel, which ends with two wicked men filling the place of high priest at the same time, and conspiring together to crucify their Messiah.

Hebrews 5:5-6. With verse 5 the writer passes to speak of Christ as High Priest. He brings before us the greatness of His Person as called to be a Priest, the experiences He passed through in order to take the position of Priest, and the appointment of God to this place of service.

The glory of His Person. Christ, who is called to be our great High Priest, is truly taken from among men to exercise His priesthood on behalf of men. Nevertheless, in Manhood, He is recognized as the Son: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee." It is this glorious Person—the One who is truly God and truly Man, and in whom Godhead and Manhood are perfectly expressed—who is appointed Priest according to the word, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." As to the character of this order of priesthood, the apostle will have more to say. Here, Psalm 110:4 is quoted to show, not only the greatness of the Priest, but the dignity of the priesthood.

Hebrews 5:7-8. In the verses that follow, we learn the experiences that Christ passed through in order that He might exercise His priestly service. How necessary that He should be the glorious Person that He is—the Son—to exercise the High Priesthood in heaven. But more was needed. If He is to succor and support His people through their wilderness journey, He Himself must enter into the sorrows and difficulties of the way.

At once then, the apostle recalls "the days of His flesh" when He took part in our infirmities, trod the path that we are treading, faced the same temptations that we have to meet, and was encompassed with like infirmities. The writer especially refers to the closing sufferings of the Lord, when the enemy who, as one has said, "at the outset had sought to seduce Jesus by offering Him the things that are agreeable to man (Luke 4), was presenting himself against Him with terrible things" (JND). In Gethsemane the enemy sought to turn the Lord from the path of obedience by pressing upon Him the terror of death. In the presence of this assault the Lord acts as the perfect Man. He did not exercise His divine power and drive the devil away or save Himself from death; but as the perfectly dependent Man He found His resource in prayer, and thus met the trial and overcame the devil. Nevertheless, His very perfection as Man led Him to feel the terror of all that was before Him and to express His feelings in strong crying and tears. He met the trial in perfect dependence upon God who was able to save Him out of death.

In all this sore trial He was heard because of His piety, which brought God into every circumstance by dependence and confidence in Him. He was heard inasmuch as He was strengthened in physical weakness, and enabled in spirit to submit to taking the cup from the Father's hand. Thus He overcame the power of Satan and, though He were Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered. We have to learn obedience because we have a wicked will: He because He was God over all who, from eternity, had ever commanded. We oftentimes learn obedience by the suffering we bring upon ourselves through disobedience: He learned obedience by the suffering entailed through His obedience to the will of God. He learned by experience what it cost to obey. No suffering, however intense, could move Him from the path of perfect obedience. Another has said, "He submitted to everything, obeyed in everything, and depended upon God for everything" (JND).

The sufferings to which the apostle refers were in "the days of His flesh," not the day of His death. At the cross He suffered under the wrath of God, and there He must be alone. None can share or enter into His atoning sufferings. In the Garden He suffered from the power of the enemy, and there others are associated with Him. We can in our little measure share these sufferings when tempted by the devil; and so doing we have all the sympathy and support of the One who has suffered before us.

Hebrews 5:9-10. Moreover, not only was He heard in the garden but, having suffered, He is also heard in resurrection and is made perfect in glory. He takes His place as the glorified Man, according to His own words, "Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today, and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected" (Luke 13:32). Nothing could add to the perfection of His Person but, having passed through the sufferings of the days of His flesh, having accomplished the work of the cross, and having been raised and glorified, He is perfectly fitted to exercise His service on behalf of the many sons on their way to glory. Being perfected, He is addressed by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec. In incarnation He is called to take up the Melchisedec priesthood (verse 5); when risen and perfected in glory, He is addressed as having taken up the calling (verse 10, JND).

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 5:11-6:20: The Spiritual Condition of the Hebrew Believers

The great object of the apostle in this portion of the epistle is to develop the blessed character of the priesthood of Christ. Having referred to the Melchisedec priesthood to show by analogy the dignity of the priesthood of Christ, the apostle breaks off the thread of his discourse to resume it again at the beginning of chapter 7.

