

Hebrews - Commentaries by Thomas Leslie Mather

Heavenly Things, Chapter 1.14 (12:3-24)

THE END OF THE RACE—WE ARRIVE AT THE HEAVENLY CITY

(Suggested Reading: Heb. 12:3-24)

This is the second and last time we are invited to consider our Lord Jesus Christ. The first time we were invited to consider Him in His dual capacity of Apostle and High Priest 3:1 i.e. as the One who was sent into the world by the Father and then the One who on returning to heaven became our High Priest. Here we are invited to consider Him in another dual capacity as the Leader (or Author or Originator) of faith and also as the Completer of faith. Considering Him as Apostle and High Priest is no doubt contemplating how He filled these offices to God's glory. Considering Him as the Leader and Completer of faith is more how the two characteristics of faith patience and power shone out in His earthly life without anything to dim their luster as with us. God has concealed the failures of the faithful ones recorded in Heb. 11 and recorded only how they overcame by faith. With Christ there was no possibility of failure. He retraced all that is found in Heb. 11 without any failure at all and is now in heaven. Therefore He personally becomes the goal the end of the race. That was the point of the first great exhortation at the opening of the 12Th chapter to fix our eyes on Jesus because He has run the race. The other great point was patience to run the race. Unlike Jesus we have an old sinful nature impatient longing to drop out of the race and settle down on earth. That being the case we need instruction on how to run the race.

God provides this instruction. He trains us for the race. God is bringing many sons to glory 2:10 and what son is not subject to a father's correction so that he may fittingly represent his father and his house and not disgrace him. But we have a part to play in the race it is not all left up to our Father's discipline. Our part is to strengthen our work and walk 12:12-13 to follow peace with all men and holiness 12:14 and not to lack the grace of God. The law is then brought in in the figure of Mt. Sinai as the great barrier to the grace of God. But we have not come to that, we are told but to Mt. Zion grace and the heavenly city. In spirit the race is over the goal attained. The epistle morally ends at the close of Chapter 12 with exhortations founded on that.

An appendix follows this chapter, summarizing our reasons for believing that Paul was the author of Hebrews. It is inserted here because Chapter 12 ends the race from earth to heaven, and at this point the reader should have a general understanding of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Disciplinary Training to Help Us Run the Race

Hebrews ignores the doctrine of the new man in Christ Jesus so prominent in Paul's letters. Instead it looks at us in mixed condition that is as having both an old and new nature. Perhaps this is because it is addressed to the Hebrews. Unlike the Gentiles who indulged in the desires of the flesh and of the mind the problem of the Hebrews was religious flesh. Their constant tendency was to long for the old religious traditions impediments to Christianity. In any event in Hebrews man is looked at as he is found in this world still with a body of flesh hindering his progress toward heaven. His fallen nature would anchor him to this world if God allowed it.

But God does not allow it and the subject opening before us is discipline to prevent our flesh from overcoming the faith God has implanted in us to strive for and attain our heavenly goal. Discipline in Chapter 12 is against the flesh but connected with the trials of faith. It is not primitive discipline as in Corinth where many had become sickly in body and others had been removed by death due to partaking of the Lord's Supper while living wicked lives see 1 Cor. 1:27-30. Rather its purpose is to help us run the race as a coach disciplines and encourages his athletes. It can be looked at in three ways as coming from "the Lord" first 12:5, 6 then "God" 12:7 and finally from "the Father of spirits" 12:9. These three ways give us some indication of the character and purpose of the discipline, which is not otherwise spelled out.

We are exhorted neither to slight the Lord's discipline on the one hand nor to crumble under it on the other, for it is a proof of the Lord's love. Paul is quoting from Prov. 3:11, 12. Proverbs is the book which gives us wisdom to pass through this world. The source of the quotation suggests that what we are considering is practical discipline in the affairs of this life; the setting of the quotation suggests guidance through this world as the reason for it Prov. 3:6. While guiding us in love He may pass us through experiences which try our faith. Suppose I am working for a firm which is in financial difficulties and finds it difficult to meet its payroll. I do not understand the problem but the Lord does. I love my job. Until some other employment is opened for me my faith is being tried. I can refuse to recognize the Lord's hand in what happened or on the other hand I can faint in my mind question His real love for me. Peter knew that the end of his life would be martyrdom because the Lord told him. The Hebrews had not yet suffered martyrdom striving against sin. If they did, that would be the end of their life in this world for Peter that end was always before him yet he wrote "that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" 1 Peter 1:7.

The next subject is God dealing with us as with sons. When Moses reached maturity he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Before that time he was a son in Pharaoh's court, subject to the discipline of that court, the end object of which was to educate him in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. To be the son of Pharaoh's daughter he must endure the discipline of the world to make him a man of the world. God has called us to a higher court and a higher discipline. If He didn't we wouldn't be His sons but bastards 12:8. This discipline then has heaven not earth as its purpose. Those who are bastards the men of the world who reject Christ are not subject to God's discipline at all. They will be subject to His final judgment after death but in life they are left alone because they have no portion in heaven. But because God is calling many sons unto glory discipline has heaven in mind and is presumably connected with our spiritual life. We may be disciplined for associating with anything we know to be grossly wrong in doctrine or practice. The last consideration is "the Father of spirits." This term

simply means God the Father "the Father of spirits" in contrast to "the fathers of our flesh." They corrected us using their best judgment which could be wrong. God the Father can never be wrong. The purpose of His discipline is to separate us from the world not in a monkish sort of way but in spirit. There are many things in this world which are not wrong in themselves. But if we allow them to displace God in our lives He may discipline us for that. The end result is that "we might be partakers of His holiness." He has in mind the heavenly scene to which He has called His many sons and there can be no unholiness there. The whole subject is summarized in v.11. We dislike discipline no matter what form it takes. It is what "seems to be" what is apparent that is what forms our judgment of it. But faith is based upon the link of the soul with God, and when tried passes through it. Then the peaceable fruit of righteousness is reaped. Fruit is the end result of a long process in nature, and God is patient with us. Alas some Christians despising the discipline, do not enjoy the taste of the fruit. "Ephraim has turned to idols, let him alone" Hos. 4:17-is the saddest thing that can be said about an indifferent Christian.

What We Must Do Ourselves to Help Us Run the Race

After giving us an insight into how divine discipline is used to help us run the race from earth to heaven the Spirit now turns to what we must do ourselves to run the race. Several exhortations are given simple but difficult to practice. We are to banish discouragement in our work for God and our walk with Him for such is the meaning of hands and feet. If we don't the lame (weak Christians) will be turned out of the way that is give up the race from earth to heaven. If you are discouraged yourself with what you are doing for God and your walk with Him, then your example will be contagious the weaker ones will be discouraged too. Instead let your example heal the lame brother that is encourage him to run the race. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Peace and holiness are mentioned in the passage on discipline. There the order is holiness first "partaking of His holiness" 12:10 then the peaceable fruit of righteousness, now viewed as ripe for tasting 12:11. They are repeated in reverse order here for emphasis, for seeing the Lord is the end of the race.

Warnings on Failing in the Race

Now the last part emerges "see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God." This means make sure that you retain confidence in the love of God not as an abstract thing but as a personal daily and practical thing the sunbeams flooding into the soul. But why grace then if love is the thought. It is because the law or the legal spirit will never help us understand the trial of faith through which God may pass us on the one hand or undergird us to do something practical to run the race. The grace of God meets all our needs. We don't deserve such a good God, but praise His Name He is our Father. But what if we do come short of the grace of God? Then our bad example will spread, just as it did to the lame brother. That is the meaning of "a root of bitterness" here. A plant well rooted will grow and spread out. The race then is lost, for all practical purposes. When a root of bitterness is firmly grounded on the earth, heaven is forgotten. How important then to retain our personal confidence in God. As to man we can have no confidence in him. So they are warned against the external wickedness of man which defiles "any fornicator" and finally internal wickedness profanity though it expressed itself in an outward act. A profane person is someone who values the world or something in it more than the grace of God. Esau sold his birthright for food, and was not forgiven. His show of repentance was only a change of mind. True repentance toward God is in the soul and consists of judging oneself sinful and God righteous and holy. Esau did neither he felt sorry for himself what he had lost. Men object to the Scripture "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated" Rom. 9:13, forgetting that it was God's verdict on both men long after they were dead.

Three Circles of Three

Notice the circles of threes in this chapter. Under discipline we had "the Lord" "God" and "the Father of spirits." Under the part dealing with our conduct we had "hands" "knees" and "feet." Under the part dealing with what we should avoid we have a "root of bitterness," "any fornicator" and a "profane person." These three circles of threes appear just before we reach the goal the end of the race in Hebrews. This is our next consideration.

Our Goal Is Not an Earthly City but a Heavenly City

As soon as man was expelled from the Garden of Eden his thoughts turned toward building a city on the earth. Cain built the first one a prototype of those which have followed. It contained every delight the flesh wanted. Cain was a farmer and so the city was surrounded by good land and named after his firstborn son Enoch whose name means dedicated. Ever since then men have been dedicated to building cities in the world. They are more elaborate than Cain's city but contain the same elements business (Gen. 4:20), music (Gen. 4:21), industry, science, technology (Gen. 4:22) and the art of war (Gen. 4:23). Except for war none of these things are evil in themselves it is the use to which they are put which is. God-given talents are prostituted used to shut God out of man's world and to camouflage sin which is corruption (Gen. 4:19) and violence (Gen. 4:23-24).

