Hebrews - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

The Epistle To The Hebrews, Hebrews 10:19-39: Practical Exhortations

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(Chapters 10:19–13:25)

We now enter upon the practical part of the epistle. Based on the truth taught in the foregoing chapters, the writer exhorts believers in connection with their privileges and responsibilities in the house of God. There follows in this practical portion of the epistle seven groups of exhortations indicated in the words, “Let us....” (Chaps. 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1, 28; 13:13, 15).

Every Christian is Constituted a Priest

The great result of believers being “perfected” by the finished work of Christ (vs. 14) is that all such are constituted priests. The Apostle Peter and the Apostle John confirm this (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6). Without stating it in actual words, it is obvious by the language the writer uses and the figures he applies to believers that he views them as priests—so much so, that he does not see it necessary to state that fact.

Firstly, our priesthood is implied in the statement, “Having a Great Priest over the house of God” (vs. 21). The existence of a Great Priest supposes that there is a company of priests under Him.

Secondly, the writer exhorts us to function as priests and to “draw near” into God’s presence in the heavenly sanctuary (vs. 22). This would only be said to those who are priests.

Thirdly, figures taken from the consecration of the Aaronic priests are applied to believers on the Lord Jesus Christ in type. He speaks of our “bodies” being “washed with pure water,” which was done to Aaron’s sons (Ex. 29:4; Lev. 8:6). Then, he speaks of us being “sprinkled” with blood, which was also done to Aaron’s sons (Ex. 29:19-20; Lev. 8:24). Thus, the priesthood of believers is implied throughout the passage.

The New and Living Way of Access into the Holiest

Chap. 10:19-22—Since all believers are priests, we are exhorted, “Having, therefore, brethren boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a [the] new and living way, which He hath consecrated [dedicated] for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a Great Priest over the house of God, Let us draw near....” This first exhortation views believers on the Lord Jesus as a company of priests having privileges and liberties that the Old Testament priests did not have. We are, therefore, encouraged to avail ourselves of this incredible liberty of access into God’s presence and to “enter into the holiest” with “boldness” in the spirit of prayer and praise. This great privilege is ours due to the efficacy of “the blood of Jesus”—a token of His finished work.

The Lord has entered the heavenly sanctuary “by” virtue of His blood (chap. 9:12), and now we can enter there “by” virtue of His blood (chap. 10:19). He has entered bodily; we enter in spirit. Since it is not possible for us in the present condition of our bodies to go up to heaven literally, it is obvious that the writer means that this is to be done in spirit, for true Christian worship is in “spirit” and according to the new revelation of “truth” (John 4:23). In the old Levitical economy people surely prayed and worshipped God, but they didn’t have the understanding of acceptance (a Christian blessing), and thus the liberty that the finished work of Christ gives to believers. The result was that they were kept at a conscious distance from God. This is signified in the tabernacle system by the fact that the people worshipped outside the sanctuary (Luke 1:10).

Vs. 20—The writer calls this means of approach into God’s presence “the new and living way.” It is “new” because it is not an alteration or an addendum to the old Judaic order, but an entirely new thing. Christendom, historically and presently, has not understood this. Church services everywhere are composed of a mixture of Christian worship and the old Jewish order of worship. The result is a hybrid of these two contrasting orders, which are neither truly Jewish, nor truly Christian. This quasi Christian-Judaic order is not at all what God intends for those redeemed by the blood of Christ. In fact, He decries the idea of mixing the two orders (Heb. 13:10).

This new order of worship is also called “living,” because a person needs to have a new life (through new birth) to participate in it. In the Old Testament Judaic order, a person did not need to have divine life to enjoy the sights and sounds and the grandeur of the temple worship; he could participate in it without being born again!

This new and living way has been “consecrated [dedicated] for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.” This simply means that in order for us to be able to draw nigh into God’s presence as purged worshippers, the veil (a figure of Christ’s body) had to be rent. That is, Christ had to die. Thus, it was not His perfect life as a Man that opened the way for us into God’s presence—it was His death. Also, this privilege which we have has cost God the giving of His Son. Knowing this ought to cause us to treat it with great appreciation. Our liberty of access is not so much a blessing as it is a privilege based on our blessings.

Vs. 21—To encourage us to enter into God’s presence, the writer reminds us that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have “a Great Priest over the house of God.” As a “High” Priest, He is there to help us by interceding for us, but as a “Great” Priest, He presides over the house of God, and thus, has the responsibility of all that goes on in the house. This corresponds with the role that Aaron had in the old Levitical order in bearing “the iniquity of the holy things” in “all the gifts” (offerings) which the children of Israel brought to God (Ex. 28:36-38). He wore “a mitre [turban]” which had a gold plate on it with the words inscribed: “HOLINESS TO THE LORD.” If any of the children of Israel inadvertently brought something in their offerings that was not according to the due order, Aaron would bear the iniquity of it, but not the offeror. This was given to encourage the people to come with their offerings. Likewise, in the new and living way, we have a Great Priest who handles all our prayers and praises, and presents them to God perfectly (Heb. 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5). And, if we offer something in our worship that is not

according to the truth, He takes care of it, and removes what is not acceptable. (Compare Leviticus 1:15-16.) Having a Great Priest over the house of God serving in this way should encourage us to respond more freely to the exhortation to “draw near” and offer our praise and worship. We can do it with confidence, knowing that we have this failsafe.

Vs. 22—The writer then mentions four things that fit the believer for approaching God as a priest; two have to do with our standing before God and two have to do with our state.

As to our standing, we have our “bodies washed with pure water.” As mentioned already, this is a figure taken from the washing of the priests at their consecration (Ex. 29:4). It typifies the cleansing which we have as a result of being born again (John 3:5; 13:10; 15:3). The Spirit of God has applied the water of the Word of God to our souls and has thereby communicated a new life to us. The result is that we are “clean every whit” because that new life is holy (John 13:10). We also have our “hearts sprinkled.” This is another figure taken from the sprinkling of the priests with blood at their consecration (Ex. 29:20-21). It typifies the judicial cleansing we have through faith in the finished work of Christ—of which His blood is a token. This results in the believer having a purged conscience. (Heb. 9:14; 10:2) Hence, the believer on the Lord Jesus Christ has a double cleansing, signified by the two divine cleansing agents that flowed from the Lord’s side on the cross—the water and the blood (John 19:34).

In John 19:34, the “blood” is mentioned before the “water,” because it is recording the historical fact; whereas in 1 John 5:6-8, the water is put before the blood, because it is referring to the order of its application in the lives of men. One is God's side and the other is mans. Before the eye of God the blood must come first. It is required in order for men to be blessed. All of God's workings by His Word and His Spirit in new birth are dependent upon, and are in view of, Christ entering the world to pay the price for sin—of which the blood speaks. J. A. Trench said, "'One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water' (John 19:34). This is the historic order, and in it the blood comes first, as the basis for everything for God's glory and our blessing. In the order of application to us, as John in his epistle (1 John 5:6) puts it, the water comes first: 'This is He that came by water and blood...and it is the Spirit that bears witness'" (Scripture Truth, vol. 1, p. 22).

The writer then mentions two practical things that are necessary for the believer to function in God’s presence as a priest. He speaks of the need of having “a true heart,” which is a heart that has judged itself (1 Cor. 11:28, 31). Conversely, a heart full of guile that covers its true state is not a true heart. Thus, we need to have a “true” heart when approaching God in worship (Heb. 10:22) and an “honest” heart when reading His Word (Luke 8:15). The writer also mentions having “full assurance of faith.” This is not referring to the assurance of salvation, but the confidence that we have in approaching God in faith because we have a double cleansing and we have judged ourselves.

Hence, the first two things (“bodies washed” and “hearts sprinkled”) make us priests and the second two (“a true heart” and “full assurance of faith”) make us priestly. The first two are connected with our position before God and the latter two have to do with our state of soul. The latter two may explain why there are occasions when only a few brothers exercise their priesthood audibly in a meeting—some of the priests present may not be in a priestly state to do so. The answer is not to set up a caste of men to do the public praying, etc., as done in Christendom, but to judge ourselves so that the Spirit of God will be free to lead us in the meetings in public prayer and praise.

Holding Fast the Confession of Our Hope

Vs. 23—The next exhortation has to do with persevering with our public confession of the faith in a world that is opposed to it. He says, “Let us hold fast the confession of the hope unwavering.” A bright “hope” of reaching the glorified state with Christ above had been set before these Hebrew saints. They were not to let go of that hope, for “He is faithful who has promised.” (See verses 36-37.) The fact that there would be such an exhortation given to these Hebrew believers, shows that they were under tremendous pressure to draw back from the Christian position they had publicly taken.

That this exhortation follows the previous exhortation to “draw near” gives us the key as to how we will be able to “hold fast.” If we truly avail ourselves of our privilege to draw near into God’s presence, we will receive the spiritual strength and conviction that will enable us to face opposition in the path. If believers waver, it is usually because they have neglected their privilege to draw near into God’s presence.

Provoking One Another to Love and Good Works

Vss. 24-25—The next exhortation addresses the need for mutual encouragement. He says, “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.” This shows that we not only need to draw near to God, but we also need to draw near to “one another.” In times of persecution and temptation to draw back, there is a particular need for fellowship and encouragement among the saints.

We need the mutual support of fellow-believers, but we will not have it if we don’t keep with “the footsteps of the flock” (Song of Sol. 1:8). Since we are our “brother’s keeper” (Gen. 4:9), we have a responsibility to watch over one another’s state, and to warn, if necessary, when one begins to stray (Prov. 24:11-12). However, this will be difficult to do if we neglect to assemble together for ministry and fellowship (Acts 2:42). Hence, the writer goes on to say, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting [encouraging] one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Forsaking the gathering together of the saints is a sure sign of waning affections. It usually precedes a person’s leaving the assembly altogether. The following things are tell-tale signs that usually accompany those who leave the assembly:

Signs That Usually Mark Those Who Leave the Assembly

They begin to attend fewer and fewer meetings.

They dwell on the short-comings of the saints, concluding that there is no love there.

There is a lack of separation from the world in either its secular or religious aspects—at the same time, accusing those who walk in separation of being legal.

They claim that they are not getting fed at the meetings—meetings that they usually do not attend.

They are easily offended.

Their doctrine as to the one gathering center becomes altered to open the door for them to justify their departure.

In view of this tendency to draw back, the writer emphasizes the need of “encouraging one another, and so much the more,” as we “see the day approaching.” There is a great need for doctrinal truth to be ministered among the saints, for it is the means by which we are established (1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:15), but this exhortation shows that we mustn’t neglect practical ministry; it encourages the saints to go on. As we get closer to the “day” when the Lord will appear to set the world right through judgment (Isa. 26:9), there will be an increased need for this kind of service in the house of God. Things will continue to get morally and spiritually darker until that moment. In fact, the darkest moment in world history will be just prior to the day when Christ appears (Matt. 24:29-30). Apostasy in the Christian profession has already begun (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:7), and therefore, encouraging one another is that much more needed. While true believers cannot apostatize, they can get swept along by the current of apostasy working in the Christian profession and begin to give up certain principles and practises that they once held. This is a real danger.