In these parenthetical verses the apostle refers to the spiritual state of those to whom he is writing. Their dull condition of soul exposed them to a serious difficulty and a grave danger. The difficulty was that they were unable to interpret the Old Testament figures. This is referred to from chapter 5:11 to 6:1-3. The danger was that in their low condition some might give up the profession of Christianity and turn back to Judaism. This danger is developed in chapter 6:4-8. The remaining verses of the parenthesis express the apostle's confidence and hope concerning those to whom he is writing (Heb. 6:9-20).

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 5:11-6:3: The Spiritual Condition of the Hebrew Believers

Hebrews 5:11-13. Those to whom the apostle was writing were not simply ignorant of the truth, nor young in the faith—things that would not necessarily make it difficult to understand the teaching of Scripture. The real difficulty was they had "become dull of hearing." Their spiritual growth had been arrested. The time had come when they should have been teachers. Alas! they needed to be again taught the elementary truths of the beginning of the oracles of God. They had become such as had need of milk instead of solid food. The apostle does not at all slight the use of milk; but he says, If milk is the proper diet, it is a clear proof that the soul is spiritually a babe, needing to be established in the righteousness of God.

Hebrews 5:14. The stronger food—the full truth of Christianity into which the apostle desires to lead us—belongs to full-grown Christians, those who are established in the position in which the righteousness of God has placed them as sons before God. Such, instead of being dull of hearing, have their senses exercised to distinguish both good and evil.

Hebrews 6:1-3. The apostle proceeds to show the hindrances to spiritual growth. The saints at Corinth were hindered by the wisdom and philosophy of man (1 Cor. 1-3). These Hebrew believers were hindered by clinging to their traditional religion. One has truly said, "There is no greater hindrance to progress in spiritual life and intelligence than attachment to an ancient form of religion which, being traditional and not simply personal faith in the truth, consists always in ordinances, and is consequently carnal and earthly" (JND).

As with these Hebrew believers, so in Christendom; nowhere is the darkness and ignorance of God's Word greater than among those who cling to tradition and religious ritual. Occupied with mere forms and dazzled by a sensuous religion that stirs the emotions and ministers to the natural mind, people are blinded to the Gospel of the grace of God unfolded in the Word of God.

To meet this snare the apostle's exhortation is, "Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ, let us go on to what belongs to full growth." He then refers to certain fundamental truths known in Judaism before the cross, and suited to a state of spiritual infancy.

In contrast to these truths, the apostle presents the full truth of the Person and work of Christ now revealed in Christianity, which he speaks of as perfection. By clinging to truths which were for the time before Christ's coming, these believers hindered their growth in the full revelation of Christ in Christianity.

The apostle speaks of repentance from dead works, faith in God, of the doctrine of washings, of imposition of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. These things were all known before the incarnation of Christ. The faith he speaks of is faith in God, not personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The washings refer to Jewish purifications, not Christian baptism. The laying on of hands refers to the way by which the Israelite identified himself as the offerer with the victim he offered. Resurrection is of the dead, not "from among the dead," as in Christianity. Martha, in the Gospel story, believed in the resurrection of the dead; she found it difficult to believe in the Christian truth that one could be raised from among the dead while others were left in death.

The apostle does not ask us to deny any of these Old Testament truths, but to leave the partial light and go on to the full light of Christianity—perfection. This, he says, we will do, if God permit. To go back to these things would be laying again “a foundation”; not, indeed, “the foundation,” as if it were the foundation of Christianity, but rather “a foundation” of Jewish things.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 6:4-8: The Danger of Apostasy

Hebrews 6:4-6. Having sought to meet the difficulties occasioned by their dull spiritual condition, the apostle passes on to warn these believers of the serious danger to which they were exposed. The fact that they were clinging to the forms and ceremonies of Judaism might indicate that some who were enlightened by the truths of Christianity, and had tasted its privileges, had given up their profession and had returned to Judaism. For such there would be no recovery. This “falling away,” of which the apostle speaks, is not the backsliding of a true believer, but the apostasy of a mere professor.