Next our attention is drawn to two contrasting expressions "you are not come" that is to Mt. Sinai and "you are come" that is to the heavenly city. Actually the heart of man would prefer an earthly city Cain and those who followed him showed that. But couldn't God have a city on the earth too to offset Cain's work? However if you would live in God's city you must do the works of God. Mt. Sinai is the city of law and a sinful people were so terrified with the mount which might be touched (the visible rather than the invisible city) the mount that burned with fire, which was characterized by blackness, darkness, tempest, the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words that they found it all unbearable. They didn't want the word spoken to them anymore. So God stopped speaking to them that way. At the beginning of Hebrews we are told "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son" 1:1, 2. The voice of God the Son is calling all who will believe to come to the Holy City Jerusalem where He is Rev. 22:17. But man's heart still prefers an earthly city and so most likely the same angel who took John to see the heavenly city takes him to see the earthly city Babylon in all her corruption. It is remarkable how these cities are tied together by the invitation "come." In Hebrews we are not come to the earthly mount but we are come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God. "Come" says the angel to John and carries him away to the wilderness to see the harlot city Babylon in the wilderness. "Come" says the angel to John and he carries him away to a great and high mountain to see the Holy City Jerusalem. The sight of it and the thought of Jesus there again invokes the invitation to come "and let him who is athirst come." Well it is one thing to be there in spirit and another to be there actually this requires the coming of Jesus. So He says "Surely I come quickly" and our reply is "Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus" for we want Him to come and take us where He is. But the angel first took John, in spirit, to see the Holy City before the vision of it brought forth these responses. So would Paul here, in Hebrews, take us in spirit to see the heavenly city. The heavenly city in Hebrews, the city for which Abraham longed, is not the Church, for Abraham knew nothing about

the Church then the unrevealed mystery. It is the whole scene of heavenly glory which includes the Church, and all who share it with us. Just before Paul takes us in spirit to the heavenly city he interjects a word about the earthly city, Jerusalem Mount Zion the center of the earth. It is as though we are looking down at it in its coming glory, when heaven and earth will be united under Christ Eph. 1-10. Mount Zion in Scripture is the place of grace in contrast to Mt. Sinai the place of law. Israel's long journey started with the law at Mount Sinai and then when they had broken all its precepts and failed miserably in their history God establishes the kingdom in power under David on Mount Zion. He would bless them on the principle of grace though they had failed under the principle of law. Then comes the heavenly city but not until the earthly city of God is brought in first. We are dealing entirely with great principles being afforded a summary of the entire blessing of earth and heaven under Christ the root and the offspring of David Rev. 22:16. Mount Zion the earthly city is the city of the Great King Ps 48:2 The joy of the whole earth Jerusalem the city of the Living God. The union of both in the coming day is the answer to the Lord's Prayer "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

An incident from my youth flashes back from time to time whenever I think of attaining our goal the heavenly city. An analogy of course, but a meaningful and encouraging one. It was the spring of.

1945. I was an airman in England awaiting demobilization. Without warning a number of us were told to pack immediately. We were to fly home to Canada in our bombers. About 2 a.m. we were alerted to put on flying clothes. After the engines were warmed up the pilot asked me over the intercom for a D.R. Compass reading and simultaneously I heard the control tower giving us take off clearance. We took off over water and in a few hours touched down on the Azores Islands for gas. The last leg of the flight was sheer delight. We flew low over a placid Atlantic, but there was nothing to see no ships, no aircraft. Only a copper colored sun which we seemed to be chasing. Our spirits were irrepressible, for the war was over and we knew we would soon be home.

We too can see the end of our warfare in this world. The multiplying signs predicted by our Lord in Matt. 24 tell us we are not far from home. But that home, that heavenly city means an eternal uninterrupted rest for us. There we shall see Christ and be like Him. There too we shall meet and associate with the Lord's people from every nation and generation. For the Christian that is attaining the goal.

The Heavenly City—the Goal—Comes in Sight at Last

To come to the heavenly city is to realize our hope the attainment of our goal. First we were called "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" 3:1. Until God called us from heaven the horizon of our hopes was confined to this earth. Next came the tasting of the heavenly gift 6:4 and we are told that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" James 1:17. Then we are introduced to "heavenly things" 9:23 even though, like Nicodemus, we may not be ready for them John 3:12. The effect of these heavenly things taking root in our souls is searching for a better country we now live in that is a heavenly country 11:16. And the capital city of that heavenly country is the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem 12:22.

The heavenly Jerusalem' is the end of the race from earth to heaven in Hebrews. In our chapter heaven and earth are brought together. There are eight considerations, ranging from the one earthly consideration Mt. Zion 12:22 Through seven heavenly considerations terminating in 12:24. Morally Hebrews ends when we arrive at the heavenly city the remainder of the epistle being exhortations. The seven things descriptive of the heavenly city are broken down into 4 and 3 as is customary in Scripture. Four of these things relate to God, for it is His city the city of the living God and three to the inhabitants of His city.

God and His city The city is called "the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." It belongs to God who is its builder and maker. A city is a system of administration and "of His kingdom there shall be no end." He is the living God the inhabiter of eternity, eternal in His being the "I am that I am."

In this city God is known as the Judge of all. His throne is there Rev. 22:3 in the inner city the Holy City Jerusalem. Believers must appear before God for the review of their responsible lives on earth Rom. 14:10 2 Cor. 5:10. They will be rewarded or rebuked but not condemned since Christ has borne their sins Rom. 8:1. Unbelievers must stand before the throne Rev. 20:11 for eternal judgment. So God is the Judge of all see also John 5:21-27.

Then we find Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant. This is "the better covenant" of 8:6. It is better in contrast to the law which was the Old Covenant. Apart from other considerations the law was temporal by its very nature. At the end of Hebrews the New Covenant is called "the eternal covenant" 13:20. Jesus, who is God's Son, will enforce this covenant on earth from His throne in heaven. The New Covenant is introduced at this juncture to sound a note of blessing in contrast to the thought of God as the Judge of all for judgment is an unusual task for God, who delights to bless see Isa. 28:21. Still, God has these two characters the Judge of all and the Blessor under the New Covenant.

Finally we come to the basis of the blessing the blood of sprinkling which speaks better things than that of Abel. Both were shed on earth first the blood of Abel then the blood of Christ. Abel's blood cried to God for vengeance and Cain went away to build a city and forget God. Christ's blood cries to God for forgiveness and opens the way to a city which God has built for us. It is the blood of the New Covenant the foundation of blessing to man.

The inhabitants of God's city. At the close of Revelation an angel takes John on a guided tour of the Holy City Jerusalem. The most striking feature of this tour is that John tells us what the city is like but is silent about its inhabitants. True there are angels outside at the gates. But the city itself is vacant and unoccupied as far as the record informs us. The reason for this is the invitation "Come" which follows i.e. come to the city by believing the gospel, and live in this holy city. When we come to the heavenly city we discover that we are not the only ones who live there. John and Paul give us opposite but complementary views of the heavenly city. John tells us about the city but not its inhabitants Paul ignores the city and tells us about its inhabitants. Three classes of inhabitants are given to us the angels, the Church in glory, and the Old Testament saints. The order of presentation is intentionally designed to convey the impression of God's city in its coming rule over the earth "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This will be "in the administration of the fullness of times" Eph. 1:10 in the millennial kingdom soon to be set up and administered by Christ. We are first introduced to "an innumerable company of angels, the universal gathering." Heaven was home to them long before the world was created. In Hebrews angels are mentioned eleven times in the first two chapters. From Chapter 2 until now they are not spoken of, for Christ is calling many sons to glory. Now they are prominent once more for the

glory is their home and we have arrived there.

Next comes "the Assembly of the Firstborn which are written in heaven." This is the Church (never the subject of teaching in Hebrews). Because we are "written in heaven" we precede the Old Testament saints in the order of presentation here. Historically they would come first but the point is not chronological order in time. It is our origin before time we were written in heaven. The Church is the moral center of the heavenly city, just as it is central in the three classes here. Being closest to Christ's heart as His bride it is the city within the city the Holy City Jerusalem of Rev. 21.

Finally we come to "the spirits of just men made perfect" the Old Testament saints. No New Testament saints are listed in the register of the "Faith" chapter Heb. 11 not even such a man of faith as Stephen. At the conclusion of Chapter 11 we are told "that they without us should not be made perfect." This statement is enshrined in a sevenfold presentation of what cannot make perfect and what can divided into the usual groupings of 4 and 3.

The three references to what cannot make perfect are introduced by the blanket statement that the law made nothing perfect. The other two references substantiate the general statement with the detail 9:9 and 10:1. God looked past the failure of the law to the coming of Christ and so these just men died in faith their spirits are with the Lord. Now we will look at the group of four Scripture

WHAT "for the law made nothing perfect" 7:19
CANNOT "unable to perfect as to conscience him that worshipped" 9:9
MAKE "the law...can never...perfect those who approach" 10:1
PERFECT CHRIST "to make perfect the Leader of their salvation" 2:10
AND "and having been perfected became...the author of eternal salvation" 5:9
HIS PEOPLE
MADE "that they should not be made perfect without us" 11:40
PERFECT "the spirits of just men made perfect" 12:23

verses in which Christ and His people are made perfect forever. (The thought in being made perfect here is having a glorified body.) This thought emerges with the references to Christ. First, the Leader of our salvation has been made perfect 2:10 secondly, having been perfected He became...the Author of eternal salvation. Christ being perfected means not only raised from the dead but ascended to the highest pinnacle of glory in heaven seated as Man on God's throne. It is from this point He becomes the Author, not of temporal but eternal salvation. He is not only the Savior of the soul but of the body also. And the bodies of the just men of the Old Testament are in the grave. However "they should not be made perfect without us" 11:40 this perfection should not be theirs in isolation but shared with us. But since we are looked at here as present in heaven in glorified bodies in the expression "the Church of the Firstborn" so they too are looked at as "made perfect" glorified along with us "the spirits of just men made perfect" 12:23.

The Better Things of Christianity

If we are correct in assuming that 12:24 is the moral ending of the epistle to the Hebrews this would surely be the point to look at two remarkable features of this verse. First of all, translators do not render part of this verse uniformly, not due to obscurity in the Greek, but to uncertainty as to the underlying thought. The language is highly figurative. The blood of Jesus is said to be speaking better things than that of Abel. In 11:4 we were told that though Abel is dead yet he speaks. Is that the contrast between Abel speaking and the blood of sprinkling speaking? Or is it between the sprinkled blood of Jesus speaking and the blood of Abel speaking? Or perhaps the language has been couched this way so both interpretations are valid. Whatever the case, raising the question draws our attention to the reference to Abel in 11:4.

Abel heads the list of those who died in faith in Heb. 11. He is the first man whose name is mentioned there and his name is the last word in the moral close of the epistle at 12:24. This must be intentional. Abel lived long before Moses and the giving of the law, long before Abraham the father of these Hebrews who boasted of their ancient religion, long before the flood even. He lived in the dawn of the Adam race. Abel continues to speak in the sense that his life's testimony was that man is a sinner and needs a blood sacrifice to redeem him, and bring him to God. Jesus has offered Himself now and the sacrifice Abel looked for has been made. And so, no matter how the verse is translated, it tells us clearly that something better has been brought to man. The moral close of the epistle thus brings together two great things Jesus' precious blood of sprinkling and, because of that blood, what is infinitely better for man than anything which preceded the blood of Jesus. So the word "better" is never found again in Hebrews. Nothing can be better than the blood of Jesus. It has satisfied God and it speaks to man of pardon.