As mentioned, the “day” the writer is referring to here is the Appearing of Christ. Mr. Darby said, “The ‘day’ spoken of here is not the catching up of the Church, but the Appearing” (Collected Writings, vol. 27, p. 400). W. Kelly said, “As responsibility is here in view, it is ‘the day’ or Appearing of the Lord that follows, when our fidelity, or lack of it, will be manifested” (The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 191). S. Ridout said, “Those saints whose eyes were anointed could say, ‘The end of all things is at hand.’ They knew that Christ had appeared in the end of the world [Heb. 9:26]; that soon the day would come when His enemies would be placed beneath His feet [Heb. 10:13]; and as they saw that day approaching, they stirred one another up all the more. What shall we say, then, we who live centuries later? How much nearer is that day for us!” (Lectures on the Book of Hebrews, p. 207)

Fourth Warning Against Apostasy

(Chapter 10:26-39)

The Danger of Sinning Willfully

The writer suspends his exhortations (“Let us....”) to warn of the danger of apostasy once more. In the latter half of chapter 10, he warns against apostasy (vss. 26-31), but he also encourages those with faith to press on (vss. 32-39). In the eleventh chapter, he continues to digress by giving examples of those who lived by faith in Old Testament times, before resuming his exhortations in chapter 12:1.

Vss. 26-27—He says, “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” The willful sin which he is referring to here is apostasy—the predominant sin throughout the epistle. As mentioned already, the apostasy the Hebrews were in danger of was the renouncing of the Christian faith and returning to Judaism. It is only something that a false professor who has never been saved would do.

This verse (vs. 26) is not referring to a backsliding Christian who sins and thus loses his salvation, as commonly thought, because Christians cannot lose their salvation (John 10:27-28, etc.). The person in view here is someone who has “received the knowledge of the truth,” and thus, has been enlightened by it. But note: it does not say that he has believed it. Receiving the truth, and believing the truth, are two different things. Some think that the word “we,” in this verse, indicates that he is speaking of Christians, and accordingly, that the writer includes himself. However, as mentioned earlier, the use of “we” in the epistle is usually referring the writer’s fellow countrymen who were Jews, as is the case here.

Neither is this verse speaking of a sinner who rejects the gospel. Rejecting the gospel can surely be classed as a sin, but it is not the sin in view here. This person is far more responsible than the sinner who rejects the gospel. He has embraced the gospel outwardly and has professed to have believed it, and then has thrown it all overboard. In chapter 6, the writer makes it clear that there is no recovery from this willful sin of apostasy. Where could there be found a sacrifice for the sins of an apostate? God has set aside the Judaic sacrifices and the apostate himself has turned his back on the sacrifice of Christ! There, therefore, remains “no more sacrifice for sins” for such a person. There is nowhere that he can go and no sacrifice to which he can turn. He is doomed. J. N. Darby said, “His [Christ’s] one sacrifice once offered was the only one. If any who had professed to know its value abandoned it, there was no other sacrifice to which he could have recourse; neither could it ever be repeated. There remained no more sacrifice for sins” (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, on Hebrews 10). All that is left for an apostate is “a certain fearful expectation of judgment” (vs. 27). Such a person makes himself an “adversary” of the truth, and consequently, he will be devoured by the wrathful judgment of God.

Vss. 28-31—To show the seriousness of apostasy, the writer compares this willful sin with sin of presumption in the old economy and shows that it is something far “worse.” Under the Law, the person who presumptuously disregarded a simple injunction was executed “under two or three witnesses.” A case in point was the infraction of the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day (Num. 15:30-36). He was stoned to death, because he did it presumptuously! It was not a sin of ignorance for which a sin-offering could be applied and the person could be forgiven governmentally (Lev. 4:2; Num. 15:27-29; Heb. 9:7). The writer then says, “Of how much more sorer [worse] punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under-foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy [common] thing, and hath done despite unto [insulted] the Spirit of grace?” (vs. 29) If there was no remedy for a presumptuous sin under the Law, how much more so in the case of an apostate who sins presumptuously (willfully) against the grace of God!

To emphasize this, the writer mentions three terrible things in this verse that an apostate does when he renounces the Christian faith and returns to Judaism.

Firstly, he treads “under-foot the Son of God!” Thus, he does not mildly reject Christ—he decidedly rejects Him in the most derogatory way. Such a manner of rejection is an affront to the greatness of His Person.

Secondly, he counts “the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing.” By taking Christian ground, a merely professing believer is outwardly sanctified in what Bible teachers call “relative sanctification.” (See also Romans 11:16; 1 Corinthians 7:14, and 2 Timothy 2:21.) Being set apart in this way does not mean that a person is saved, but that he is in a favoured position through his identification with the Christian company. The “blood of the new covenant” was shed at the cross (Matt. 26:28). Christ’s work there laid the foundation for the making of the new covenant with Israel in a coming day. In the meantime, His blood sanctifies all who make a profession of faith in Him in this outward way. To renounce the profession one has made is to treat “the blood” of Christ as “an unholy thing.” This is a

shocking disregard of that which is exceedingly precious in the eyes of God and in the eyes of all who have been redeemed by it! (1 Peter 1:18)

Thirdly, the apostate has “insulted the Spirit of grace”—the divine Person who has come from God to convey many wonderful truths to us and to bestow many wonderful blessings on us.

Needless to say, to be guilty of these things is far more serious than being guilty of gathering sticks on the Sabbath day! If severe judgment was executed against an offender under the Law for such a simple offence, it will surely be meted out against a person who does these terrible things. Thus, the judgment will be in proportion to the seriousness of the sin.

Vss. 30-31—While we naturally grieve over such brazen unbelief, we must refrain from judging all such who apostatize. The apostate must be left to God to deal with. Hence, the writer gives us a cautionary word: “Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord.” And again, “The Lord shall judge His people.” His closing word of warning is, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” This solemn statement was calculated to speak to the conscience of any who were merely professing believers, who were contemplating withdrawing from the Christian company and returning to Judaism.

Three Things We Must Not Lose Sight Of

Chap. 10:32-39—The closing verses of the chapter are full of encouragement for those who were real believers. They were experiencing persecution from the unbelieving mass of the nation. Under this pressure, they were getting weary and doubtful in the path. It was imperative that these brethren would continue with endurance in the path of faith. To encourage them to this end, the writer goes on to set three things before them which they were not to lose sight of. If these things were kept burning brightly before their souls, they would surely be motivated to carry on in the path. These three things will do the same for us.

We Have “A Better and an Enduring Substance”

Vss. 32-34—“Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had sympathized with prisoners, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”

The first thing that the writer would not have them lose sight of was the great spiritual possessions that they had in Christ. These blessings and privileges are exceedingly precious, and are far above anything that the Jews had in Judaism. In fact, they are the highest conferred blessings that God has ever given (or ever will give) to any of His creatures! Thus, through grace, Christians have a special place before God which all others in His blessed family do not have, through their link with Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Hence, they are called “the assembly of firstborns” (Heb. 12:23 – W. Kelly Trans.). (The term “firstborn” refers to having the pre-eminence over others.) Christians could not be more blessed (Eph. 1:3).

These Hebrew believers once had a right perspective on these spiritual things when they were first “illuminated [enlightened]” and saved by the gospel, and they needed to be recalled to that mindset. Hence, he says, “Call to remembrance the former days … .” When they first set out on the Christian path, they understood that their portion in Christ was something special and considered it a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer for those things. As a result, they happily “endured a great fight of afflictions.” When they were publicly shamed by their fellow countrymen, being “made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions,” they accepted it without retaliation, because they understood that it was all part of suffering for Christ. Even when their “goods” (material possessions) were plundered by the ill-will of others, they took those setbacks “joyfully.” The reason why they were able to endure those things in such a remarkable way was that they knew that they had “a better and an enduring substance” in Christ. As a result, they saw those things to be worth living for and worth suffering for.

But sadly, being bombarded with opposition, they were becoming discouraged in the way and were losing their original convictions. Hence, came this exhortation from the writer. His remedy for them was to return to their original mindset which they had as new Christians—but not to return to Judaism. They needed a re-set in their convictions by having a fresh look at what had been put into their hands. Then they would once again realize that it was a great privilege indeed to have been given those precious things.

Likewise for us, there is nothing that will motivate us to go on in the path of faith, with conviction, more than realizing what has been put into our hands. If we take a moment to recount our many blessings in Christ, which set us apart from all other blessed creatures of God, we will see at once that we have truly been given something special. It is an understatement to say that it is a privilege to be a Christian.

The Lord Is Coming Very Soon

Vss. 35-37—“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a [very] little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry [delay].” The second thing that these Hebrew believers were not to lose sight of was that the Lord was coming soon—in “a very little while.” And, He would be bringing a special reward with Him for those who have done “the will of God” (Rev. 22:12).

Bringing the Lord’s coming in, as he does here, was surely calculated to motivate these dear believers to carry on in the path until that moment, for to faith, it was not far off. Likewise, the imminence of His coming ought to motivate us to carry on in the path. If they were to look for the Lord to come in their day, how much more should we who live many centuries later. It will not be long now! The KJV says “tarry,” but it should read “delay.” The Lord has tarried (waited) for nearly 2000 years because it has not been the Father’s time to send Him. But when that time comes, He won’t delay to come and take us home. (Compare Psalm 19:5.)

Drawing Back Displeases the Lord

Vss. 38-39—“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” The third thing that these dear brethren were not to lose sight of was that, if they chose to draw back in the path of faith, it would displease the Lord.

In these verses, the writer speaks of “drawing back,” which “any man” (believers included) can do, and “drawing back to perdition” (apostasy) which only merely professing believers can do—by renouncing their profession of faith in Christ. Both of these things have to do with departure, but one (apostasy) is infinitely worse. As mentioned earlier, real believers cannot apostatize from the faith, but they can be affected by the current of apostasy moving in Christendom in these latter times (1 Tim. 4:1), and can give up certain principles and practices that they once held.

Every person who is contemplating drawing back in the path—even if they think that it is just a little—needs to be reminded that in doing so, they bring into the equation the possibility of the chastening of the Lord. He loves His people, and He will not allow them to go on in a path of unrighteousness or compromise without exercising discipline in their lives to bring them back (Heb. 12:5-11; Hos. 2:6-7). Thus, drawing back in the path often brings unwanted trouble in our lives, and therefore, should not be seen as an option. Life in the path of faith is difficult enough without us bringing additional problems into our lives through our carelessness and disobedience.

The only logical thing for us to do is to carry on in the path and seek grace from God to endure the difficulties and troubles that come from living in obedience to His Word. The writer quotes from Habakkuk 2:4, to show that “the just” must “live by faith,” for it is normal for the child of God, regardless of what dispensation he lives in, as the next chapter (11) shows. Hence, there is the need to “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear,” knowing that if we displease the Lord in some way, it may “invoke” our Father to bring forth a governmental judgment in our lives to correct us (1 Peter 1:17).

The Gap of Genesis 1: Is It A Theory?, Conclusions and Considerations

There are a couple of final things to consider in connection with the "young earth" view of Genesis 1. The things which we now address have to do with the principles upon which the belief is based—what we believe is at the root of the interpretation

The "Young Earth" View Seems to Reflect an Undue Confidence in What Men of Science Say Rather Than What the Word of God Says

It seems that the "young earth" interpretation is based more on scientific tests and geological discoveries than on what Scripture says. To see Christians who believe that the Bible is the guide and supreme authority on which all matters religious, moral, or otherwise, are settled, readily accepting the things that Young Earth Creationists are putting forth, and rejecting what the older generation of scholars have taught from Scripture, is disconcerting. The relative ease with which Christians have abandoned what has long been accepted as orthodox is alarming. Basically, what is being said is that those gifted and spiritual men who have exegeted Genesis 1 with a gap (some of whom are mentioned on page 3) are mistaken in what they have taught, and if they knew what we know from science today, they wouldn’t have taught those things!