The passage speaks of enlightenment, not of new birth, nor of eternal life. It speaks of the outward privileges of Christianity, the presence of the Spirit, the preciousness of the Word of God, and the outward display of power in the Christian circle. All this could be felt and known by those brought in among Christians, even where there was no spiritual life. Such partook in an outward way of the privileges of the Christian circle, and yet could give up their profession and return to Judaism. So doing, they returned to a system that had ended in the crucifixion of the Messiah. They virtually, for themselves, crucified the Son of God and put Him to an open shame for, by their action, they practically avowed that, having tried Christ and Christianity, they found Judaism better.

It removes all difficulty from the passage when we clearly see that the apostle is not supposing the possession of divine life or a divine work in the soul, but merely tasting the outward privileges of the Christian circle.

Hebrews 6:7-8. The illustration used by the apostle makes his meaning clear. The herbs and the briars equally partake of the blessing of the rain which comes from heaven, but the herbs bring forth fruit, while the briars end by being burned.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 6:9-20: Comfort and Encouragement

Hebrews 6:9-12. Having met the difficulty of their low condition, and warned them of the danger of apostasy, the apostle now encourages these believers by expressing his confidence and hope concerning them. Though he has warned them, he does not apply to them what he has been saying as to falling away. On the contrary, he is persuaded better things of them, and things that accompany salvation. He thus clearly shows that the outward privileges of the Christian circle, of which he has been speaking in verses 4-8, can be known in measure by those who are not saved.

The things that accompany salvation are things which give evidence of divine life in the soul. They are “love,” and “hope,” and “faith.” That they possessed love was proved by their continual service to the Lord’s people. God will not forget service of which love to Christ is the motive. The full reward for such service is in the day to come. This leads the apostle to speak of the “hope” that lies before us. He desired that these believers should diligently pursue their service of love in the full assurance of hope that looks on to the rest and reward of all labor.

The apostle does not suggest that the prospect of reward is a motive for service. This, he clearly states, is love “to His Name.” But, as ever, reward is brought in to encourage in the face of difficulties. To continue to the end, however, calls for faith and patience. We are exhorted to be imitators of men of God “who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Their faith looked on to the future blessing and enabled them to endure with patience their wilderness trials.

Hebrews 6:13-15. Faith, however, requires some absolute authority upon which to rest. The apostle turns to the history of the patriarch Abraham to show that the Word of God is the solid ground on which faith acts. In the case of Abraham, this word was confirmed by an oath. In the fullest way God pledged His Word to bring Abraham into blessing, the result being that he was enabled to endure patiently all the privations of a wilderness journey.

Hebrews 6:16-18. Moreover, it was not for Abraham’s sake only that God gave this twofold guarantee, His Word and His oath. Thus the principles on which God acted towards the fathers of old are applied to the children of faith now that “we might have a strong encouragement.” God, in His condescending grace, to convince the heirs of promise of the unchangeable character of His Word, confirmed His promise with an oath, even as men do in their dealings with one another. As He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself. Thus, by two immutable things, His Word and His oath, in which it was impossible for God to lie, He gives strong encouragement to all those who have fled to Christ for refuge from judgment, to lay hold on the hope set before them, instead of turning back by reason of the difficulties on the way. The allusion is to the city of refuge for the manslayer. The Jews had murdered their own Messiah and brought themselves under judgment. The believing remnant, separating themselves from the guilty nation, fled for refuge to the living Christ in glory.

Hebrews 6:19-20. The believer that flees to Christ has a hope that is “sure and steadfast,” as Jesus, our great High Priest, has entered within the veil of heaven. Christ appears before the face of God for us as the Forerunner and as our High Priest. The Forerunner implies that there are others coming after. We have therefore not only the Word of God, but Jesus, a living Person in the glory, as the everlasting witness of the glory to which we are going, and the guarantee that we shall be there. Until we reach the rest of heaven, Christ is our great High Priest to sustain us by the way. Thus again, as in the end of chapter 4, the apostle keeps the Word of God and the living Christ before our souls. Here it is the Word of God as the firm foundation of our faith, and the living Christ as the anchor of our soul, the One who links us with heaven and holds the soul in calmness amidst all the storms of life.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 9:1-7: The Earthly Sanctuary With Its Carnal Sacrifices

Hebrews 9:1-5. The apostle first refers to the tabernacle of old, not to speak in detail of its furnishings however symbolically instructive, but in order to show by contrast the superiority of the heavenly sanctuary.