Heavenly Things, Chapter 1.15 (13)

THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFESTYLE AS TAUGHT IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

(Suggested Reading: Heb. 12:25-29; 13)

Morally the epistle to the Hebrews is concluded when we reach heaven 12:22-24 for the running of the race from earth to heaven was the theme of the epistle. Paul wanted them to leave the earthly Jerusalem and run the race to the heavenly Jerusalem. In the book of Hebrews the race is now over. Our hope has been attained when we come to the heavenly city in spirit our fondest prospects made good. The epistle concludes with comments, warnings, exhortations, prayer all based on that body of doctrine which is to be given effect to in our lives. Our character is sketched as it should be in the world the image we should make in men's eyes "you are our letter...known and read by all men" 2 Cor. 3:2. In the previous chapter the great thought was how God saw us here we are witnesses in the world and the great thought is how man sees us. But these are generalizations. What we should look for as well, is the application of the doctrine of the epistle to ourselves. And so it is not surprising to discover an immediate linkage with the beginning of the epistle as we come to its end.

The Opening Command and Warning From God Himself

The opening two verses here refer back to the opening two verses of the epistle, reversing the order. Let us compare them. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son" Heb. 1:1, 2. At the end we read "see that ye refuse not Him who speaks" 12:25 i.e. God the Son, followed by a quotation from the prophets "yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" Hag. 2:6. God is content to speak only at the beginning of the epistle at the end He insists on being heard and obeyed. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord" 2:3 is the great question posed at the beginning. It is answered here for such there is no escape "for if they escaped not who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven." The shaking of heaven and earth spoken of here as the result of God the Son pronouncing judgment on everything opposed to Him will introduce the millennial kingdom. Man will not bow to righteousness willingly it will be enforced. That state of things which now exists good and evil both contending must be swept away "that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." The result is that we shall receive a kingdom which cannot be moved. This is because "a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom" 1:8. The world cannot have peaceful rule because it spurns righteous rule. Righteous rule will characterize Christ's kingdom.

A babe in Christ should know that the kingdom which cannot be moved is Christ's millennial kingdom, the principles of which were enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount. But it is important that we connect it to the two cities we have come to in 12:22 Mount Zion i.e. Jerusalem on earth and "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." When the kingdom has come, heaven and earth will be linked together in a divine administration involving Jerusalem on earth and the heavenly Jerusalem above as stated in Eph. 1:10. Jacob's ladder connecting heaven and earth with the angels of God ascending and descending was an earlier forecast of those good things still to come confirmed by the Lord when He was on earth to Nathanael see John 1:51. In summary Paul is directing the attention of the Hebrew Christians to something they never understood from the law and the prophets that the kingdom has a heavenly side. As Hebrews they thought only of an earthly kingdom. Quite true, Paul is arguing, but not for you. As belonging to the Church of the Firstborn, your place is in heaven and your role in the future administration of the kingdom will be played from heaven, not earth. Don't you see, he is saying, that that is why I have been telling you to run the race from earth to heaven, discarding the old earthly religion along the way?

Six Exhortations to Regulate Our Life in This World and to Serve and Worship God

The reader should now consult the chart captioned "The Six Exhortations at the Close of Hebrews." Notice how the subject of three of these exhortations the inner group is our life in this world. These three exhortations are bracketed by other Scriptures about the service and worship of God. This tells us that practical life in the body is central to the service and worship of God. How could we serve or worship Him if our life contradicts our testimony?

The first exhortation is "let us have grace." We saw what happens when this is lacking in 12:15. This is positive. If we preach the grace of God to others we must exhibit it ourselves. We must serve God acceptably that is to His satisfaction not our evaluation of ourselves with reverence and godly fear. Fear in the service of God? Yes "for our God is a consuming fire." At the judgment seat of Christ He will burn up the wood, hay and stubble in our lives. The gold will remain.

Next come exhortations to govern our lives in the Church 13:1, the family 13:4, and in the world 13:5. It is noteworthy that these exhortations lack an abrasive tone. First, brotherly love is assumed so it is to continue. Brethren in Christ are to show love to one another. But to confine it to an inner circle would breed sectarianism. We mustn't neglect hospitality to strangers. Abraham didn't and we are his children by faith. We too may be rewarded for doing so. We must not forget those who are not at liberty like ourselves. We are to evangelize those in prison, comfort those who are in prison for Christ's sake, or who have been saved when imprisoned. We too are in the body and should feel for their sufferings. To remember them tells us of two things prayer for them and visitation too. So Paul wrote "the Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me" 2 Tim. 1:16, 17. Next come the exhortations that marriage is to be held in honor by all. Purity of life is to be maintained whether in or out of the marriage bond. God who is the Judge of all 12:23 will judge all who defile God's holy institution of marriage. Then comes our lifestyle in the world it is to be characterized as free from the love of money. It is not money which is in question for the Lord may give it to some believers for careful stewardship in His work but rather the love of money. Still the heart can use this as an excuse and the world will watch us. So "be content with such things as you have" don't accumulate unnecessary worldly possessions baggage which will weigh you down in the race an example of a "weight" in 12:1. The Lord will never leave you nor forsake you. David acknowledged as much when he said "I have been young, and now am old yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread" Psalms 37:25. So that we may boldly say "the Lord is my helper and I will not fear. What shall man do to me?" The primary thought here is practical help in life. An old believer confirmed David's words to me by saying that the Lord sees His people through to the end whether they are rich or poor. Sometimes the rich end up poor for riches take wings and fly away. Wonderful then to have the Lord as our helper. Nor should we forget the spiritual side of this "the Lord is my helper" tells us also of His High Priesthood on our behalf.

Following these exhortations on life in this world come two verses concerning the worship of God 13:3 and 13:15, 16. One is negative accepting the reproach of Christ in this world, being identified with a crucified, not a conquering Christ, and the other positive praise and thanksgiving. The sacrifice of praise (worship) is to be followed by practical sacrifices doing good and sharing what we have with others. If you are in the presence of God as a worshipper you are to come out with the imprint of the divine presence and so doing good. These verses take us ahead of our subject but because of the unique connection shown in the chart cannot be ignored as a group. The teaching of the six exhortations is that to serve God you need grace to worship God there must be practical godliness in the Church, the family and the world and then identification with the cross (the outside place with man) to enjoy the glory in spirit the inside place with God as a worshipper.

SERVING GOD

REQUIRES GRACE Let us have grace whereby we may serve God.

OUR LIFE DOWN HERE IN THE

CHURCH IN THE Let brotherly love continue.

IN THE FAMILY (Let) marriage be held in honor by all.

IN THE WORLD (Let) our lifestyle be free from the love of money.

WORSHIPPING GOD

THE OUTSIDE PLACE WITH MAN Let us go out therefore unto Him without the camp bearing

His reproach.

THE INSIDE GOD Let us offer the sacrifices of praise to God continually.

A Closing Reference to the Day of Atonement

In Chapter 1:9 we touched upon the Day of Atonement. Much that is written in Hebrews would not be understood without an explanation of the meaning of the ritual of that day. Here at the close Paul reverts to that Day in a closing appeal to withdraw from the system of Jewish ritual and occupy full Christian ground and privileges. "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek one to come."

Notice the many lines of truth which converge in this appeal. The Hebrew Christians were to run the race from earth to heaven and arrive at the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem 12:22. Therefore the earthly city Jerusalem and its temple were to be given up. Christ had suffered outside this earthly city on a cross while the ritual of Jewish services was being performed inside that city. So Paul takes them back to the days of their fathers when the tabernacle, not the temple, was the official structure for the worship of God. And of all the ritual of the tabernacle services he singles out that performed on the Day of Atonement. We know this because the blood which the high priest brought into the Holy of Holies for sin was the blood of the bullock and the blood of the goat in Lev. 16. That same chapter tells us that the bodies of the sacrifices whose blood was brought in were burned outside Lev. 16:27 which agrees with 13:11 here.

What then is the altar of 13:10? It is clearly spiritual in nature and sets forth Christ as the true sin offering whose blood alone is efficacious before God. The other reference to "altar" in this epistle is in 13:13 a turning point following the statement that the priesthood is changed and so the law must be too. Our High Priest does not offer continual blood sacrifices without value. The greatness of His Priesthood is attested to by the fact that He has sat (down) on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens 8:1. Share His rejection by man then withdraw from the visible system which rejected Him and cleave to Him obtaining an inside place with God. This altar calls for two classes of sacrifices spiritual sacrifices rather than material ones. The first is continual sacrifice of praise to God the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name. The second sacrifice is manward 13:16 good works with which God is well pleased. We come out of the holiest of all and do good to men a proof to all men that we have been in God's presence for He is the Source of all good.

Principles Governing Leadership of the Flock of God

The exhortations on Christian leadership which are grouped together in the closing chapter of Hebrews are full of instruction. First of all we must divest ourselves of misconceptions arising from the reading of the authorized version which renders 13:7, 13:17 and 13:24 as "those who have the rule over you." This would imply elders who have local rule whereas the epistle is on Jewish rather than Church ground and there is no thought of confining the teaching in it to such a restricted group. The best modern versions render these passages "leaders" or "those leading you" (The American Standard Bible, The Modern Language Bible (Berkely Edition) J.N. Darby Translation, New International Version, and Young's Literal Translation). The distinction is an important one for as already stated the epistle is not addressed to one or more Christian assemblies but rather to the entire Hebrew nation a nation once in exclusive relationship to God, then blessed with the first introduction of Christianity in the world, now in danger of giving up this profession. Who among that nation, then, were the leaders, and what was the goal to which they were leading the flock of God. The verses which we will now consider group these leaders into those who are no longer with them (due to death), those still with them, and Jesus Christ the Leader and Great Shepherd of the sheep. The leaders are those who lead others to follow the great Leader from earth to heaven.