However, this calls in question the spiritual judgment and discernment of these gifted and respected Bible scholars. To sweep away what those men have taught because learned scientists (though Christians) have found certain things in their microscopes and telescopes is quite incredible. It is really putting science before the Word of God! It appears that Christians today would rather trust the discernment of men of science rather than the discernment of godly Bible teachers! It really comes down to this: Is our understanding of creation based on science or on what the Word of God says? The Bible does not say, "Through science we understand that the worlds were framed...," but rather, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed..." (Heb. 11:3). True science will validate the Word of God, but "science falsely so-called" militates against the Word (1 Tim. 6:20). At the bottom of it all, we see an undue confidence in "the uncertain science of geology" (W. Kelly) and a sad lack of confidence in what we have been taught from God's Word by the most reliable Bible teachers.

It may be argued that Young Earth Creationists back up everything that they have found in science with the Word of God. Indeed, they have used the Scriptures to support their belief, but we have shown that they have not used the Word of God correctly in supporting of their conclusions concerning creation. Things have been inferred into Scripture to make Scripture fit their beliefs. For example, they state that Genesis 1:1-2 is part of the six days, when it clearly is not. They also state that creating, making, and forming are all the same thing, even though Scripture shows otherwise. They state that Adam brought sin and death into the creation—not Satan. They say that dinosaurs were created at the same time as men and lived on earth with men. If this is so, they must have been in Noah's ark, because Scripture says "two of every sort" of animal boarded the ark (Gen. 6:19-20). Knowing that this presents a problem due to their enormous size, some creation scientists tell us that those dinosaurs entered the ark as babies; others say that they died off earlier—but this is pure speculation. Needless to say, inferring things into Scripture is an unacceptable way of handling the Word of God. In doing so, the Young Earth Creationists' interpretations make Scripture (on this subject) subservient to science!

When things in science seem to conflict with the Scriptures, the Christian is to cling to the Scriptures and to set those things that science (so-called) is saying aside. This is because things that are put forth as science may not be true science; they are things that men have learned, and they could be mistaken. The Scriptures, on the other hand, are never wrong. C. H. Mackintosh put it succinctly: "Geologists may explore the bowels of the earth, and draw forth from thence materials from which to add to, and, in some instances, to contradict the divine record. They may speculate upon fossil remains; but the disciple hangs with sacred delight over the page of inspiration" ("Notes on Genesis," pp. 1-2). In many cases, Young Earth Creationists do not do this. They hold on to what they think science is saying (when it seems to favour a young earth) and try to interpret the Scriptures to support their mistaken conclusions.

The "Young Earth" View Seems to be Based in Arminian Beliefs

When we step back and look at the reasoning behind the "young earth" view of creation, we see that it is a well-meaning effort to debunk the notions of Evolution, with the purpose of making the gospel more convincing to the world. To deny their scientific conclusions about the creation is, in their minds, a terrible compromise with Evolution. They believe that, if we hold that there is an undisclosed period of time (a gap) before God began to make this present earth, then we are opening the door for people to think that Evolution is right after all. Hence, in their minds, it undermines the gospel message.

R. Radebaugh summarized the Creation Science movement as being "a knee-jerk reaction to Evolution." At the bottom of the Young Earth movement, we see Christians trying to prove to the atheists and infidels of the world that they are wrong about Evolution, and that they

should turn to Christ for salvation. Now, these dear believers (Young Earth Creationists) can be commended for their good intentions, but the premise of their effort betrays a basic ignorance of one great fact of the gospel—that man in the flesh is totally depraved and that he has no power (freewill) to change his mind and to believe. Scripture presents the condition of a lost person (an unbeliever) as being spiritually "dead" (Eph. 2:1- 5; Col. 2:12-13), having no spiritual faculty to hear and believe the message of the gospel. According to Scripture, man in his natural state in the flesh:

- Cannot "see" (understand) God's kingdom (John 3:3).
- Cannot "enter" God's kingdom (John 3:5).
- Cannot "receive" the testimony of God concerning His Son (John 3:27, 32; 1 Cor. 2:14).
- Cannot make a move to "come" to Christ for blessing (John 6:44, 65).
- Cannot "tell" (or discern) the truth (John 8:14).
- Cannot "hear" the truth (John 8:43, 47).
- Cannot "please God" (Rom. 8:8).

This being the case, Scripture nowhere enjoins Christians to reason with, or debate, atheists and infidels on the various topics of their unbelief. In fact, it warns against such tactics (2 Tim. 2:14). We have not been called to convince man in the flesh of the existence of God and His creation. The Bible makes no attempt to explain this, but assumes faith on the part of all who read it (Heb. 11:6). If we could intellectually convince unregenerate men to drop their false ideas of Evolution and to believe on the Lord Jesus, then their "faith" would "stand in the wisdom of men" and not in "the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:5). Clever scientific arguments cannot convince unbelievers to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, because men in their natural state have no spiritual faculty to understand the truth; it is all foolishness to them (1 Cor. 2:14). If any believe the gospel, it is solely because of God’s quickening power. In quickening, or new birth, the Spirit of God applies the Word of God to souls and thereby communicates divine life to them. Thus, they are given the capacity to hear and respond to the call of God in the gospel. Our responsibility in sharing the gospel, therefore, is to present the message of redeeming grace from the Word of God clearly, simply, and passionately, and leave the results to the Spirit of God who alone has the power to impart life and bring men to repentance and belief in the Lord Jesus. The Bible says, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

Thus, the premise of the Young Earth Creationist's efforts has a wrong footing. It seems to be based in Arminian misconceptions concerning man's fallen state. James Arminius (1560-1609 A.D.) taught that all men are depraved sinners, but he did not see that their depravity was such that they could not choose to believe the gospel. He taught that though men are fallen creatures, they are still free moral agents, and thus have the power to believe the gospel, if they choose. (The truth is, that unregenerate man does not have a free will; he may choose in the ordinary things in life, but he will never choose Christ.)

We are not saying that every Young Earth Creationist is Arminian in his soteriology, but that the effect that Arminianism has had on many Christians has led them to believe that it is their duty to reason with the atheists and the infidels of the world, and to try to convince them that their ideas are wrong, and that they should believe on Christ. Most evangelical Christians today are Arminian in their views, and therefore, see nothing wrong with the Young Earth Creationist's intellectual presentation of the gospel through science. However, while their motives may be good, the whole exercise betrays a basic misunderstanding of the total depravity of man. It supposes that there is still a spark of good in fallen man that gives him the power to choose to believe—if he wants to. (Therefore, we should try to reason with men and convince them of the truth through science and geology, etc.) If this is so, then fallen man is not totally depraved, and he is not dead after all!

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The net result of the "young earth" view is that one must disregard what reliable Bible teachers have taught on the subject of creation, and adopt a new teaching because science and geology have supposedly found those teachers to be wrong. We believe that it would be safer to leave science out of the picture and to stay with a sound exposition of the Scriptures, which has been attested to by respected Bible scholars over a span of many years. And also, to shun new and contrived interpretations that have been devised to support these so-called scientific discoveries.

The Epistle To The Hebrews, Hebrews 12:28-13:25: Closing Exhortations

(Chapters 12:28–13:25)

The practical exhortations (“Let us...”) resume again at chapter 12:28. This final part of the epistle has two groups of exhortations: those pertaining to the believer’s personal life and those pertaining to the believer’s assembly life.

Exhortations Regarding the Believer’s Personal Life

(Chapters. 12:28–13:6)

The exhortations and encouragements in this series of verses address the appropriate lifestyle that should characterize holy brethren with a heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1).

Thankfulness

(Vss. 28-29)

He says, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace [be thankful], whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.” Thus, having something so much better in the new and living way of approach
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to God in Christianity (Heb. 10:19-22), the writer would have them to realize this fact and to “be thankful” for it, and thus, to respond by serving Him “acceptably” in this very favoured position in which they had been set. To return to Judaism would not be serving God acceptably. For all those who were entertaining the idea, he says, “Our God is a consuming fire” who judges all that is contrary to Him.

Brotherly Love

(vs. 1)

He then says, “Let brotherly love continue.” They had started well in their early days as Christians and lived in an atmosphere of love (Acts 2:44-47); they now needed to “continue” in it. Thus, he says, “let,” because being born of God, Christians have a new life and nature that naturally loves (1 John 5:1). All we need to do is to “let,” or allow the divine nature in us do what it does naturally—which is to love (1 John 4:19). This exhortation is needed because we can get in the way of our divine nature expressing itself by allowing fleshly feelings of dislike for some of our brethren hinder the outflow of our love.

Hospitality

(vs. 2)

One way love will express itself is in “hospitality.” Our homes should be open to our brethren to promote Christian fellowship. The “strangers” mentioned here are fellow brethren in the Lord from different areas who were travelling through that region. These brethren may have been running from persecution and were hard-pressed and in need of food and shelter. Gaius was commended by John for doing this, and especially so for those who were out serving the Lord (3 John 5-7). Christian fellowship in our homes is an important way to promote the health of the assembly locally. He adds that some have “entertained angels unawares.” This may be a reference to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was certainly aware that the men who visited him were angels and one of them was the Lord Himself. But Sarah didn’t seem to understand this, and when she heard Him say that they were going to have a son in their old age, she laughed in doubt (Gen. 18).

Sympathy

(vs. 3)

He then says, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” This is another way in which love can express itself—by showing sympathy to those who had been imprisoned for their faith and “ill-treated.” To “remember” them is not merely calling them to mind and praying for them, but actively reaching out to them by visiting them, if possible. This is what Onesiphorus did in Paul’s case, and Paul said that it “oft refreshed” him (2 Tim. 1:16-18). Such are deprived of fellowship and really appreciate it.

He adds, “As being yourselves also in the body.” This is not a reference to our connection with one another in the (mystical) body of Christ, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:26. (The body of Christ is not in view in Hebrews.) It is, rather, the connection that we have with one another through being in our physical bodies. We can sympathize with their sufferings because we are in the body too, and thereby know what it is to suffer physically. These Hebrew believers could very well end up being imprisoned for their faith and be in the same situation, so while they were still free, they were to show their sympathy to those who were bound in this way.

Moral Purity

(vs. 4)

Marriage is to be held in respect and maintained in purity. Violation of the marriage tie through adultery will be visited by God’s governmental judgment “for fornicators and adulterers will God judge.”

Contentment

(vs. 5)

“Let your conversation [conduct] be without love of money [covetousness], and be satisfied with your present circumstances; for He has said, I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee.” This exhortation addresses the need to cultivate contentment in the present circumstances of life in which God has placed us (Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:8). We have temporal needs but they are not to be met by covetous dealings. “The love of money” has been the ruin of many (1 Tim. 6:9-10). Christians are to work with their hands, and the Lord has promised to supply all their needs (1 Thess. 4:11; Phil. 4:19). Note: He supplies what we need, not necessarily what we may want.

Courage

(vs. 6)

Finally, he says, “So that, taking courage, we may say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid: what will man do unto me?” This is a quote from Psalm 118:6. With the Lord on their side, they were not to fear the persecution connected with taking the Christian stand. The last part of verse 6 is really a question and could read: “If [since] the Lord is my helper, what can man do to me?” This is how Psalm 118:6 renders it.

Exhortations Regarding the Believer’s Assembly Life

(Vss. 7-25)

As mentioned, the second group of exhortations pertain to their collective privileges and responsibilities.

Remember the Christian Leaders Who Have Gone on Before

(Vss. 7-8)

In stepping away from Judaism, the Hebrew believers might have thought that the writer was asking them to turn their backs on their long heritage in that religion. But he doesn't say that. Abraham, Moses, David, etc. were still to be valued by them on account of their faithfulness, as chapter 11 indicates. What they needed to see was that they now had a Christian heritage of valued leaders as well, whom they were to remember.