We learn that though there were ordinances of divine service connected with the tabernacle, yet it was essentially “a worldly sanctuary.” By its beauty, its elaborate ritual and impressive ceremonies, it made special appeal to the natural man, and was thus entirely suited to this world. Further, the apostle lays great stress upon the two divisions of the tabernacle separated by the veil, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

Hebrews 9:6-7. Having referred to the form of the tabernacle and its contents, the apostle passes on to speak of the priests, the sacrifices connected with the tabernacle, and the people. In connection with this tabernacle it was the priests, not the people, who accomplished the service of God. Moreover, into the second part of the tabernacle the high priest alone had access, and that only once every year, and then not without blood, which he offered for himself and the errors of the people.

Here, then, in these first seven verses we have a description of what the apostle speaks of in the closing chapter as “the camp” (Heb. 13:13). The camp was composed of a host of people surrounding a beautiful tent that appealed to nature, with one portion veiled off as the Holy of Holies, and served by a company of priests, distinct from the people, who accomplished the services of God on behalf of the people.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 9:8-10: The Signification of the Tabernacle and Its Sacrifices

Hebrews 9:8-10. What, then, are we to learn from the tabernacle and its services? We are not left to give our own interpretation, but are definitely told that the Holy Spirit has signified their true meaning.

First, we are to learn that the services of the tabernacle clearly showed that, under the law, the way into the presence of God was not yet made manifest.

Second, if the way into the Holiest was not yet open, it was a clear proof of the insufficiency of the sacrifices. They could not make the offerer perfect as to the conscience.

Third, these things during their existence were a figure of things to come. The figures, however, could never satisfy God nor meet the need of man. Under such a system God was shut in and man was shut out. The Jewish system could neither open heaven to us nor fit us for heaven.

Alas! Christendom, ignoring the teaching of the Holy Spirit, instead of seeing in the tabernacle “a figure,” has used it as a pattern for its religious services. So doing, it has lost the “good things” of which the figures speak. Thus the mass in Christendom have again set up magnificent buildings, have again railed off one part of their buildings as more holy than the rest, and again have instituted a priestly class distinct from the laity, who perform religious services on behalf of the people. Thus a system has been adopted after the pattern of the Jewish camp that keeps people at a distance from God and can never make the conscience perfect.

It is well to remember that the “perfect” or “purged” conscience, of which the apostle speaks in chapters 9 and 10, is very different to that which is spoken of elsewhere as “a good conscience.” The purged conscience is one that, being “once purged,” has no more conscience of sins (chapter 10:2). It supposes a conscience that has been exercised as to its sins, but has had that exercise met by learning that the believer is cleansed from all sins by the precious blood of Christ and will never come under judgment. A good conscience is a conscience void of offense in the practical ways and walk.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 9:11-23: The New Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:11. With the coming of Christ all is changed. At once we have a new High Priest, a greater and more perfect tabernacle, and a new sacrifice. Aaron was high priest in reference to things in this present world; Christ is our “High Priest of good things to come.” The sacrifice of Christ does indeed secure present blessings for the believer, but the “good things” in reference to which Christ is High Priest are yet “to come.” Thus again the Spirit of God keeps in view the end of our wilderness journey. In chapter 2: 5 we read of “the world to come”; in chapter 2: 10 we have learned that Christ is bringing many sons to glory; in chapter 4: 9 we are told of the rest that remaineth; in chapter 6: 5 we again read of “the world to come.” Christ is our High Priest to support us through the wilderness in view of bringing us into the “good things” at the end of the journey in the world to come.

If, then, the Aaronic priesthood is set aside by the priesthood of Christ, so too the earthly tabernacle is set aside by “the greater and more perfect tabernacle.” The earthly tabernacle was made with hands and was of this creation; the perfect tabernacle is “heaven itself” (verse 24).