Remembering the leaders of the past Our first exhortation is "REMEMBER your leaders who have spoken to you the Word of God, and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith" 13:7. While these leaders are not named they are easily identified from the Acts of the Apostles. Perhaps of all the leaders those who were preeminently before Paul's mind were those of the twelve apostles who had laid down their lives for Christ's sake. This thought is reinforced by the allusion to their sufferings as a way of life among others of course "REMEMBER prisoners, as bound with them those who are ill-treated as being yourselves also in the body" 13:3. The apostles, more than others, had spoken the Word of God to them see 2:3, 4, and who were imprisoned more than they? Stephen's stoning tells us the cost of being a leading Christian in the early days of Christianity.

The class of leaders referred to here were now absent from the body and present with the Lord like James the brother of John whom Herod killed with the sword Acts 13:1, 2. The Hebrews were exhorted to weigh the outcome of their Christian life and testimony and to imitate the faith that made them leaders. Christian leadership here is for the purpose of helping others to attain the goal they have attained. For them the race from earth to heaven ended with their death. Let their faith encourage others to run the race to the same destination. God never forgets those who serve Him, as man does. Heb. 11 is God's shining recollection of those who died in faith those whom He remembers. As God's children the Hebrews were to remember their past leaders and imitate their faith. Having heard the Word of God from such leaders they would not be carried about with every fanciful doctrine that arose like a small sailboat in a gust of wind. The anchor of the soul 6:19 is both safe and secure a certain hope. Why listen then to fanciful doctrine about what to eat and what not to eat and other regulations of the law?

Obedience and submission to leaders still alive and salutations of grace to them A second exhortation follows "OBEY your leaders, and be submissive for they watch over your souls as those who shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not groaning, for this would be unprofitable for you" 13:17. Clearly the reference here is to the living leaders to whom obedience and submission were due as the reference in 13:7 was to the dead leaders who were to be remembered. The dead leaders were to be remembered as having established them in the truth to which no man can add the living leaders are viewed more as pastors tending the sheep "for they watch over your souls." Because of that responsibility they have One over them to whom they report "that Great Shepherd of the Sheep" referred to in the closing prayer of this chapter but inferred in "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever"

13:8. It is natural for the sheep to turn every one to his own way see Isa. 53 causing distress to the leaders discouraging them making them fall short of the example of the leaders of the past robbing them of their reward. If such misconduct occurred it would be recompensed on those who caused it. Their works would be burned up in the day when God judges the secrets of men. They should resist their natural tendencies so that their leaders could report to the Great Shepherd with joy concerning their pastoral work among them.

Their leaders were to be SALUTED also—something we shall briefly comment on later.

The leader of our salvation the Great Shepherd of the sheep Jesus Christ Between the dead leaders and the living leaders comes "Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday and today and forever" 13:8. Servants of God may come and go but He remains the same the Leader of our salvation through whom God is bringing many sons to glory 2:10. His Shepherd character as the leader of God's sheep is given to us in three ways in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. First He is "the Good Shepherd" John 10:11 in which character He gives His life for the sheep. The counterpart of this in the Old Testament is Psa. 22 in which His sufferings on the cross are prophetically forecast even to the piercing of His hands and His feet and the cry of abandonment by God when made sin on the cross a cry which opens the Psalm. Secondly in Paul's closing prayer in 13:20 He is "that Great Shepherd of the sheep" because as the leader of our salvation He has brought us to the goal at last heaven and satisfying approach to a God well known through the blood of His cross. The counterpart of this in the Old Testament is Psa. 23. In that Psalm the Lord is not only our Shepherd who provides for our wants down here but at the end He leads us home "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Thirdly He is "the Chief Shepherd" to whom the leaders in 13:17 must give account of their conduct in shepherding the sheep. So Peter writes in his first epistle "feed the flock of God which is among you...and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory which fades not away" 1 Peter 5:2-4. The Old Testament counterpart of this is Psa. 24 when the kingdom has come (and all our rewards are in connection with Christ's coming kingdom). The earth then is claimed for God "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof the world and those who dwell in it" Psa. 24:1.

The Throne of Grace Appears at the End As at the Beginning

In the early part of the epistle Paul had written "for we have not an high priest not able to sympathize with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart. Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find seasonable help" 4:15, 16. Here as the epistle closes we find Paul first of all requesting that the Hebrews pray for him and then his prayer for them. This is the beautiful reciprocal note on which the epistle closes although there are two 'Amens' one for the message of grace closing it all and the other at the close of Paul's prayer.

The apostle's request for the Hebrews' prayers. Just as in most of our own prayers or requests for prayer, we find here the general and the specific. "Pray for us for we persuade ourselves that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to walk rightly." This is the general request. The specific request follows "but I much more beseech you to do this, that I may the more quickly be restored to you." Note, however, how Paul ties the specific request to the general. Before commenting on the specific request let us weigh 1 John 5:14 "and this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Sometimes our requests are not according to His will although we do not know it at the time. It has been said that God always answers prayer but that sometimes He says no. I recall an esteemed teacher of the Word exclaiming at a Bible Conference "Do you want to pray a prayer that God will always answer? well here it is 'Teach me to do Thy will for Thou art my God'" Psa. 143:10.

Clearly it was not the will of God that Paul should be restored to the Hebrews sooner 13:19 or at any time for his life and ministry were drawing to a close. What value would there be in another visit to Jerusalem? Natural affections, national aspirations perhaps, a limited amount of teaching among them. Historically his three previous missions had all started at Antioch. Should another start instead from Italy with that destination in mind Jerusalem which ended his third mission so disastrously? Suppose God had said 'yes' rather than 'no' to the Hebrews' prayers for Paul what might have happened? He loved his own nation dearly and the temple was a magnet to his heart. Had he gone there he might have denied everything he had written in this epistle. God prevented this from happening, so that the close of Paul's life was in keeping with his teaching in the epistle to the Hebrews. Paul finished the race he wrote about in Hebrews with joy. Faith, hope, and love "these three things" see 1 Cor. 13:13 buoyed him up.

In Heb. 4 references to faith (4:2 6:12 10:22 13:7) are supported by 3 references to hope (3:6 6:11 10:23) and 3 to love (6:10 10:24 13:1). This does not exhaust the rich variety of ways in which faith, hope and love "these three things" are presented in the Word of God not by accident but by design. Finally there is the moral application of these design features. In Hebrews Paul links up "these three things" in an absolutely unique way "Love" 6:10 "Hope" 6:11 "Faith" 6:12. Then he reverses the chain, beginning with "Faith" 10:22 "Hope" 10:23 "Love" 10:24. In this way, though he links the chain together with his own principle of faith, he begins and ends with love, proving his own thesis that, of "these three things" the greatest of all is love.

So in the wisdom of God Paul was not diverted from finishing the race by turning aside to the trappings of that Judaism he had condemned in his epistle to the Hebrews. Writing to the Philippians he says "brethren, I do not count to have got possession myself; but one thing forgetting the things behind, and -stretching out to the things before, I pursue (looking) towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" Phil. 3:13,14. These three things, then, "faith, hope and love" helped Paul run the race from earth to heaven and obtain the cherished prize at the end. May they help us also.

The Apostle's closing prayer for the Hebrews peace, the will of God, the eternal glory of Jesus Christ. The Apostle started his epistle with God, but now addresses Him as the God of peace. This is because peace has been made by the blood of Jesus' cross see Col. 1:20. So the blood is brought in, Jesus having been raised from among the dead by the God of peace and this is the blood of the eternal covenant. It is eternal, as so often in Hebrews, in contrast to the transient things of the law, shadows about to pass away. It is in this way God is to be known to them.

Next, the God of peace would have them do His will. Sometimes we do not know what the will of God is for us. Even Paul didn't at a crucial juncture of his service for Christ see Acts 16:6-10. Here it is made clear to the Hebrews. First of all, as mature Christians, with "senses exercised to discern both good and evil" 5:14 they are to choose the good and do it "make you perfect in every good work to the doing of His will." The prayer continues "doing in you what is pleasing before Him through Jesus Christ." Unquestionably this refers to the main doctrinal thrust of the epistle. Should he not pray for them to separate from the shadow of Jewish ritual to the reality of Christianity? Surely the will of God was that they should approach God in the Holy of Holies with confidence, since the way of approach had been opened for them by the shed blood of Christ. This was the time Jesus foresaw when He told the woman of Sychar's well "the hour is coming when you shall neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father...but the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for also the Father seeks such as His worshippers" John 4:21-23.

The prayer closes with glory to Jesus Christ for the ages of ages. Amen. Paul's second prayer in Ephesians ended with "to Him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen." That prayer was early in the epistle this one toward the close. Ephesians, being the epistle of Church truth, brought the Church prominently in view as associated with the glory; in Hebrews glory all belongs to God. There are seven mentions of glory in Hebrews, three of which are general 2:10, 3:3; and 9:5. The other four are in connection with Christ's glory. At the beginning He is called the brightness of God's glory 1:3 then God crowned Him with glory and honor 2:7 then we see Him thus crowned with glory and honor 2:9 then at the close we see that that glory is imperishable. It will never fade away nor will the crown of glory be transferred to another. God set a diadem of pure gold on His head Psa. 21:3 and so the prayer here closes with glory to Him forever and ever. Amen 13:21. This is beautifully expressed in an undated composition of E. Williams, someone unknown to the writer:

Following his prayer Paul asks his brethren to hear the word of exhortation in his brief letter. He passes on news about Timothy, greetings and a message of grace, closing the epistle like his prayer with Amen. The close of the epistle takes us in spirit to the beginning. In Hebrews Christians are never viewed as members of Christ's body, united to Him, as in Ephesians. Instead they are looked upon as Christ's fellows, or companions. In the beginning they are grouped into three great classes sons who are being brought to glory 2:10 brethren of whom Christ is not ashamed 2:11 and children in the family of God 2:13. These three classes are found again at the close of Hebrews, but looked at more or less in a corrective way. We are in the wilderness and learning lessons in God's school. As children and sons 12:5 and 12:7 it is a question of discipline to help us become partakers of God's holiness. As brethren we are simply called upon to listen to and act upon "the word of exhortation" in this letter and a most gracious one at that.

The epistle starts with God and ends with grace. Just before the end there was the prayer with glory to Jesus Christ for the ages of ages. Grace and glory are found in the Son of God.