This company of Hebrew believers had leaders who had taught them the Word of God, which they were to value and to look to for spiritual help and encouragement. Hence, the writer says, "Remember your leaders [guides] who have spoken to you the Word of God; and considering the issue of their conversation [conduct], imitate their faith. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today and to the ages to come." The fact that he says, "Who have spoken to you..." (past tense) indicates that these Christian "leaders" had gone on to be with the Lord and were no longer on earth. J. N. Darby said, "In exhorting them (ver. 7) to remember those who have guided the flock, he speaks of those already departed in contrast with those still living (ver. 17)" (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, on Hebrews 13:7; see also Collected Writings, vol. 27, pp. 321, 413). Even though they had gone to be with the Lord, their faith had left a legacy of Christian character and courage for those in future generations to "imitate." Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 12) would be examples of such ones, perhaps Judas, Barsabbas, and Silas, were others (Acts 15:22). These were "leading men among the brethren." Some of these leaders may have been in oversight in a local assembly, but W. Kelly points out that that is not the force of the word used here. It is leaders in a general way (The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 261).

Note: he says, "Imitate their faith." He doesn't say that they were to imitate their mannerisms, or their idiosyncrasies, or the way in which they spoke publicly in ministry. To do that is making oneself a clone of these dear servants of God, which is not God's will. Just as one star differs from another star in glory (1 Cor. 15:41), God would have us all to shine in our own individual way. It was their "faith" that they were to imitate (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1). These leaders, who had gone on before, were a testament to the fact that walking by faith in the Christian path can be done victoriously.

The "issue" (or substance) of their conversation (manner of life) was "Jesus Christ." Christ was the goal in everything those men had pursued in life. It is the reason why they went on in a straight course. These Hebrew believers were to consider this and follow their example by making Christ the Object and Center of their lives. The writer adds that Christ is "the same yesterday, and today and to the ages to come." That is, times may change and those who have served their generation by the will of God have "fallen on asleep" (Acts 13:36), but Christ is always there for each new generation to look to, for He never changes.

Guard Against Strange Doctrines That Mix Judaism With Christianity

(Vss. 9-10)

The next exhortation warns against the danger of getting "carried away with various and strange doctrines" that would mix Judaism with Christianity. All such Judaizing teaching opposes the principles of Christian grace and has no place in the present economy. Such teachings usually focus on trying to produce a higher standard of holiness in believers through legalism, which doesn't work. Hence, the writer says, "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein." He uses "meats" here, as a figure for the outward ordinances of earthly religion (Heb. 9:10). His point is straightforward and clear: Christians who have adopted Judaistic principles have not profited from it spiritually.

He goes on to say, "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." This "altar" is not the brazen altar, nor is it the golden altar in the old economy, but what is symbolic of "the new and living way" of approach to God in true Christianity (Heb. 10:19-22). To "eat" at this altar symbolizes participating in the spiritual worship offered in Christianity (1 Cor. 10:18). This 10th verse teaches us that those who want to hold on to Judaism should not be allowed to participate in the true Christian way of approach to God. To do so would be mixing the two orders, which is something that God does not want.

As mentioned on pages 18-20 in the Introduction of this book, Christendom is permeated with Judaistic principles and practises. It is truly a mixture of Judaism and Christianity. Since this is so, those who wish to attend and partake in the so-called "worship services" in the churches of Christendom, and at the same time want to be in fellowship at the Lord's Table where Christians seek to worship according to the new and living way, should be told that they have "no right" to eat there. Accordingly, they should not be permitted to do so. The reason is simple: God does not want a mixture of the two things.

Go Forth to the New Meeting Place Outside the Camp

(Vss. 11-14)

In these verses, the writer mentions a meaningful ritual connected with the sin offering that has had its fulfilment in the death of Christ—"the bodies of those beasts" which were offered were consumed with fire in a place "outside the camp" (Lev. 4:12). As the fulfilment of this, the Lord Jesus "suffered without the gate" of Jerusalem (John 19:20). He was cast out of the system of Judaism by its wicked leaders and died there as a criminal. But in being cast out of that system, God has made Christ the new gathering center for those who receive Him as their Saviour. The effect of Christ's death outside of Judaism was to "sanctify the people with His own blood" in a relative or external sense (chap. 10:29). That is, it laid a new ground upon which believers are to gather in separation from Judaism.

This being the case, the writer exhorts: "Therefore let us go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." It has been often asked, "What exactly is 'the camp?'" It is an expression that denotes Judaism and its related principles and practises. Thus, verse 13 is a formal call to all believers in that Judaic system to sever their connections with it by going forth to the Lord Jesus who is outside of it. He is the new Meeting Place—the Christian's gathering Center (Matt. 18:20). This is not a geographical location as in Judaism (i.e. the temple at Jerusalem), but rather, a spiritual ground of principles upon which God would have Christians to meet together for worship and ministry.

Since the Christian profession has become permeated with Judaistic principles and practice, and a mixture of the two systems exists almost everywhere, this call to go forth unto Christ, "without the camp," has a very practical application to us in Christendom. The principle is simple: believers are called to separate from Judaism—regardless of where it may be found, or in what form it may be in. It could be in formal Judaism (a synagogue) or in quasi Judaeo-Christian places of worship (the churches of Christendom). This call to separate from Judaism has led exercised Christians to dissociate themselves from the churches in Christendom, wherein this mixture exists, and to meet simply in the name

of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 18:20). (Compare 2 Timothy 2:19-21.)

Some Christians who are defensive of the Judaeo-Christian mixture in the church systems will say that “the camp” refers strictly to formal Judaism, and nothing more. Any extraction thereof, in their minds, is not considered the camp. However, if this reasoning were correct, then Jewish believers who have been called to separate from the camp do not really need to separate from the synagogue, because even the strictest sect of Judaism today is but an extraction of the true Scriptural Judaism which God gave through Moses. Even when the Lord was here on earth it had become wildly distorted by the interpretations and the traditions of the elders. It is only that much more so today. This argument, therefore, is surely false, and only insisted upon to avoid a practical application being made to church-goers. It is true that many of the Judaic things in these churches have been somewhat altered to fit a Christian context, but those places of worship still have the trappings of Judaism in principle. In fact, if we were to ask them for Scripture for many of their church practices, they would freely point to Old Testament Judaism as their model. A lot of the present Judaeo-Christian order has been around in Christianity for so long that it has become accepted by the masses as God’s ideal. What has happened, to a large extent, is that Christendom has joined the “camp” of earthly religion, which is the very thing that this 13th verse calls believers out of.

The writer adds that as the Lord went outside the camp to bear our judgment as the ultimate sin-offering, we must now go outside the camp to Him, and in doing so we will bear His “reproach.” Thus, meeting around the Lord outside the camp has reproach connected with it because this new ground of gathering is a rejected thing. Therefore, we must be prepared to endure suffering in connection with it. The reproach that these Hebrew believers were feeling came primarily from those in the camp. And, believers who separate from the Judaistic principles in the churches of Christendom will also find that reproach will come primarily from those in the church systems who will not separate from that mixture. The Apostle John called people who take this quasi Judaeo-Christian ground, “Them which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie” (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

The writer adds that “here” on earth “we (Christians) have no continuing city,” as the Jews had in Jerusalem (vs. 14). Instead, he says, “We seek one (a heavenly city) to come.” Thus, there is no earthly headquarters in Christianity. Hence, the new Christian place of worship is:

Inside the veil as to our spiritual privileges (Heb. 10:19-20).

Outside the camp as to our ecclesiological position (Heb. 13:13).

Exercise Our Priestly Privileges

(vs. 15)

Having taught that all Christians are priests with liberties that exceed anything the Aaronic priests had in Judaism (Heb. 10:19-22), the writer now exhorts us to exercise our priestly privileges in praise and prayer. He says, “By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks [confessing] to His name.” This is a spiritual sacrifice which Christians can offer in the immediate presence of God. It is done “by Him” (see also 1 Peter 2:5), which is an allusion to Christ as our Great Priest presenting our worship to God with perfection (Heb. 10:21). Note: there is no mention of this praise being offered with the aid of the outward appliances of orchestras and choirs, etc., because true Christian worship “is in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). That is, it is a spiritual thing produced in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit (Phil. 3:3). True Christian worship will manifest itself in “the fruit of our lips” and will be done as “confessing His name,” because we should take no other name than that of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 18:20).

Use Our Material Resources to Support the Christian Testimony

(vs. 16)

The writer then speaks of another kind of Christian sacrifice—communicating out of our material possessions in a monetary way. He says, “Of doing good and communicating [of your substance] be not forgetful, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Thus, our material resources, if used to promote the Christian testimony, are viewed as a sacrifice for His name. This kind of a sacrifice can be made on an individual level (Gal. 6:6), or on a collective level as from an assembly (Phil. 4:14-16). The principles of such giving are laid out in 2 Corinthians 8-9. The fact that he says “forget not,” shows that it can be overlooked.

Obey and Submit to the Leaders

(vs. 17)

He gives a further word here as to their “leaders [guides].” These were alive and doing their work among the saints at the time of the writing of the epistle, unlike those in verse 7 who had died and were with the Lord.

He says, “Obey your leaders [guides], and be submissive; for they watch over your souls as those that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not groaning, for this would be unprofitable for you.” The KJV translates “leaders,” as “them that have the rule over you.” See also 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Timothy 5:17. This is an unfortunate rendering, and could convey the thought that there is some sort of official hierarchy in the Church that rules over the saints—i.e. the clergy, which is an unscriptural, man-made office.

These “guides” have been raised up of the Holy Spirit to care for the flock (Acts 20:28). They “watch” over the saints as overseers. They have experience with God, having walked in the path for some time, and thus, they can be a help to the saints in spiritual matters. This shows that the sheep which have gone outside the camp to Christ will not be left without shepherding care. Without the confines of that legal system, there will be the danger of enemies and sheep straying, etc., but these guides will guard and instruct the flock in these practical matters. At times we might resent their interaction with us and see it as meddling in our personal lives, but if we are submissive and try to follow the spiritual advice that they give, we will be helped in the path. They must give an “account” to the Lord as to how they have cared for the flock. Their desire is to do it “with joy, and not with grief [groaning].”

Pray for the Servants of the Lord

(Vss. 18-19)

It is to be noted that the writer touches on the three spheres of privilege and responsibility in the house of God. Verses 15-16 pertain to the exercise of priesthood; verse 17 has to do with the office of oversight, and now in verses 18-19, we have the sphere of gift. As servants in the exercise of their spiritual gifts, he says, “Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.”

The fact that the writer asks these Hebrew believers to pray for him, but has not identified who he is, might seem a little unusual. The natural response would be, “Pray for whom?” But he assumes that they know who he is—which most, if not all expositors, believe was Paul. More specifically, his prayer request is for his release from prison so that he might be “restored” to them, and thus, be enabled continue his public ministry among the saints, surely points to his being the Apostle Paul (vs. 19).

Things That Characterize the New Christian Meeting Place

Summarizing the foregoing exhortations regarding the new center of gathering in Christianity, the writer has touched on various things that characterize that ground:

It is a ground on which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Center of gathering—“unto Him” (vs. 13a).

It is a ground that is “without the camp,” thus, it is free of Judaistic principles and practises (vs. 13b).

It is a ground that bears the “reproach” of Christ (vs. 13c).

It is a ground that has no earthly headquarters—“no continuing city” (vs. 14).

It is a ground where Christians have liberty to worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24) with “the fruit of our lips,” without the aid of the outward appliances of orchestras and choirs etc., that characterize earthly religion.