Hebrews 9:12. The Levitical sacrifices are set aside by the one great sacrifice of Christ who, by His own blood, has entered into heaven itself, prefigured by the Holy of Holies. Moreover, in contrast to the Aaronic priest who entered once “every year,” Christ has entered into heaven “once for all.” He enters to take up His priestly service on behalf of those for whom He has already obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:13-14. The blood of Christ, by which eternal redemption has been obtained, sets aside the blood of bulls and goats. The blood of these animals did indeed have a sanctifying effect, so far as the cleansing of the body is concerned. (See Num. 19:7-8.) But the blood of Christ purges the conscience. The blood of an animal offered through a priest is entirely set aside by “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.” By the Holy Spirit, Christ became incarnate; by the Holy Spirit, He lived His life of perfection. So, by the eternal Spirit, as the perfect Man He “offered Himself without spot to God.” (Compare Luke 1:35 and Acts 10:38.) In the second chapter, verse 9, we read that by “the grace of God” Jesus tasted death “for every man.” Here we learn that He has offered Himself without spot to God. Thus we can announce to the sinner that Christ has offered Himself to God, but for you.

For the one who believes, the effect of this great sacrifice is to purge the “conscience from dead works.” As Christ has offered Himself without spot to God, and God has accepted the great sacrifice and is infinitely satisfied with Christ and His shed blood, the conscience of the believer is relieved of all thought of working to secure the blessing. Such works, however good in themselves, would only be dead works. Thus set free in conscience, the believer becomes a worshipper of God.

Hebrews 9:15. As the offering of Christ meets the holiness of God and the need of the sinner, Christ becomes the Mediator of the new covenant, the One through whom all the blessings of the new covenant are secured for those who are called, that they might enter into the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 9:16-17. The apostle has shown that “by means of death” the believer receives the promise of the inheritance. In order to illustrate the necessity of death he refers in these two parenthetical verses to the fact that, amongst men, the inheritance is secured by a will that only comes into force by the death of the one who makes the will.

Hebrews 9:18-22. The writer proceeds to show that the great fact that the blessings of the new covenant, and the new Sanctuary, can only be secured “by means of death” was set forth in figure in the first covenant and the earthly tabernacle. The first covenant was dedicated by blood; the tabernacle and all its vessels were sprinkled with blood—the witness that there can be no blessing for man, no drawing nigh to God, apart from the blood.

Thus the great conclusion is reached that “without shedding of blood is no remission.” Here it is not simply the sprinkling of blood, but the “shedding of blood”—the righteous basis upon which God can proclaim forgiveness to all and proclaim all who believe forgiven.

The tabernacle and its furnishings were only “the patterns of things in the heavens.” It was possible to enter the earthly tabernacle through the purification of the flesh, afforded by the blood of bulls and goats; but the purification of heavenly things demanded better sacrifices.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 9:24-28: The New Sanctuary

The writer has spoken of the better sacrifices, introducing the subject with the words, “But Christ being come” (verse 11). Now he leads our thoughts to the New Sanctuary with the words, “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself.” There, in the very presence of God, the Lord Jesus as our great High Priest now appears to represent His people before the face of God. Christ appearing in heaven before the face of God “for us” is the everlasting witness that heaven is secured and thrown open to the believer.

Hebrews 9:25-28. Moreover, every hindrance to the believer being in heaven has been righteously met and removed by one eternally efficacious sacrifice. The yearly repetition of the Levitical sacrifices was a proof of their inadequacy to put away sin. In contrast to these sacrifices, Christ has once appeared in the consummation of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, “and as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” Thus by one great sacrifice, of Christ Himself, sin has been put away, sins have been borne, and death and judgment removed for the believer.

The blessed result for the believer is that, when Christ appears the second time, He will no more have to do with sin. Sin having been dealt with at His first appearing, His second appearing will be wholly for the salvation of His people from a world of sin and the power of the enemy, to bring them into the rest that remaineth.

The passage thus presents the three appearings of the Lord Jesus: His past appearing at the cross to put away sin, bear sins and remove judgment (verse 26); His present appearing in heaven itself as the great High Priest on behalf of His people (verse 24); the future appearing in glory for the final salvation of His people from this wilderness world with all its temptations and infirmities (verse 28).

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