Heavenly Things, Chapter 1.2 (2:5-18)

THE IMPERISHABLE MANHOOD OF ISRAEL'S DEPARTED MESSIAH

(Suggested Reading: Heb. 2:5-18)

What is really the second chapter opens with verse 5, picking up the connection with the subject of angels in 1:14 sent out to serve those about to become heirs of salvation. How they carry out this service is not told us but it is a necessary work in a world opposed to God and His people. In 2:5 Paul tells us something more about the angels they are not to rule "the world to come" i.e. the millennium. Angels are servants then, not rulers. Once the Son of God assumed manhood the question of angelic rule came to an end. At the appointed time man in Christ will share the rule of the universe with the Son of the Father's love.

That is why direction shifts rapidly away from the subject of angels to man "but one in a certain place *1. testified saying, "What is man that Thou rememberest him, or the Son of Man that Thou visitest him?" Well, why should God remember man? To this question there is no ready answer until a second question makes an answer unnecessary. This second question is "or the Son of Man that Thou visitest Him?" The Son of Man, of course, is Christ. Son of Man is one of Christ's official titles. It means the rejected One in this world, but the Lord of the worlds to come. When did God visit Christ as man, though? Again the Jew is referred to his Holy Scriptures "Thou hast proved my heart, Thou hast visited me by night Thou hast tried me, Thou hast found nothing. My thought goeth not beyond my word" Psa. 17:3. The Gospel of Luke gives us a good illustration of this night trial and proving "and it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God" Luke 6:12.

We See Jesus

Two opposite views of Christ are given us in 2:7. One speaks of His incarnation and life as man on earth "thou madest Him a little lower than the angels" that is in becoming man. This makes it clear that man is lower in the sphere of creation than the angels, and Christ became man. But if Christ humbled Himself God exalted Him, for the latter part of the verse tells us, "Thou crownedst Him with glory and honor and didst set Him over the works of His hands" 2.* This is Psa. 21 where God sets a crown of pure gold on Christ's head. This is God's answer to man's wickedness in cutting Christ off from the land of the living. But this is in resurrection. He asked for life and God gave Him life in resurrection length of days forever and ever. So God has reversed man's judgment on Christ. Man awarded Him a cross God awards Him a crown, and life as Man forever and ever. This the Christian sees by faith v.9. But it is not enough to reverse man's judgment He must be put over all creation and His enemies must be subdued. God sees this as already accomplished but as for us "we see not yet all things put under Him." What we do see however is Jesus, crowned with glory and honor.

By faith we see the glorified Man. He was once on this earth in flesh and blood v.14 that is He had a body capable of suffering, capable too of death but not subject to it. He was "made perfect through sufferings" i.e. by experiencing suffering in the body which He could not until incarnate. He tasted death "for everything... that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil." Stephen saw Jesus and was given grace to die for Him Paul saw Jesus and was given grace to live for Him Phil. 1:21.

Christ As the Leader of Our Salvation

Because Christ is the leader of our salvation we must follow Him. That was the Lord's parting message to Peter "Follow Me." Peter understood what the Lord meant for he wrote of "the sufferings of Christ" (the penalty for following a rejected Christ in this world) "and the glory that should follow" (the heavenly reward later) see 1 Peter 1:11. Paul starts with the glory of Christ Acts 9:3 then the sufferings Acts 9:16. Because Christ is the leader of our salvation in Hebrews, many sons are first brought to glory where He is now but we are not allowed to forget His former sufferings.

Even in glory, though, something is missing of what belongs to Christ, for "we see not yet all things put under Him." Until that time God compensates Him by giving Him the company of those whom He has redeemed. These were first called His fellows that is companions, which confirms this thought. Here they are known by other names sons 2:10 brethren 2:11 and children 2:13. So "it became Him" this expression is a revelation of God's character what was consistent with God Himself. But to continue "it became Him for whom are all things" (for He is heir of all things) "and by whom are all things" (for He created them) "to bring many sons to glory." We are brought to that bright glory as sons with God's Son a relationship of dignity, affection, understanding of God and liberty in His presence. Man was born to sonship see Luke 3:38 and the prodigal son discovered that he could only return to his father as a son not as a servant. Jesus has brought us back in peace and free the leader of our salvation made perfect through sufferings. Because of this we know our Father's heart in a way that Adam never could in innocence. So the leader of our salvation will bring us home to His Father's house. He is not ashamed of us when we get there for the sanctifier (Christ) and the sanctified (us) are all of one *3. for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Brothers in the Lord are those who have had His life eternal life communicated to them, as the Lord told Nicodemus in John 3. To these brethren He would declare the Father's name and lead the songs of praise to the Father in the glory *4. As the leader of our salvation He brings us to glory as sons. Then in the glory, our salvation completed, He becomes the leader of praise in the center of the church. Next Paul comes to "children" those in the family of God 5* the godly of all ages. Admission to the family is based on the death and resurrection of Christ whether the children come from past, present, or future ages. That is why "I will put my trust in Him" precedes "children." Men railed, "He trusted in God let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him" Matt. 27:43. The prophet said, "Who shall declare His generation? For He was cut off out of the land of the living" Isa. 53:8. Here we find that it is God who answers this question by giving Him His children in resurrection.

This blessedness is the fruit of the travail of Christ's soul. It is God's consolation to Him just as Joseph was given Asenath as a wife because He has lost Israel and is not yet ruling the nations. We are His companions now, and will soon join Him in songs of praise to His Father in the place He has prepared for us.

God has pulled the curtain back, so to speak, to the blessedness of future glory with Christ, and our present joy as His companions, till all be light. However the other side of things is that we are a needy people. To begin with we were born into this world in bodies of flesh and blood, corruptible bodies because of Satan's power of death over man. We needed a deliverer. Who would take up our cause, and who, after having delivered us, would help us in a world opposed to God when we ourselves are overloaded with infirmities?

Christ Our Sacrifice and Priest

The closing verses of Chapter 2- i.e. vs. 14-18 sum up what was before God in Christ assuming manhood. One object was to become the sacrifice the other to become the priest.*6 This could never be under the law of Moses. The office and its leading function were separated. Aaron was the priest but Moses could not be the sacrifice, for he could not make an atonement for the people's sins see Ex. 32:30-32. But in Christ the sacrifice and the priest are one. This is fitting since Israel's high priest performed two great functions sacrifice outside the tabernacle and burning incense inside it. But Christ's sacrifice is past. Today He is inside, performing the other function of the high priest burning incense inside on the golden altar as it were. Incense speaks of prayer and intercession going up to God on our behalf see Psalms 141:2 and Luke 1:9-11. The fire to burn the incense had to come from the brazen altar outside where typically Christ had been sacrificed. Connecting the two we see that Christ's intercession to God is only for His own people those who have been redeemed by the blood of His own sacrifice.

These closing verses give us the emerging principle of the whole book of Hebrews, and therefore merit close attention. Paul wants his readers to give up the temple and its ritual. To give them a proper orientation he brings them back in spirit to the tabernacle in the desert where their fathers had once worshipped God. This is a gradual development in the epistle. Paul has purposely brought before the Jews their threefold link with God. In Chapter 1 he pointed out that God spoke to them through the law and the prophets and finally in the Person of His Son. Chapters 1 and 2 are full of quotations from the Holy Scriptures, the oracles of God committed to them. When we come to Chapter 3 he will point out a summit privilege they enjoyed the tabernacle, God's house, where God Himself dwelt in the midst of His people.

Paul wants the Jewish Christians to think of a heavenly tabernacle in which Christ is the great high priest. On earth He had been the sacrifice so that will never be repeated. He goes into the holy and most holy places and burns incense. That means He intercedes to God for His people. It is not something we ask Him to do for us as when we pray for our needs. No. As high priest He goes to God for us. He is the intercessor. Why does He do it? Because of the yawning gap between our standing "sons," "brethren," "children," even "companions" and our feeble state in this world poor people who are sick, persecuted, bereaved, etc. This is a spiritual work in our souls to help us overcome the obstacles in the race to heaven. He strengthens us for conflict in the world and praise in the church. That is the essence of His high priesthood.

Christ then had two motives in coming into this world to be the sacrifice and to be the priest. Only one who was God's Son could be an acceptable sacrifice that is Chapter 1 and only the man of Chapter 2 Could be the priest.

"Follow Me" the Leader of the Race From Earth to Heaven

At this point we would like to raise the question why God has been occupying us with the glories of His Son in Manhood when, as we understand it, the great subject of the epistle is running the race from earth to heaven. The answer is that you cannot run a race from one point to another unless someone else has trail blazed the path for you marked it out as a surveyor does, built the roadway and used it. Then and then only can others follow in his steps. This is what Jesus meant when He said "Follow Me" to Peter. Paul puts it this way, "For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings" 2:11.

So God has gone to great lengths to point out the glories of the Man who has mapped out the route from earth to heaven and traveled it before we did. He is the Creator of all things. He upholds the created universe by the word of His power. He has created beings to inhabit the heavens the angels He has created other beings to inhabit the earth men. But in taking on manhood Himself He has made it clear that the world to come will not be in subjection to angels but to men 2:5-16, who, now on earth, are to follow the path He marked out from earth to heaven. How especially favored we are His "fellows" 1:9 those who are to be His companions in glory God's sons brought to glory 2:10 the brethren of Christ 2:11 and John 20:17 children in the family of God 2:13 those whom the Father gave to Christ cf also Isa. 8:18.

Having finished God's work perfectly on the cross, God has encircled the brow of His Son with glory. He has set a crown of pure gold on His head. In reciprocal affections Christ declares the Father's Name to His brethren and becomes the leader in praise to the Father in the midst of the Church.

Mrs. J. A. Trench captured these thoughts in her hymn:

Heavenly Things, Chapter 1.4 (4:14-16)

JESUS AS THE HIGH PRIEST

(Suggested Reading: Heb. 4:14-16)

Before we can understand the meaning of priesthood we must first understand the meaning of apostleship. We have briefly considered apostleship in the preceding chapters. Now we will consolidate our knowledge of apostleship and show how it contrasts with priesthood. It is important to do this because in Hebrews Christ is both the Apostle and the Priest. As Apostle God saluted Him "Thou art My Son"—as Priest He says "Thou art a Priest"—5:5-6.