It is a ground upon which love is seen in action, and where believers communicate to one another out of their material resources (vs. 16).

It is a ground where shepherding care is exercised, without official appointment to that work or prior training in the schools of men (vs. 17).

It is a ground where prayer is wont to be made (vss. 18-19).

His Doxology

(Vss. 20-21)

In closing, the writer invokes God to help the Hebrew believers to reach spiritual maturity. He says, “Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting [eternal] covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen.” His desire was that God’s great power, which had been demonstrated in the raising of the Lord Jesus from the dead, would be operative in effecting spiritual growth in them. (“Perfect,” signifies full growth.) And this, he desires, would be manifested in their performance of the “will” of God, which would be “well-pleasing in His sight.” The context of the epistle strongly suggests that he is referring to their complete separation from Judaism under the old covenant, and an understanding of what they had acquired through “the everlasting [eternal] covenant.”

His Final Salutation

(Vss. 22-25)

Knowing that there could be a negative reaction to what he had laid out in the epistle, he adds a gentle word of encouragement: “I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words” (vs. 22). His desire here is that they would allow what he has presented to them to sink down deeply into their hearts, and that they would respond appropriately.

He reminds them that “Timothy” had been “set at liberty” (vs. 23), and that he could be a help to them in understanding the truth that he has communicated in this epistle.

He encourages them to “salute” (greet) all of their “leaders.” This promotes peace among brethren. He closes with: “Grace be with you all, Amen.” (vss. 24-25).

The Epistle To The Hebrews, Hebrews 1:1-3: Christ Superior to the Prophets

(Chapter 1:1-3)

Christ, the Apostle of Our Confession

This great thesis begins with the writer magnifying Christ. As mentioned in the Introduction, in chapters 1-2, He is presented as the “Apostle” of our profession. He is seen as having come from God to accomplish the will of God for the glory of God. In these chapters, He is compared to the two greatest kinds of messengers that the legal system had—the prophets and angels. In every way He is shown to be infinitely superior.

The Glories of Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Man

In these opening chapters, the glories of Christ are viewed in two ways:

As the Son of God—emphasizing His deity (chaps. 1:1–2:4).

As the Son of Man—emphasizing His perfect humanity (chap. 2:5-18).

There is a type of these two sides of Christ's Person in "the ark" of the tabernacle system (Ex. 25:10-16). It was made of two materials: "pure gold," which typifies His divinity, and "shittim wood" ("incorruptible wood" – the Septuagint version), which typifies His perfect humanity. In Hebrews 1 we have the pure gold, and in Hebrews 2 we have the shittim wood.

The Purpose of Magnifying the Greatness of Christ

Perhaps the strongest and most convincing argument that the Jews would put before a person who wanted to leave Judaism is the fact that God Himself had ordained it. He delivered it to the nation of Israel by the hand of Moses and by "the disposition of angels" (Acts 7:53). Their argument is that since the greatest Authority in the universe appointed this system of worship, no person on earth should think of altering it. The unbelieving Jews would press this point upon those who were contemplating leaving Judaism, and would tell them that they were being persuaded to "apostatize from Moses" (Acts 21:21) by Christian preachers who had no authority to teach such things. Such a step, they would say, was an act of disobedience and rebellion, and essentially, was turning away from God Himself!

This, of course, would be terribly upsetting to the Jewish believers whose consciences had been formed by the demands of that legal system. However, if they understood that the God who gave Israel the religion of Judaism was the very same Person who was now calling them out of it, they would respond more confidently to the call. Hence, chapters 1-2 are devoted to establishing the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is God in the Person of the Son, and that it is He who is speaking to them about leaving Judaism for something better in Christianity. He is the divine Speaker throughout the epistle.

The Word Spoken by Christ is Greater Than That of the Prophets

Vs. 1—The first word in the epistle is "God." It is the only book in the Bible that begins in this way. It immediately brings us face to face with the Person who is speaking in this epistle. It is not a prophet, nor an angel, nor an apostle of Christ, but God Himself in the Person of the Son. Since there could be no greater Person in the universe, the reader is to take what is about to be stated with much gravity.

The writer informs us that while God has communicated to His people Israel through some mighty messengers in times past, He has now spoken in a far greater way. He says, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by [in the Person of] His Son." "Prophets" (vs. 1) and "angels" (vs. 4) were the two great messengers in the Jewish economy who God used to communicate to His people. The Jews proudly pointed to these messengers as a mark of the nation having God's favour, and it is true. No other people on earth have had such a distinguished means of communication from God (Deut. 4:7). However, the point that the writer is making here is that with the coming of Christ (His first advent), God has spoken to His people "in Son." This is an infinitely greater means of communication than that through prophets and angels. It is not merely that God has sent a greater Messenger in Christ, but that God Himself has come to the nation to speak to them in the Person of the Son! If the Jews felt privileged to have such exalted messengers as prophets and angels come to them from God, they ought to have felt doubly privileged to have had a "visitation" from God Himself! (Luke 1:78; 19:44)

In "time past" God had spoken to His people "in divers manners" (in different ways) "by the prophets"—through dreams, through visions, through an audible voice, etc.—but now "in the end of those days" of prophetic communication, He has spoken "in Son." This was in two ways: firstly, when the Lord was here on earth (chap. 2:3), and secondly, at the time of the writing of this epistle He was speaking from heaven (chap. 12:25).

A Digression

To properly grasp what is conveyed in this passage, we need to note the digression that occurs from chapter 1:2 (after the word "Son") to the end of the chapter, wherein the Holy Spirit leads the writer to unfold the glory and greatness of Christ's Person, before going on with a warning from Him in chapter 2:1-4. This is done to give emphasis as to WHO it is that is speaking, and thus, to bring what is said home to their hearts and consciences with greater force. If we follow the thread of the argument by skipping over the digression, it will read: "God" has "spoken to us in the Person of the Son...for this reason we should give heed more abundantly to the things we have heard." The point here is that since the importance of anything that is said depends upon the greatness of the person who has said it, they, therefore, ought to listen more earnestly to what is being said in this epistle because it is God Himself who is speaking!

A Sevenfold View of Christ's Glory

Vss. 2-3—As mentioned, the purpose of the digression is to magnify the glory and greatness of Christ. The writer, therefore, turns to ascribe many wonderful attributes of deity to Him, and thus distinguish Him from all others as the Son of God. Seven things in particular are stated that prove His superiority to all the prophets who ever lived and spoke for God:

The Heir of All Things

Firstly, Being the Son, He has been "appointed Heir of all things" (vs. 2). The inheritance is comprised of every created thing. This simple statement tells us that it all belongs to Him! No prophet, regardless of how distinguished he might have been, ever had such a thing given to him. This immediately sets the Son apart from all prophets. When Christ rises up to redeem His inheritance in a coming day (Eph. 1:14), He will share it with us because we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," and thus, we will reign over it together (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:21-22). But that is not the point the writer is making here—His emphasis is on Christ's worthiness to have the inheritance on account of who He is.

The Creator of the Universe

Secondly, "He made the worlds" (vs. 2). (The "worlds" is a Jewish expression for the universe – J. N. Darby Trans. footnote.) Again, a prophet might reference the creatorial works of God in his communications to the people, but he would not dare to claim to be the creator of it. The fact that Christ created the universe (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-16) attests to His deity, for Scripture clearly states that God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1, etc.).

The Effulgence of God's Glory

Thirdly, Christ is “the effulgence” or shining forth of God’s glory (vs. 3). Thus, He is the great Revealer of God (John 1:18). This is something more than a testimony being borne by a prophet concerning God; it is the actual outshining of God Himself, which is something that could only be done by a divine Person. Thus, all the moral and spiritual qualities of God shine forth in Him. It is not a mere reflection of God, as Moses reflected the glory of God on his face, but the very attributes of God coming out in display. H. Smith said, “The Son has drawn near to us in a way that makes it possible for us to see God displayed in all His attributes” (The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 8).

The Expression of God’s Substance

Fourthly, Christ, the Son of God, is not just the Revealer of God—He is God! (vs. 3) All the essential attributes of deity are in Him personally. He is the very “expression” of God’s “substance.” It would be blasphemy for any prophet to claim such attributes, and none have dared to do so.

The Upholder of the Universe

Fifthly, Christ, the Son of God, is also the Sustainer of the universe (vs. 3). That is, He keeps the whole creation going from day to day. Thus, He is not only the Heir of “all things” and the Creator of “all things,” but He is also the Upholder of “all things.” Scripture states, “By Him all things subsist” (Col. 1:17). He does this, we are told, “by the Word of His power” (Psa. 147:15-18; 148:8).

The Purifier of Sins

Sixthly, Christ “made by Himself the purification of sins” (vs. 3). That is, He has settled the whole question of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. As a result, sin has been “put away” before God judicially (chap. 9:26), and one day it will be “taken away” out of the creation entirely (John 1:29). Needless to say, this is something that no prophet or priest in the Mosaic system ever did, or ever could do. Those Old Testament sacrifices on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) signified the carrying over of the sins of the people year by year (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 16:34; Heb. 9:7, 25; 10:3). They could not put away sin, nor could they purge a believer’s conscience, as does the perfect sacrifice of Christ (chaps. 9:14; 10:1-2). The KJV says, He “purged our sins,” which is not a correct translation. It restricts the scope of His work of purification to believers’ sins, whereas the work here is general, touching every aspect of sin’s presence in the creation (chap. 2:9).

We are told that Christ did this “by Himself.” J. N. Darby said, “The Greek verb here has a peculiar form, which gives it a reflective sense, causing the thing done to return into the doer, throwing back the glory of the thing done upon the One who did it” (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, on Hebrews 1:3 – footnote). Thus, Christ’s finished work on the cross was done by Himself and for Himself, but the emphasis in the verse is not so much on what He did—great as that is—but WHO did it. Noting this, Mr. Darby said, “The purging of our sins is spoken of by the way, and then we hear of His glory on high” (Collected Writings, vol. 27, p. 388).

The Exalted One at God’s Right Hand

Seventhly, having completed the work of purgation, the Lord ascended into heaven and “set Himself down” on the “right hand of the Majesty [greatness] on high” (vs. 3). By virtue of who He is, He could enter the true sanctuary in the heavens and set Himself down on the throne of God! J. N. Darby commented: “He could sit down on the throne of God, and not soil it” (Collected Writings, vol. 27, p. 339). Satan, as “the anointed cherub,” attempted to do that very thing and was immediately expelled from heaven (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:11-19), but when Christ ascended to the throne, all heaven rose up to crown Him with glory and honour (Heb. 2:9). Being who He was, He stepped into the presence of “the majesty on high” and wasn’t out-classed by the glory of God that shone there—it was His place by right because He is God! No prophet will ever sit in such an exalted place. Christians are said to be seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6), but they, too, will never sit at God’s right hand; that place is reserved for Christ alone. He sits there because of WHO He is.

Summary

To summarize the attributes of the Son of God, He is:

The end of all history—being “Heir of all things.”

The beginning of all history—having “made the worlds.”

Beyond all history—being “the effulgence” of God’s glory and “the expression of His substance.”

Throughout all history—as “upholding all things.”

The One Sacrifice for all history—having made “purification of sins.”

Above all history—as sitting “on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Christ Seated at God’s Right Hand in Four Ways

It is significant that Christ is seen seated at God’s right hand four times in this epistle. When the heavens were “opened” for Stephen to look into, he saw Christ “standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). The Lord was standing at that time because opportunity was still being extended to the Jews to receive Him as their Messiah, even though they had rejected and crucified Him. He stood there ready to return to earth to set up the kingdom, as stated in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, if they would but repent and be converted (Acts 3:19-20). But they would not have Christ and sent Stephen to heaven with the message: “We will not have this Man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). It was only after this that God judicially set the nation aside and began a new departure in His ways towards the Gentiles (Acts 15:14) to call believers out of them to be part of an entirely new thing—the Church of God. The epistle to the Hebrews, being written some years after the stoning of Stephen, gives us another glimpse into heaven, and we see Christ not standing, but seated at God’s right hand. This shows that God was no longer reaching out to the nation on covenant lines as He once did, and the opportunity to have Christ return to earth as the Messiah of Israel and set up the kingdom had now been rescinded. Those things have been suspended for an undisclosed amount of time.

From the periodical, The Remembrancer: “JESUS is still standing because until the rejection by Israel of the testimony of the Holy Ghost, He did not definitively sit down, waiting for the judgment of His enemies. Rather, He remained in the position of High Priest standing....the Jews having done the same thing with regard to the testimony of the Holy Ghost that they did to JESUS, having (so to speak) in Stephen sent a messenger after Him to say, ‘We will not have this Man to rule over us,’ Christ definitively takes His place seated in heaven, until He shall judge the enemies who would not that He should reign over them. It is in this last position that He is viewed in the epistle to the Hebrews....This, it appears to me, is the reason why He is seen standing. He had not definitively taken His place as seated for ever (or ‘in perpetuity’)—eis to dienekes (Heb. 10:12), on the heavenly throne until the testimony of the Holy Ghost to Israel of His exaltation had been definitively rejected upon earth” (The Remembrancer, vol. 18, pp. 158-160).

Christ is mentioned as being seated at God’s right hand for four different reasons:

In chapter 1:3—He sits there on account of the greatness of His Person—as the Son of God.

In chapter 8:1—He sits there on account of His present work of intercession—as our High Priest.

In chapter 10:12—He sits there as having victoriously finished the work of atonement—as the great Redeemer.

In chapter 12:2—He sits there having walked the path of faith perfectly—as the Object for faith.

We can see from what has been before us concerning the greatness of Christ in relation to the prophets of Israel, that in reality, since He is God “in the Person of the Son,” there is no real comparison at all. Christ is an infinite Person, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, whereas the prophets are but mere men! In fact, the greatest of all the prophets said, “One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose” (Luke 3:16).

The Epistle To The Hebrews, Hebrews 1:4-2:18: Christ Superior to Angels

(Chapters 1:4–2:18)

The writer now moves on to the second kind of messenger in the old Judaic economy—angels. The nation of Israel has had a rich history of angelic interventions and communications. The Jews regarded this ministry of angels very highly, and saw it as a mark of God’s favour on them, and they were quite right in believing this. They assumed that if one were to leave Judaism, he would be stepping away from this incredible ministry. However, the writer shows that this is not true. He indicates here that angels also minister to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 14). A quick survey of the book of the Acts confirms this (Acts 1:10-11; 5:19; 8:26; 10:3-7; 12:7-10; 12:23, etc.).

The Jewish Tendency to Exalt Angels

The Jews had a tendency of exalting and extolling angelic beings. So highly esteemed was the ministry of angels among the Jews that there was one sect (the Essenes) that went beyond Jewish orthodoxy and actually worshipped them. Paul alludes to this error in Colossians 2:18-19. It was necessary, therefore, to speak of Christ’s superiority over angels to dismiss any question as to them being on par with Him. Angels are surely a higher order of created beings than prophets (who were but men), but lest anyone should think that angels were anything close to being equal with Christ, this next section puts that idea to rest beyond any doubt.

In the first section, the writer of the epistle has stated seven things that set Christ apart from the prophets as being infinitely superior (chap. 1:1-3). Now, he quotes from seven passages of Scripture to show that He is also infinitely superior to angels (chaps. 1:4–2:18).

As Son, He Has a Superior Place and Name

The first quote is from Psalm 2:7. It refers to when Christ came into the world as a Man. He had “a place” in God’s house and “a name” that set Him apart as being superior to angels (vs. 4). The writer says, “Being made [taking a place] so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee?” (vs. 5a) His point here is that angels are but servants in God’s household, whereas Christ is the Son! H. Smith said, “Christ has a place and a name far above angels. Psalm 2:7 is quoted to prove that coming into the world, Christ takes a place much better than that of the most exalted created beings” (Hebrews, p. 10).

At no time has God ever called an angel, “My Son.” This term denotes the special relationship that Christ has with the Father, as the eternal Son of God. (Note: He does not say, “This day I have begotten Thee; Thou art My Son,” but phrases it in the reverse order: “Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee?” Christ is declared to be the "Son" before the "day" He became a Man. Hence, His Sonship is eternal.) Angels are referred to as “sons of God” in the Old Testament (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psa. 8:6), but never as the Son. The expression “sons of God” is not used in connection with the angels after Christ rose from the dead, because in rising from the dead He became the Head of a new race of men (Col. 1:18; Heb. 2:10; Rev. 3:14) who are now designated as “the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). These believers are also called Christ’s “brethren” (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11-12) and Christ’s “companions” (Heb. 3:14). Thus, angels are no longer the highest order of God’s created beings; this new race of men—new creatures in Christ—is superior to them (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). It is not that angels have been demoted, or that they are less capable than they once were, but rather, that this new race (believers on the Lord Jesus Christ) has been elevated above them. Nor are the angels jealous of this change.

As Son, He Has a Special Place in the Affections of the Father

A second passage is quoted from 2 Samuel 7:14, to emphasize that Christ also has a special place in the affections of the Father that angels do not have: “I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be unto Me a Son” (vs. 5b). This was originally said of David’s immediate son, Solomon, but the terms and length of his kingdom that the prophet describes clearly point to great David’s greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:1; 15:22; 21:9). At no time has God ever addressed an angel in such terms of relationship and endearment. Angels are never said to be loved, or that they love, but in contrast to this, the Son dwells “in the bosom of the Father” and basks continually in the enjoyment of His

love! (John 1:18)

As Firstborn, He Is the Object of Angelic Worship

A third Scripture is brought forward: “When He brings the Firstborn into the habitable world, He says, And let all God’s angels worship Him!” (vs. 6). This is a quote from Psalm 97:7. The logic in this point is irrefutable; if the angels worship Him, then He is obviously greater than they. Psalm 97 refers to the Appearing of Christ (His second advent) when He comes in judgment to set the world right. He will intervene from heaven at that time as a glorified Man, and He will be worshipped by the angels as a glorified Man!

The fact that Christ receives worship from men (Matt. 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17; John 9:38; Rev. 5:9, etc.) and angels (Psa. 97:7; Rev. 5:11-14) proves His deity, for all worship from God’s creatures is to be given to God alone (Matt. 4:10; Rev. 22:8-9). Scripture strictly forbids the worship of any other, for all such is idolatry (Ex. 20:3-5).

As Creator, He Made the Angels to Serve Him

The writer brings forward a fourth Scripture from Psalm 104:4: “As to the angels He says, Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire” (vs. 7). Thus, angels are creatures of Christ’s making! He is their Creator! This verse tells us why they were made—to be His “ministers” (servants). Hence, Christ is so far above angels as to His Person that it is incomprehensible to even think of comparing Him to them.

As God, He Has a Throne, a Sceptre, & a Kingdom

A fifth Scripture is then quoted from Psalm 45:6: “But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom” (vs. 8). In this passage Christ is addressed as “God.” What could attest more clearly to His deity? If He is God, then angels are surely inferior to Him.

As with Psalm 97, Psalm 45 also has to do with Christ’s Appearing. When He comes to publicly rule over the world, He will establish a kingdom that will continue “for ever and ever”—that is, for as long as time will run. Again, the writer’s point here is unmistakably clear; no angel has ever had a “throne,” a “sceptre,” or a “kingdom.” Angels are servants in Christ’s kingdom and are happy to be such, but they never rise to a status higher than that.

Moreover, this psalm states that Christ “loved righteousness and hated iniquity,” and therefore, God “anointed” Him with “the oil of gladness.” This is a reference to the Holy Spirit coming to rest on the Lord at His baptism (Matt. 3:16). It set Him apart from His “fellows [companions],” which were Jewish brethren who were being baptized at that time. Loving righteousness and hating iniquity shows that Christ is morally and spiritually fitted to rule the world, for He will rule in “equity” (Psa. 98:9). Angels have not been thus prepared because they are not destined to rule.

As Lord (Jehovah), He Is the Unchangeable One

A sixth passage is quoted from Psalm 102:25-27. It shows Christ’s eternality in comparison to created things. “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands: they shall perish; but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the Same, and Thy years shall not fail” (vss. 10-12). The point here is that the things of this material creation will be “changed,” but Christ will never change for He is “the Same”—the unchangeable One. Those material things will one day “perish” (2 Peter 3:10), but He will “remain [continue still].”

As Lord (Adonai), He Has a Sovereign Right to Reign

A seventh passage is quoted, from Psalm 110:1, to show that by virtue of who He is, Christ has a sovereign right to reign supreme in the world to come. The writer says, “But to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool?” (vs. 13) Christ has been invited to sit on the “right hand” of God until the day that His enemies are put down. This is a place in which no angel has ever been invited to sit; it sets Him apart as being their Superior.

As to the angels, the writer adds that they have no higher role than that of “ministering spirits” sent forth by the Lord as His servants to care providentially for “the heirs of salvation.” These are those who would be saved by His grace (vs. 14).

Summary

To summarize the foregoing, in the process of magnifying the greatness of the Person of Christ, the writer has predicated things of Him that are only said of God Himself. This emphasizes His deity.

He is the Son of God (vss. 4-5a).

He has a special place in the affections of His Father (vs. 5b).

He is the Object of angelic worship (vs. 6).

He made the angels to be His servants (vs. 7).

He is addressed as God, having a throne, a sceptre, and a kingdom (vs. 8).

He is Jehovah, the Same, and the Unchangeable One (vss. 10-12).

He has a sovereign right to sit at God’s right hand (vs. 1).

First Warning Against Apostasy

(Chapter 2:1-4)

The Danger of Slipping Away from the Word Spoken by the Son

Vs. 1—After a long digression from chapter 1:2b to the end of that chapter (wherein the writer speaks of Christ's glories), he brings us back to the word spoken by the Son. He says, "For this reason, we should give heed more abundantly to the things we have heard, lest in any way we should slip away." The great danger for some among the Hebrews was that of slipping away from the Christian ground which they had taken and returning to Judaism. Such would be apostasy. The writer uses the word "we" here, not to denote believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, but those who were of Jewish stock, of which the writer includes himself. (This is characteristic of the Hebrew Christian epistles—Hebrews, James, and 1 & 2 Peter, though there may be some exceptions.)

Vs. 2—The writer makes a comparison between "the word spoken by angels" in the giving of the legal covenant (Acts 7:53) and the word that was "spoken by the Lord" when He came to the Jews at His first advent. He asks them to consider that if the angels' word in the Law against offenders was "stedfast" (it could not be repealed and overturned), and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward," how much more severe would the judgment be if they neglected the word spoken by the Lord who is an infinitely greater Person! How could they possibly "escape" the certain judgment that would fall upon them if they turned back? Thus, Christ's word is superior to that of angels.