The Difference Between Apostleship and Priesthood

In Scripture an apostle was a man sent from God with the Word of God. Since the apostle Paul completed the Word of God Col. 1:25 it was evident to the early Church that there could be no more apostles. When men claimed they were they were put on trial at Ephesus and proved to be liars Rev. 2:2. Apostles were sent out by each Person of the Godhead. God the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world and so Jesus is called an Apostle in 3:1. God the Son sent the twelve apostles out with the Word of God Matt. 10:5-7. God the Holy Spirit sent the apostles Barnabus and Paul out to preach the Word of God Acts 14:14. The reason why each Person in the Godhead sent out apostles is interesting for it reveals the universal scope of God's blessing for man. As an Apostle Christ was sent out by God the Father with a special mission the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Then God the Son sent out the twelve apostles to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to the Jewish part of that world. Finally, when they refused it God the Holy Spirit sent Barnabus and Saul to the Gentile part of that world Acts 13:2. Thus an apostle was a man sent by God to bring the Word of God to the world.

A priest on the other hand had to be called. As just demonstrated that is precisely the opposite of an apostle who is sent. If I am called I come to the person calling. That is one great idea behind priesthood approach to God. As Apostle Christ came from God but as High Priest He goes to God. At this point we would be going too far ahead of our subject to explain why Christ enters God's presence as our High Priest. The important thing is to see that only those who have appropriated Christ's services as Apostle can have them as High Priest. The whole scope of His birth, life, death and resurrection the message of the gospel will be found in His Apostleship. Those who deny that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world are not in living relationship to God and so have no High Priest to go to God for them. The man of the world must fight his way through the world. Believers are helped through the world by their High Priest.

The Compassion and Support of Our Great High Priest

The term "Great High Priest" here anticipates doctrine which will be found later on in Hebrews. But in brief the term "high priest" means the chief priest, as Aaron was over the other priests who served in the tabernacle. However the term Great High Priest means that He is alone in the office His is the lasting supremacy of a Great High Priest who lives forever in the Divine Presence. Aaron passed through the pattern of the heavens in the tabernacle on the Day of Atonement. But our Great High Priest has passed through the actual heavens. Does this awe us and make us say like Peter "depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord?" On the contrary one of the functions of His office is to remove things in our lives which would discourage us from coming to God in prayer. That is the thought in verse 15 "for we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin." He is both the Son of God and Man. Had He remained Son of God without becoming a man how could He feel and sympathize for us? It takes a man to sympathize with another man's sorrows, troubles, etc. in life. And this Man, who is also Son of God has passed through the heavens. Such being the case we are to hold firmly to our confession. He can be affected when we suffer from human weaknesses. He suffered from hunger, thirst, fatigue of body in the days of His flesh just as we do. He suffered in spirit too at the grave of Lazarus, and wept there. Such is our Great High Priest.

Now the question is what does He do for us as we pass through a troubled world in a body of weakness. As High Priest He does not come to assist us if we sin. If that happens He may plead for us with God our Father as our Advocate. We must never confuse human infirmities i.e. weakness in the body with sin. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous" 1 John 2:1. So if we sin He

may plead our case with God our Father as our Advocate. Rather what we have to consider here is the role of our Great High Priest in helping us in our infirmities in the body.

Infirmities show up in the entire span of life from childhood to old age so that we need an "all the way home" high priest. They are things which we cannot control by our own efforts or the efforts of others, and very often they represent losses of things we once enjoyed. We may suffer physically from accidents, war, disease or constantly diminishing bodily function due to age. We may suffer mental stress from loss of property, money, income, bereavement, the greatest of all losses, which often happens unexpectedly. Children lose their brothers and sisters or their parents, married couples their partners, older people their friends. Bereavement is more than the loss of loved ones and their companionship, for in its train comes loneliness. Some people spend much of their lives in loneliness. They may never have married. They may be blind, crippled, or forgotten in nursing homes. Infirmities then are very real, very distressing. Most people experience them in varying degree and often the burden is too heavy for us. But we are not alone. These circumstances of life come under the eye of our great high priest. He evaluates our problems and in the light of what is best for us spiritually either relieves us or strengthens us while permitting the trial to continue. The desert of this world is God's university and what our High Priest does for us here is done with the light of eternity before Him. This often distresses us because we prefer a solution in time. But the Scripture says He is a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God. We are too much like Israel, not thinking of the Promised Land but complaining to God how difficult things are down here. Well, Christ was in this world too but unlike us He glorified God on the earth and all in view of the coming glory. Did it ever strike you, for example, that in the miracles Christ did in this world we get an intimation of the way He would help His people when He went back to heaven as their Great High Priest? In other words just as His miracles relieved and supported man physically while He was on earth so is He now performing the same works spiritually from His seat in heaven. These are works of relieving us when all seems hopeless (mercy) or sustaining us for a trial which He permits to continue (grace).

Mercy the relief given to the man who was beaten on the road to Jericho Jesus told "a certain lawyer" a parable about a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who was ambushed by thieves who stole his clothes and beat him so badly that he was half dead. However, a certain Samaritan traveling that way saw him and had compassion on him. To have compassion is to show mercy to do something positive about a need which the needy person cannot do for himself. The Priest and the Levite the official representatives of the law passed by the wounded man. Human priesthood could not help man for it has nothing man needs no dressings for his wounds, no medication, no shelter and no Christ for companionship. But the Lord for He was the Good Samaritan has everything that is needed. He dressed the man's wounds with the medication of the day oil and wine bandaged them, provided him with transportation to an inn and prepaid his expenses there until He should return.

There are two parts to this story. First the Lord undoes Satan's work beating and robbing man. This is Heb. 2:14-15. Secondly He uses His own power as High Priest to put us beyond further damage from Satan by sheltering us in this world until His second coming for us (though there was no room for Him in the inn when He was here). Such is the doctrine. Now we will provide one out of many illustrations of how it applies in practical Christian life.

Years ago I knew a faithful Christian, now with the Lord, whose name was Thomas Holliday. This man was an official of an important power company. In his leisure hours he went street preaching. He had a good voice and was a gifted evangelist. One day his manager called him into his office and told him bluntly that his street preaching activities brought discredit to the company in the eyes of the public and that unless he stopped them he would be fired. Holliday refused to do so. Certainly there was Scriptural precedent for his refusal when other rulers had commanded Peter and John not to speak at all nor teach in the Name of Jesus, they refused Acts 4:17-31. His manager then told Holliday that he was going away on a business trip and when he returned the first thing he would do was take steps to fire him. We may be sure that in the interval Holliday was at the throne of grace to receive mercy (removal of the trial) and grace (to support him in it while it lasted). On the day of his return Holliday's manager walked into his office no doubt intending to execute his promise to fire the Lord's servant. Shortly after he came out of his office on a stretcher for he had suffered a massive heart attack. Another man replaced him as manager and Holliday continued to preach the gospel in the street.

Grace the support given us by our Great High Priest in a trial He does not see fit to remove Since God is sovereign He can work His will toward us without explaining why. For example He allowed Herod to kill James with the sword but He sent His angel to deliver Peter. Since we know that all things work together for good toward those who love God we must not question His ways. Having said this we will now turn to John 11, for this passage is a foreshadowing of how our Great High Priest supports us (grace) in sickness and bereavement.

The question of sickness and bodily disability comes up first. In considering such trials in the body we are to understand cases which physicians and surgeons cannot alleviate and the Lord's sustaining grace is needed. Evidently that was the case with Lazarus' terminal illness in John 11. The sisters of Lazarus sent the Lord a message that their brother was sick, for they knew His curing power. The Lord, however, appears to ignore the message. Actually He received it but it was not His purpose to heal Lazarus. He stayed away from Bethany for two days instead of traveling to it. Before He went there He told His disciples that Lazarus was dead now. On arrival He is reproached by the two sisters of the deceased that if He had only come earlier their brother would not have died. How true to life this is. How often we pray to the Lord for something which in His wisdom He does not wish to give us. Then the tendency of our hearts is to reproach the Lord for unanswered prayer. But the Lord does not forget us any more than Lazarus. Sometimes He gives us dying grace and Lazarus got that sometimes living grace when life seems hopeless. I cite the instances of two crippled women I know who are very bright Christians. One is confined to bed the other to a wheelchair. Yet they radiate the grace which supports them in otherwise unsupportable positions. Such is the effect of the High Priesthood of Jesus.

But let us continue with the story of the raising of Lazarus. It is critical to the understanding of Christ's High Priesthood because it shows its acting in three ways the infirmity of sickness, the supreme infirmity of bereavement and a third thing which we will consider later in this book because it is out of place here. Well the Lord finally goes to Bethany, there to be virtually accused by Lazarus' two sisters that Lazarus wouldn't have died if He hadn't been so slow see John 11:21 and 32. Their bereavement was real. However their words had tinges of accusation in them. Spiritual as these women were they, like Israel in the desert, and we in this world, are slow to realize that as for God His way is perfect. Mary though goes to meet the Lord. She remains silent at the grave unlike her sister Martha and listens to the Lord's words which raise Lazarus from the dead. The result is that "many of the Jews who came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed

on Him." One of the things our Great High Priest does for us in the hour of bereavement is comfort us, not only as He comforted Mary on the way to the tomb but afterward with the consolation that the parting is not permanent but temporary. As He raised Lazarus so will He raise our loved ones. And so we sorrow not as others who have no hope. Grace strengthens us and the people of the world note this. The Mary's of our day who have walked with Christ display the superiority of Christianity to everything else in death's dark valley.

The Throne of Grace

This is our last consideration v.16. It is an allusion to the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. But that was a throne of judgment. The people dared not come near that. Once a year only could Aaron the High Priest come in there with the blood of a sacrifice to sprinkle on it and a censer of incense whose rising fragrance hid his flesh, so to speak. The blood was a figure of the shed blood of Christ in Aaron's time that was future. But under grace, with the blood of Christ shed, the character of God's throne has been changed from a throne of judgment to a throne of grace. The "mercy seat" anticipated Christ's death hence its name the throne is called a throne of grace. That is why these two things are written in v.16. We come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy. Since grace characterizes the throne the measure in which it is dispensed is the measure of God's heart a work wrought inside us to strengthen us. Mercy is measured according to our needs as individuals in the hostile outside world.