He says, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" The "great salvation" which the Lord announced in His earthly ministry is not the eternal salvation of the soul announced in the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24), as commonly thought, but a temporal deliverance for the nation from their enemies. At that time, the Jews were captive to the Romans who ruled over them in their own land, and they were very much in need of this kind of deliverance. The Lord Jesus was sent from God as God's "Horn of Salvation" for the nation's deliverance (Luke 1:68-71). He came preaching "deliverance to the captives" who were under the Roman yoke (Luke 4:18-19). This was one of the outward blessings promised to the nation in the gospel of the kingdom which the Lord announced (Matt. 4:23; Mark 1:14). Upon His entry into Jerusalem, the people cried "Hosanna" (which means "Save now!") and expected great things from Him in that way (Matt. 21:15). But the leaders led the people to reject Him, and this great salvation from their enemies was, therefore, postponed. Had the Jews received Christ, He would have saved the nation by releasing them from their bondage. The nation would have averted its destruction in 70 A.D. and would have been blessed of God as promised in the writings of their prophets.

The writer also says that the promise of this temporal salvation from their enemies was "confirmed" to the people by the apostles (Heb. 2:3; Acts 3:19-21) and also by the "witness" of God Himself in the miracles that accompanied the preaching of that gospel (Heb. 2:4; Acts 3:6-10; 5:15-16, etc.). Thus, the nation "tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come" (Heb. 6:5).

This "great (national) salvation" spoken of in Hebrews 2:3, couldn't be the spiritual salvation of "souls" announced in the gospel of the grace of God today (1 Peter 1:9; Acts 16:31, etc.), because it says that it was "first" spoken by the Lord when He was here on earth. The gospel that the Lord preached was the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23; Mark 1:14). That message presented Him as the King and Messiah of Israel who would come to the nation in its time of need and save them from their enemies, and then set up His kingdom in power and glory. It was not until after the Jews formally rejected Christ, and sent a man (Stephen) to God with the message, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14; Acts 7:54-60), that the gospel of the grace of God went out to the world (Acts 11:19-21; 13:46-48; 15:14; 20:24; 28:28).

Regarding this point in Hebrews 2:3, H. Smith said, "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 contemplate the indifference of a sinner in [neglecting] 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 afterwards 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.' The Gospel of the Kingdom will again be preached after the Church has been completed" (The Epistle to the Hebrews, pp. 12-13).

J. N. Darby also said, "It is the preaching of a great salvation made by the Lord Himself when on earth; not the gospel preached and the Church united after the death of Christ. This testimony, consequently, goes on to the Millennium without speaking of the Church, a fact to be noticed not only in these verses but in the whole epistle." (Collected Writings, vol. 28, p. 4)

The Importance of the Death of Christ

Chap. 2:5-18—The writer's remarks to the Hebrew company as a whole are continued here with the theme of Christ's superiority over angels. As mentioned earlier, the great point in chapter 1 is to magnify the glories of Christ as the Son of God. Now in chapter 2, the writer brings out the glories of Christ as the Son of Man. The chapter exults in His death—seeing it as it truly is—a triumph for God and man. This was important for the Jews to understand because they had been conditioned to think of death as being a thing of defeat. The hope of every Jew was to live forever on earth in "the world to come"—the Millennium (Psa. 133:3; Isa. 65:22; Dan. 12:2; Mark 10:17; Luke 10:28). Death signalled defeat in their minds. They could not accept the idea that their Messiah would die, even though their own Scriptures stated that He would (Psalm 16:10; 22:15; Isa. 53:8-9; Dan. 9:26). Hence, they needed to see that Christ's death and resurrection was really a victorious thing that accomplished much for the glory of God and for the deliverance and blessing of man.

Four Reasons Why Christ Became a Man, Suffered, and Died

This being the case, the writer proceeds to present four great reasons why Christ became a Man, suffered, and died. (See The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, vol. 21, pp. 383-385; vol. 23, p. 255; vol. 28, pp. 41-42; Notes and Jottings of J. N. Darby, p. 240.) If He was to accomplish great things for God and man through death, He must of necessity become a Man. The writer, therefore, presents Christ in this chapter as "the Son of Man," which emphasizes His humanity. The underlying message that the Spirit of God would have us to get from these four points is that they are things that no angel could do. This, again, confirms Christ's superiority over angels.

First Reason

1) CHRIST CAME TO VINDICATE GOD REGARDING THE FALL OF MAN AND TO BEGIN A NEW RACE OF MEN THROUGH WHICH THE PURPOSE OF GOD WOULD BE FULFILLED

Vss. 5-13—The writer explains that God has purposed that “the world to come” (the Millennium) would be under the rule of man. This is something that was never said of angels. God made angels to serve but not to rule. Hence, the writer says, “Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak” (vs. 5). The only creature that He ever made to rule was man. However, the fall of man has rendered him quite incapable of ruling in any proper sense (Eccl. 7:29). In his fallen state, he is not fit for the purpose for which he was created. If God were to use man in his fallen state to rule the world to come, he would only spoil it as he has done with this present world. Thus, the entrance of sin has seemingly frustrated God’s purpose for man.

The writer of the epistle then quotes from Psalm 8 to show that God would meet this dilemma by having Christ come and take up manhood for the glory of God. He would become a Man and assume the liabilities that the first man has incurred by going into death and making expiation for sin. In rising from the dead, Christ would become the Head of a new creation race of men which would be well able to rule in the world to come, as God has purposed. This is the first great reason why Christ became a Man.

Vs. 6—The Psalm says, “What is man that Thou art mindful of him?” The Psalmist wonders at the grace of God that would take up with men. The word here for “man,” in the Hebrew, is “Enosh.” It denotes man’s weak, frail state—implying his fallen and degenerated condition. We are indeed very thankful that God has been mindful of our fallen race. He could have "thought only of Himself, and gathered unto Him His spirit and His breath, and all flesh would perish [expire] together, and man would return to the dust" (Job 34:14-15). God would have been just in doing this, but we as a race would have been lost forever. The writer continues his quote of Psalm 8, saying, “ ... Or the son of man that Thou visitest him.” This refers to God's visit to the human race in mercy in the Person of the Son (Luke 1:78). Instead of thinking only of Himself and leaving us to perish in our sins, “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son” that we might not perish (John 3:16). But here, let us note that the Psalmist uses a different word for “man,” in the Hebrew, from what he had previously used. Here it is “Adam,” which does not carry the connotations of “Enosh.” This means that when Christ would visit the human race by becoming a Man, it would not be in the degenerated “Enosh” state. Thus, in His incarnation, He would partake in manhood (spirit, soul, and body), but not in fallen manhood. We see from this how carefully the Word of God guards Christ’s sinless humanity. The Lord Jesus did not have a fallen sin-nature, as the rest of Adam’s descendants do; He had a holy human nature.

Vss. 7-8a—In becoming a Man, Christ condescended to take a place “a little lower than [inferior to] the angels” because men are an order of beings in God's creation that are inferior to angels. In chapter 1:4, the writer said that Christ is “so much better than the angels.” These statements do not contradict each other; one emphasizes His deity and the other His humanity. Thus, in coming down to take up with mankind, the Lord passed angels by and took upon Him the seed of Abraham (vs. 16). Being a Man, He accepted creature limitations (though not a creature Himself) and walked through this world in lowly dependence and obedience to His Father. The Psalm does not speak of His death, but passes over it to tell us of His present position as ascended on high—“Thou crownedst Him with glory and honour.” The Psalm also says, “And didst set Him over the works of Thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet.” Being that this is a millennial psalm, this hasn't happened yet. It refers to God's intention to have man to rule over the world to come in the Person of Christ. In that day, He will publicly have dominion over all as a glorified Man.

Vs. 8b—The writer breaks off quoting Psalm 8 at this point because that psalm views Christ's dominion as being limited to "all things" on earth and in the sea. The Old Testament does not go beyond the earthly side of the reign of the Messiah. However, the New Testament reveals that Christ's dominion will be over a far greater range of things, including things in heaven (Eph. 1:10; Phil. 2:10). Therefore, under inspiration, the writer adds, “He left nothing that is not put under Him.” This goes beyond the scope of Psalm 8 and embraces the whole universe. Since this is yet in the future, he states that the public display of this is not presently seen in the world—“but now we see not yet all things put under Him.”

Vs. 9—While we do not see Christ publicly reigning over the universe yet, the eye of faith sees Him “crowned with glory and honour” at the right hand of God. This is where He is now as a glorified Man. The writer goes on to tell us why Christ was made a little lower than the angels—it was "for the suffering of death." This is also something that Psalm 8 does not mention. It shows that by stepping into man’s place and becoming a Man, Christ assumed the liabilities that came with it. Hence, His becoming a Man was to “taste death for every thing.” This is the broadest aspect of Christ’s work on the cross. It is that which took care of the whole outbreak of sin and the havoc that it has wrought in the creation. This shows us how far-reaching the effects of sin have been; it has not only touched Adam’s race, but also the whole lower creation under him. Hence, Christ did not die only for men, but also for what sin has wrought in the creation.

If Christ, as a Man, is to reign over the inheritance—which includes every created thing in heaven and on earth—He must obtain the right to it by His purchase on the cross. This is why it says that Christ tasted death for "every thing." He bought “the field” (the whole world—“the cosmos”); this includes men as well as things (Matt. 13:38, 44). Hence, He paid the price for the right of possession to the whole world and all in it.

Vs. 10—If God, "for whom are all things, and by whom are all things," is to have His purpose fulfilled by having the creation under the rule of man in the world to come, it would have to be through a new race of men. But, in order for this new race to exist, it first must have a Head. Colossians 1:18, states that when the Lord Jesus Christ rose “from among the dead,” He became the "beginning" (and thus Head) of this new creation race (Rev. 3:14). The writer of Hebrews refers to this, stating that if God was going to bring "many sons" (a new race of men) to "glory," the “Captain [Author]” (the Lord Jesus Christ) would first have to be made "perfect." This refers to Christ’s resurrection and glorification (Luke 13:32; Heb. 5:9). It shows that there had to be a glorified Head before there could be a glorified race under Him. All who have believed the gospel, and are thus “in Christ,” are part of this “new creation” race (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10). While Christ is presently glorified, the new race under Him has not yet been brought to glory—that is, been brought to a glorified condition. This change awaits the moment of the Rapture (Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:15-17).

The amazing thing about this is that when Christ rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens as a Man, He passed angels by a second time, and took manhood to a place far above angels! We are told that when He entered the heavens as a Man, He sat down in a place “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:20-21). (Principalities and powers, etc., are angelic beings.) Thus, the Head of this new race is in a place above angels, and since believers are “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17), they are in that place too! This means that there is now a whole race of men under Christ that is superior to angels! The first order of man was made a little lower than the angels, but this new race of men under Christ is not a little higher than angels—it is “far above” angels! Men in this new race are now the highest order of God’s creatures. We are of that new order of

manhood now. Presently, it does not appear to be so because we still are in our bodies of humiliation (Phil. 3:21), which are part of the old order of manhood, but “as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:49; 1 John 3:2). That is, there is a day coming when we will be glorified like Christ (Rom. 8:17, 30) and will thus be suited to reign with Him in the world to come.

Note: it was the will of God that Christ would be made perfect “through sufferings.” This refers to what He passed through when He walked in this world. These were not the Lord’s atoning sufferings, but the sufferings which prepared Him to be our High Priest. He is now able to sympathize with His people who are passing through suffering and trial in the path of faith because He has felt the same (vs. 18).

Vs. 11—The writer goes on to show how perfectly those of the new creation race are suited to Christ. He says, “He (Christ) that sanctifieth and they (Christians) who are sanctified are all of one.” This refers to those of the new race being of the same nature and kind as Christ Himself. “All of one,” is not referring to the oneness of the body of Christ, nor is it speaking of the oneness in the family of God, but of our oneness of kind with Christ in the new creation. Thus, Christ and His brethren are of one set and kind.