A closing comment is that we must not confuse the throne of grace with the office of our Great High Priest. In Israel the high priest had two principal functions offering sacrifice outside and burning incense inside. But Christ was both the Priest and the Sacrifice. He offered one sacrifice outside in this world in figure the brazen altar thus ending that part of the Priest's work. Then He went into heaven to burn incense on the golden altar, so to speak. When we draw near to the throne of grace He makes our prayers efficacious provided they are in harmony with the Word of God and God's will for us. But it is to God we go with our prayers whether individually or collectively. And it is to God our Great High Priest goes for us. If our prayers are mistaken even an apostle had difficulty discerning the will of God Acts 16:6-10 He is understanding, being both compassionate and full of grace.

Summary of the Digression Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 are digressions to make the Christian position understandable to professing Hebrew Christians who still thought in terms of an earthly Messiah found in the writings of the prophets and an earthly ritual the need for which had passed. Christ had come to them as an Apostle with the Word of God. In obedience to that Word He purged our sins. Then by His own death He disannulled Satan's power of death and delivered us from the fear of death. His work as Apostle finished, He passed through the heavens as our Great High Priest 4:14 He sat down on God's throne on High 1:3. Our calling now is heavenly for our High Priest is in heaven. To reach Him we must pass through the wilderness in His power dependence and obedience. God gave Moses and Aaron to His people to support them as they went through the wilderness. They came with the Word of God and the services of the High Priest. These are the same things we get. Only their fathers failed, for faith was not mixed with the Word of God 4:2 so that the impediments along the way became insurmountable. The priesthood suffered from human infirmity. But we have the full Word of God and a priesthood which cannot fail. He may either relieve the pressure if the circumstances of life become unbearable, or support us in the trials. He may help or guide us. He knows what we suffer for He suffered Himself. He also knows which of these courses will be most beneficial to us spiritually. In view of this we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace. Israel could not come at all because they had a throne of law. Now that Christ's blood is shed we can approach that same throne in holy boldness because perfect love (as expressed in His death) has cast out fear. But we mustn't confuse coming to the throne of grace with the priest's office. We go direct to God to receive mercy and find grace. Mercy delivers from a trial and is for individuals grace sustains in a trial. This applies to both individual and collective prayer this holy boldness in entering God's presence to supplicate Him. However we don't go to the Priest for these things rather we approach God direct for them. Similarly the Priest goes to God for us to relieve us of our infirmities. He does not want us to be dragged down by them but wants us to be happy in God's presence.

Thus three things take the Christian through this world and on to heaven the Word of God, the High Priesthood of Christ and the throne of grace. Our passage through this world is to bring us to glory 2:10. The glory is the rest which "remains" to the people of God 4:9. To anticipate doctrine slightly, Jesus has gone there before His people 6:20 for He is the Captain of our salvation. Like troops we follow where our Captain leads us.

Heavenly Things, Chapter 1.5 (5:1-10)

THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS' PRIESTHOOD TO AARON'S

(Suggested Reading: Heb. 5:1-10)

At the opening of Chapter 3 Paul exhorted the Jewish brethren to consider Jesus in two ways as the Apostle of our confession and as the High Priest of our confession. An Apostle is one sent by God. Their fathers knew Moses. He had an apostolic character for he had both spoken the Word of God to them and given it to them in writing. But Jesus is "the Apostle of our confession" for God is now speaking in the Person of His Son 1:2. The Father had never been revealed before until Jesus came, speaking the Words of God. He was the sent One of the Father. So much for the Apostle of our confession what now about the High Priest of our confession? Where in Hebrews do we find Jesus compared to Aaron? This is a wide ranging subject. Paul introduces it in the last three verses of Chapter 4. But the consideration of Jesus as the High Priest of our confession properly opens at the beginning of Chapter 5 and closes at 10:18. Because this large subject is subdivided we shall consider here only the first ten verses of Chapter 5.

The Priesthood of Aaron

The first four verses give us the character of the Aaronic priesthood, so we have a basis for comparing it with Christ's. Verse 1 is a general statement "for every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God that he may offer gifts and sacrifices

for sins." The expression "every high priest" suggests a succession in the priesthood as the office is vacated by death. The first general characteristic of human priesthood then is weakness. However while the high priest holds the office his duties are defined "things relating to God" that is spiritual considerations. Then the two main duties are spelled out offering both gifts and sacrifices for sins." The word for gift here is DORON—gifts offered to God. Since it is distinguished from sacrifices for sins which were offered on the brazen altar outside, possibly the gifts refer to the high priest's duties within the holy and most holy place. In any event it is clear that priestly duties were both inside and outside. But the high priest was a sinner like other men and his exalted official duties did not exempt him from offering a sacrifice for his own sins v.3. And because he was a man he was able to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring. Though clothed with a priestly garment he was also clothed with infirmity like other men. Still the official position was honorable. It was divinely established. Aaron did not usurp authority over his fellows in carrying out divine services into which the people dare not intrude. Aaron was called by God to the office. It was God Himself who conferred on Aaron the glory and dignity of the high priest's office. Nobody then could be a priest unless God called him to the office. But God called Christ to be a Priest also v.5. No man could assume the office of his own will. But this introduces in the reader's mind the thought of two high priests, without raising the question if one of them has been superseded. For the present it affords him an opportunity of comparing one order of priesthood with the other.

The Priest Whom God Called Is Also the Apostle God Sent

Paul once more reverts to the Old Testament Scriptures to prove what God has said about Christ. In Psa. 2:7 God had said, "Thou art My Son this day have I begotten Thee" and in Psa. 110:4 "Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedec." As Son He was the Apostle i.e. the Father sent the Son into the world as Priest He is called into God's presence in the heavens to establish a new order of priesthood. These divine utterances are repeated in verses 8 and 10 in slightly different form so there is no reason for misunderstanding them.

But why should God's eternal Son be told in time "this day have I begotten Thee" and what day is in mind? There can be little doubt that the day in the quotation was the day when Christ was baptized by John in the river Jordan. So great was His humiliation then and so unknown His Person that God the Father declared "Thou art My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." As Son He was the Apostle the One Whom the Father had sanctified and sent into the world and in His own words the Son of God. His public service for God commenced after the Father's voice from heaven was heard at the Jordan. Aaron could have no such personal dignity yet Aaron was a priest on earth, which Christ was not, as we are told later on in the epistle. God saluted Him as a Priest when He returned to glory, the meaning of "being made perfect" at the beginning of verse 9. But He is a special kind of priest "forever" and "after the order of Melchizedec." "Forever" tells us that unlike Aaron and those who followed him in the priesthood He will be a Priest as long as the office is open. This High Priest will have no successors in the office as Aaron had, for He never dies. "After the order of Melchizedec" means that He brings a new order of things into the priest's office. The order of His priesthood is mentioned seven times in Hebrews four of which stress that the order is forever 5:6-6:20-7:17 and 7:21 and three the character of His order of priesthood 5:10 and 7:11 (twice). Melchizedec was a man of blessing Gen. 14. Now the first of all Christian blessings is the forgiveness of sins. Aaron's order of priesthood with its endless animal sacrifices could not give man this most essential of all blessings. But by one sacrifice His own Christ has purged our sins. Furthermore' it was God, not Paul, who spoke of the coming of this new order of priesthood. Paul merely showed the Hebrews, from their own Scriptures, what God had said. By inference the first order of priesthood must pass away if a new order is to be established.

The Holy Spirit now returns to the days of Christ's flesh. His first testing and suffering in the flesh was at the temptation. "If Thou be the Son of God, command these stones that they be made bread." Truly He was hungry and had the power to satisfy His hunger for He was the Son of God. "Man shall not live by bread alone" He replied "but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God." He would not use His power to satisfy His needs unless His Father told Him that was the meaning of His reply. He knew Satan's underlying suggestion that surely the Father would not allow His Son to starve if He were His Son. Having overcome Satan, His Father attended to His bodily needs. Satan then disappeared for a season, reappearing at the Garden of Gethsemane. If he could not overcome Him in life perhaps he could do so by bringing across His soul the shadow of his power of death. Could this deflect Him from doing His Father's will if the price of obedience were death? He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him who was able to save Him from death and was heard in that He feared." He feared from the full knowledge of what sin meant to God and how God must judge it. All this is prophesied of Him in Psa. 22. "And He said unto them 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death. Remain here and keep watch.' And He went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said 'Abba Father, all things are possible unto Thee. Take away this cup from Me nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt'" Mark 14:34-36. As Man He learned obedience through experiencing human sufferings for He was the Man of Sorrows yet truly Son of God and without sin. God's answer to His perfect obedience even the death of the cross was to make Him "perfect" that is not only to raise Him from the dead but exalt Him to His own throne in glory. There in the highest heavens He has sat down on God's throne. It is from this pinnacle of exaltation that He becomes "the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him." "The gospel of the glory of the blessed God" is so-called in Scripture because it originates from the throne of God in heaven.

This gospel is preached on earth "for the obedience of faith." We are to obey Him the Author of eternal salvation as He obeyed His Father. Obedience to God characterizes true Christian life and should be found in our pathway. The reward of His obedience was a special salutation from God when He returned to the glory... "addressed by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedec." Thus the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled "Thou art My Son" Psa. 2:7 at the beginning of the Lord's ministry at the Jordan and "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedec" Psa. 110:4 when He returned to glory. So the Lord ended His Apostolic office and took up His High Priesthood. Now the High Priesthood of Christ is according to the order of Melchizedec. Since Melchizedec was a blessing the new order of things Christ introduces into the High Priest's office is an order of blessing. When He was on earth Christ's blessings were material in character as the record of His miracles shows now that He is in heaven the blessings are spiritual. We might remark in closing that all blessing for-man is founded on the death and resurrection of Christ. However the character of the blessing depends on where the priest is. When the priesthood was on earth the blessing was limited, because it really looked forward to the death and resurrection of Christ. So you could bring the very finest bullock to the priest for sacrifice but he could not give you eternal salvation. He Himself had to die and leave His office to another. But now the priesthood is in heaven. This is proof that the blessing is perfect, for God is so satisfied with Christ's work that He has pronounced Him priest and He is seated on God's throne. The blessing then flows from the place where the Priest is heaven to the place where His needy people are earth.