An example of the oneness of kind is shown when Adam’s wife was brought to him. He had seen all of the various kinds of creatures pass before him; each was “after his kind” (Gen. 1:21, 24-25). There was, however, none found among them that were of Adam’s kind, and thus, all such were unsuited to him. But when God brought the woman to Adam, he saw one who was of his own kind, and said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). Far be the thought, but had Adam been forced to take one of the other creatures to be his wife, he would have been ashamed, but when God gave him the woman, which was of his kind, he was overjoyed. Similarly, we are "one" in kind with Christ in this new order of humanity, and therefore, entirely suited to Him. Hence, He “is not ashamed to call them brethren.”

It is important to note, however, that while He is not ashamed to call us “brethren,” the Word of God never says that we should call Him our “Elder Brother,” or other such terms of familiarity. Let us remember that He is “the Firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). As such, He has a place of preeminence among the others in the new race and there is a special glory that belongs to Him alone—which is what “Firstborn” indicates. It is a “glory” that we will behold, but it is not shared with us (John 17:24). The Lord’s words to Mary indicate this special place that belongs to Him. He said, “I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God” (John 20:17). He did not say “our” Father and “our” God, but mentions Himself in relation to His Father and His God separately from that of believers, showing that He has a place of distinction in the new creation race. This being the case, we must be careful not to speak to Him, or of Him, in terms of familiarity.

Vss. 12-13—Three quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures are cited to show Christ’s full identification with His brethren in this new relationship. While Christ must be distinguished as the preeminent One in the new creation, these quotations serve to prove how thoroughly the Sanctifier and the sanctified are bound up together.

The first Old Testament quotation is from Psalm 22:22: “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing Thy praises.” The word “assembly,” in this verse, is not referring to the Church as elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt. 16:18, etc.). If it was speaking of the Church, then the Church is found in the Old Testament—but this contradicts Romans 16:25; Ephesians. 3:3-5; Colossians 1:24-26. The word “assembly,” in Psalm 22, is referring to the whole heavenly company of saints from Old and New Testament times who will be raised and glorified in a coming day. J. N. Darby remarked, “The assembly is not found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, save in an allusion to all comprised in the millennial glory in chapter 12” (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, on Hebrews 1-2). His translation footnote on Hebrews 9:11 states something similar: “The Epistle to the Hebrews, though addressed to Christians on most precious subjects, does not enter into the proper church standing: it once refers to the church as in heaven in chapter 12” (full notes version). See Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, vol. 10, p. 245.

The point of the quotation is not to teach that the Church is seen in the Old Testament, but to show that after redemption would be completed, the theme of praise from Christ and the redeemed would be one in intelligence as to what He accomplished in His death. J. N. Darby said, “Verse 12 is a quotation from Psalm 22:22, where Jesus, in resurrection, takes the place of Leader of the praise of His brethren. Our songs should therefore ever accord with His. He has passed through death for us; and if our worship expresses uncertainty and doubt instead of joy and assurance in the sense of accomplished redemption, there can be no harmony but discord with the mind of heaven” (Collected Writings, vol. 27, p. 343). The Lord leads the praise of the redeemed today in these Christian times when the saints are assembled together because He and the redeemed are one in their theme of praise, if they are in communion with Him.

The second quotation is from Isaiah 8:17 (the Septuagint version): “I will put My trust in Him.” Having become a Man, Christ has accepted creature limitations (though not a creature Himself) and thus, lives in expressed dependence upon God. Since He will remain a Man for eternity, He will forever have a place of subjection to the Father along with His brethren.

The third quotation is from Isaiah 8:18. “Behold I and the children which God hath given Me.” Again, this is quoted for the sake of the principle involved; it does not teach that we are Christ’s children. We are “the children of God” (John 1:12; Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:1), and as such, we are “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). This quotation shows that the Sanctifier and the sanctified are one in nature, having the same life.

Thus, we are one with Him in our praise to God, in our dependence on God, and in our having the same life and nature.

In summary, this passage (vss. 5-13) shows that God has been fully vindicated regarding the fall of man, and that His purpose concerning the dominion of man in the world to come will be accomplished through a new race of men under Christ. All this is something that no angel could accomplish, and thus, Christ’s superiority over them is herein distinguished.

Second Reason

2) CHRIST CAME TO ANNUL THE DEVIL’S POWER OF DEATH

Vss. 14-15—The writer moves along to give a second reason as to why Christ became a Man and died—it was to annul the devil's power in death. He says, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy [annul] him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

Prior to the death and resurrection of Christ, Satan wielded “the power of death” over men by making them afraid of what lay beyond death. He used the fear of death (“the king of terrors” – Job 18:14) to his advantage and held men in bondage and fear. Satan’s power of death does not mean that he has the power to take a person’s life. He cannot go about killing whomsoever he chooses; only God holds the power of life and death in His hand (Dan. 5:23; Job 2:6). No one dies without Him allowing it. The power of death that Satan has used on men is the dread power of death—its element of fear.

The good news is that Christ has not only borne our sins in His own body on the tree as our Sin-bearer (1 Peter 2:24), but He has also gone into death and robbed the devil of his power to terrify the child of God with death. He now stands victoriously on the other side of death declaring, “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [hades] and of death” (Rev. 1:18). Thus, Christ has conquered death by loosing its “pangs” or fear element (Acts 2:24 — W. Kelly’s Translation) for the enlightened believer who faces death. He went down into “the dust of death” to conquer it (Psa. 22:15) and has left but “the shadow of death” for the child of God to pass through (Psa. 23:4). We may be called to pass through the article of death, but its “sting” has been taken away; we can face death without fear (1 Cor. 15:55).

The KJV says that the Lord died to “destroy” the devil, but it should be translated, “annul.” (See also 2 Timothy 1:10). The devil, clearly, has not been destroyed; he is still doing his evil work today of deceiving men, etc. His destruction will not occur until after the Millennium has run its course, when he will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). What this 14th verse is telling us is that the devil’s power to terrify believers has been annulled, or cancelled. Satan, generally, leaves unbelievers undisturbed as they go along life’s path into a lost eternity. Sold under his deception, many look at death without alarm, even though immediately after they pass through it, there is sheer torment for them (Luke 16:22-23). The Psalmist notes this, stating, “They have no pangs until death” (Psa. 73:4 – ESV). Similarly, the Lord taught that Satan (“the strong man”) does everything he can to keep “his goods” (lost persons) “in peace” (Luke 11:21).

Note: by Christ’s becoming a Man in order to win this victory over Satan, there are two different words used in verse 14 which are used to guard His sinless humanity. When it speaks of the "children," it says that they are “partakers” of flesh and blood. The word in the Greek translated “partakers” (koinoneo), means a common, equal sharing in something. In this case, their sharing in humanity. This is true of all men; they all fully partake in humanity—right down to having the sin-nature. However, when it speaks of Christ’s becoming a Man, the Spirit of God leads the writer to use a different word. He says that He “took part” (metecho) in the same. This word in the Greek indicates a sharing in something without specifying to what degree the sharing goes. Therefore, while Christ became a Man fully (in spirit, soul, and body), His sharing in humanity did not go so far as to take part in man’s fallen state, because He did not have a fallen sin-nature.

Vs. 15—He goes on and says, “And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Those who experienced this deliverance could not be the Old Testament saints, as many have supposed. They lived hundreds, or even thousands of years before Christ won this victory by dying and rising from the dead. They lived in fear of death and they died in that state of bondage, and never got deliverance from it in their lifetime. Of course, once they passed through the article of death, they would immediately be at “peace” and in a state of bliss (Isa. 57:1-2). All such are rejoicing now with the Lord in their disembodied state. But these, of whom the writer speaks, got deliverance from this fear through Christ's death and resurrection. They would have to have been alive on earth at the time when He rose from the dead. This would have to be the believing remnant of disciples, the first generation of believers in the Church. They were Jewish believers on Old Testament ground as to their understanding, and thus, they lived in "fear of death." However, they learned through the gospel of Christ’s victory over Satan's power in death (2 Tim. 1:10), and thus, were delivered from those fears. When they were later called upon to go through death as Christians, they could face it without fear. In fact, all who believe on Christ, after His death and resurrection, and who have been enlightened by the gospel as to these things, have this same confidence.

Again, this shows Christ’s death to be a triumphant thing, not a defeat. And, it is something that no angel could do.

Third Reason

3) CHRIST CAME TO MAKE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS

Vss. 16-17—The third reason that Christ became a Man and died was to "make propitiation for the sins of the people." This, of course, refers to His “one sacrifice for sins” on the cross to save those who would believe (chap. 10:12). To accomplish this, Christ would have to be “made like unto His brethren”—that is, to become a Man. (This is not referring to His brethren in the new creation race as mentioned in verses 11-12, but rather, His fellow countrymen of natural relationship—the Jews.) He took "hold of the seed of Abraham" and became a Man in that lineage for the purpose of going to the cross to make propitiation. Propitiation is the Godward side of Christ's work on the cross that meets the claims of divine justice in regard to sin and sins, and thus, vindicates God’s holiness (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

The KJV says that Christ made “reconciliation for the sins of the people,” but this is a mistranslation. It should read, “propitiation for the sins of the people.” A holy God, as our God is, will never reconcile Himself with sin! (This mistranslation is also found in Leviticus 16:20.) Christ’s work in making propitiation is, again, a triumphant thing, and something that an angel couldn’t do.

Verse 17 introduces us to Christ’s priesthood for the first time in the epistle. Coupling this verse with Romans 8:34, we learn that there are two functions in His priesthood:

Making propitiation for sins of the people—a one-time work.

Making intercession for His people—an on-going work.

Similarly, the Old Testament high priests had a two-fold function in their office: Firstly, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would don his holy “linen” garments and offer a sacrifice (a sin offering) outside the sanctuary at the brazen altar (Lev. 16:6, 9). This is a type of Christ’s death on the cross to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Then, after offering a sacrifice to make atonement for the people, the high priest would go inside the sanctuary and change into his garments of “glory and beauty” wherein he would minister before the Lord. This is a type of Christ’s present service on high in the presence of God interceding for His people who are passing through this world. Verses 17-18, show Christ to be the anti-type of these two things.

Fourth Reason

4) CHRIST BECAME A MAN IN ORDER TO BE A SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST

Vs. 18—The fourth reason Christ became a Man and died was so that He could be a sympathizing High Priest. The writer says: “For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour [help] them that are tempted.” In passing through this world to the cross, Christ suffered being tempted in every way that a righteous man could be tempted, thus qualifying Him to be “a merciful and faithful High Priest.” Being thereby fitted through sufferings to the office of high priesthood (vs. 10), Christ presently intercedes for His people as they pass through the same evil world through which He passed. Being a Man, He is fully able to enter into the sorrows and trials of His people because He has felt the same. He succours (helps) them in His sympathies, and grants according to His perfect wisdom, “mercy and grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Thus, through His high priestly intercession we are enabled to stand in the time of temptation and trial. However, all this necessitated the Son of God becoming a Man and suffering. And again, this is something that angels cannot do. They are not men and have not walked in the path of faith, nor have they been tempted with troubles in connection with life on earth. They, therefore, cannot enter into our sorrows and minister the comfort and encouragement that we need in times of trial.

Summary

Thus, Hebrews 2:5-18, presents four great reasons why the Son of God became the Son of Man. Each of these things that the writer has touched upon could only be accomplished by Christ becoming a Man, suffering, dying, and then rising again. Being who Christ is—God “in the Person of the Son”—there is really no comparison between Him and angels. He is an eternal and infinite Person, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, whereas the angels are but creatures that He made to be His servants!

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