For encouragement and strengthening, His people must look up. He is perfected that is Man in glory. He is both the Author of eternal salvation 5:9 and the Leader of our salvation 2:10. If we follow Him we shall be perfected in glory as He is. If we look up and that is the thought in coming boldly to the throne of grace we will see with the eye of faith the Man in the glory. So all closes on a note of triumph. The perfectly obedient Man has been glorified. As He had companions on earth so He would have them in heaven for that is the place where He is now. What a rich unfolding of grace this is to be companions of the Man in the glory of God.

In the High Priesthood of Christ two streams of blessing converge the human and the divine something not possible in the old established order of priesthood. We can consider our High Priest (3:1) in that light and so as a High Priest of good things to come 9:11. From the human standpoint He is a merciful and faithful High Priest 2:17 not one who is unable to sympathize with our infirmities but who has been tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart 4:15. Such an High Priest became us 7:26 and "we have such an High Priest" 8:1. To these four human considerations the Holy Spirit has added three which are divine He did not glorify Himself to be made an High Priest 5:5 God did that, addressing Him as an High Priest according to the order of Melchizedec 5:10 and not only so but His High Priesthood according to that order of blessing is forever 6:20.

When Jesus was on earth He surrounded Himself with companions He loved them and wanted their company. Has He changed now that He has left this earth for heaven? Not at all. He wants our company now. To enjoy His company we too must leave earth for heaven. That is the race, but you might say that is for the future when Christ comes for us. Partly true. But to the extent that we realize that our citizenship is in heaven where Christ is, the heart is drawn away from earth. His Person becomes the center of our thoughts. In spirit, if not in actual fact, we are His companions, sharing His thoughts and interests.

Heavenly Things, Chapter 1.6 (6:1-20)

THE HEAVENLY CITY WITH ITS UNDYING HIGH PRIEST IS THE LAST CITY OF REFUGE FOR A GUILTY NATION

(Suggested Reading: Heb. 5:11-14; 6:1-20)

Paul's opening thrust is that he had much to say about Christ being a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedec. The trouble was that it was hard to explain those things to the Hebrews because they had become hard of hearing. They were not ready for the revelation of this truth. Their eyes were fastened on the golden temple of Jerusalem and its resplendent human priesthood. So Paul interrupts his main train of thought to admonish them and direct their gaze to a heavenly priesthood, not an earthly one.

Now some things which Paul wrote on this subject are hard to understand. Even the Apostle Peter had trouble understanding this epistle. He wrote to his Jewish flock "even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given him has written to you as also in all his epistles... in which are some things hard to understand" etc. 2 Peter 3:15,16. Peter admits difficulty with some things, but certainly not with elementary truths. By this time the Hebrew Christians should have been teachers... exponents of the truth to others, for didn't Christianity start at Jerusalem. However the fact was they needed a teacher to instruct them over again in "the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God" meaning the presentation of the life of Christ in the Gospels as their Messiah. He compares them to babies who are dependent on their mothers for milk Paul wants them to crave the strong meat of a heavenly and unseen Christ. They should be like strong men by now independent of early tutors capable of working for and eating solid food. Paul also answers the question of how we graduate from a new born Christian to a mature one. We acquire skill in the word of righteousness by habitual use of it constant practice the same way musicians must constantly practice playing their musical instruments to retain and sharpen their proficiency in them. Growth results. We become full grown men with senses altered to detect what is good and what is evil.

The three verses which open Chapter 6 illustrate the teaching. "Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ, let us go on (to what belongs) to full growth... and this will we do if God permit." What Paul is saying is that, Lord willing, he now wants to write about those things which are the solid spiritual food of adult Christians. He wants to wean them away from milk as a spiritual food for that is the nourishment of babies figuratively of those incapable of providing for themselves. This spiritual milk, or elementary truth, is defined in terms of another figure a foundation. A foundation is a beginning. So they were not to lay again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God. God had once laid the foundation on the earth 1:10. Did He lay it again? No. He went on to finish His work in the old creation. So should they who were in the new creation. Then there is the doctrine of washings and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead. Now "washings" refers to Jewish ceremonial purification by water and "the resurrection of the dead" to the limited Jewish understanding of resurrection before the Pauline epistles were written see John 11:21-24. All this was milk suitable for infants before the revelation of God in the Person of His Son. Then, to follow the natural analogy, they should have graduated to adult food meat. Verses 4 and 5 give us an intimation of what this strong meat is but it is introduced with a warning.

Whom does Paul address in the ominous verses from 4 to 8 which sound like the foreboding, dreadful sounds heard by their forefathers at Mount Sinai when the law was given? He is not addressing the Church at Jerusalem or in other locations in the holy land, but the general company of professing Christians, some of whom had accepted Christ as Savior while others had not. The emphasis in these verses is on those who had not. These professors of Christianity were convinced mentally of the truth of Christianity from the proofs of it which they had seen. They were in the especially favored position of having witnessed the miracles of Christ, the Apostles and others, and the great evangelical stirring of the nation recorded in the first twelve chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. They assented to the truth of Christianity in their minds and met together with companies of believers in the Christian synagogues of that day. But they had not believed with the heart they had not experienced the new birth.

They had been enlightened v. 4 but this meant no more than the effect of receiving the, truth in their minds. Christianity illuminates the minds of men who bow to its moral teachings, because it dispels the natural darkness of the human mind. Such people lack a saving belief in Christ. Still they are more responsible to God than those who had never been enlightened and tasted God's good things. Christ had tasted death for everything 2:9. In contrast they had tasted good things from God yet were turning back from Christianity. This is the background of

the stern warning "for it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit" (professors of Christianity who had sampled the goodness of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit) "and have tasted the good word of God" (eg. Simon Magus) "and the power of the world to come" (those miracles which nullified Satan's power in the world) "IF THEY SHOULD FALL AWAY to renew them again to repentance." These people were in a special class because they experienced a foretaste of the kingdom of God in power a privilege not granted to men before or since. If they should, after all this, fall away from Christianity and return to Judaism, that act of apostasy would be like them personally crucifying the Son of God all over again, and publicly disgracing Him. That is how God would look at their act if they returned to a religious system He had judged for crucifying His Son. It would be equivalent to sanctioning the nation's crucifixion of the Son of God. And yet they were assembling together with born again Christians. To point out the anomaly Paul gives them a simple lesson from nature. Surely everyone knows the effect of rainfall on the earth in the growing season. The rain comes from heaven to earth as Christ had done. The professing Hebrew Christians men of the earth had drunk in that heavenly rain. Good crops for the farmer i.e. fruit for God was the result for those with saving faith in Christ. Such received blessing from God v. 7. The others the thorns and thorn bearing plants of empty profession without life were almost at the point of being cursed. As for their end, it would be divine judgment the sense of being burned up v. 8.

Then in verse 9 Paul addresses true professors of Christianity. He is persuaded better things of them things connected with salvation. His tone is almost apologetic "even if we speak thus" for he felt it necessary to warn the others sternly first, due to the mixed nature of the congregation at Jerusalem. The others had been enlightened, but did not have life. Those who had life had tilled the ground to bring useful crops out of it v. 7 and a righteous God could not forget this v. 10. They had not only served God's true people in the past but were still doing so. He stresses this continuance in good works and diligence in them v.11 buoyed up by the full assurance of hope to the end. He stresses the same point in v.12 using a negative exhortation don't be lazy in whatever you do for God. Rather they should imitate those who in the past have been inheritors of the promises. In other words let their patient character in the face of promises not yet received be their example, for their own circumstances were very similar.

The introduction of the promises is blended with the heavenly hope characteristically Paul's line. Now this heavenly hope which all Christians have materially differs, in the case of these Hebrews, from our own. If we do not see this distinction the closing verses of Chapter 6 will be blurred to our vision. The Hebrew nation was guilty of the death of God's Son. The question arises then how does God classify their crime as an act of murder or an act of ignorance. If murder there is no hope "the murderer shall be put to death" Num. 35:30. If ignorance there is hope. Under the law a man who had killed another unintentionally could flee to a city of refuge and remain there in safety until the death of the high priest. If he ventured outside he lost his shelter and the blood avenger of the killed man could slay him. Well the question is answered by the Lord Himself "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" Luke 23:34. Since the Lord's words attributed their sin to a sin of ignorance they must flee to a city of refuge. The law established six such cities three on each side of the river Jordan read Num. 35, Josh. 20. But under Christianity a seventh is opened up heaven itself. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost convicted them and, by believing in Christ, they had, in effect, fled to this heavenly city of refuge. Peter confirmed their right to do this as the Lord Himself did on the cross "and now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers" Acts 3:17. But they must not leave this city of refuge or they will die. Such was not only the ruling of the law but the tenor of this epistle. Only when the High Priest dies can they leave this heavenly city. But you say Jesus, as our High Priest, can never die. Exactly. And so you Hebrew Christians are not permitted to leave the heavenly calling and return to Judaism. Why would they ever want to leave it? Jesus is there. He is our forerunner. The Savior man put to death is there to welcome to safety those who put Him to death. The Man in the glory is the anchor of the soul. Not only the anchor of these Christians but all of us. Storms may hit a ship but if it is securely anchored, it is reasonably safe. But our safety the safety of the soul is secured by an anchor which can never be moved. "Refuge failed me no man cared for my soul. O Lord... Thou art my refuge" Psalms 142:4, 5. Our High Priest can never die, so we can never lose our heavenly hope.

This ends the parenthesis refuge from blood guilt by fleeing to a city whose high priest can never die. The closing of the parenthesis opens the way for the uninterrupted consideration of "Jesus, made an High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedec."

Heavenly Things, Chapter 1.10 (9:1-10)

THE IMPERFECTION OF AARON'S WORK

(Suggested Reading Heb. 9:1-10)

Paul opens the ninth chapter with a brief comment about the first covenant having ordinances of service and a sanctuary. He expands his opening statement with an overview of this sanctuary, the tabernacle. He follows this up with a description of one of those services the Day of Atonement which illustrates the point he wants to make the inadequacy of the law and everything associated with it to meet man's needs.

This chapter then is an attempt to give the reader a general understanding of the tabernacle, and a specific understanding of the ritual performed there annually on the Day of Atonement.

The Tabernacle Preliminary Remarks

In Hebrews the subject of the tabernacle emerges at 8:2 and ends at 13:10. The word tabernacle means tent, suggesting an ever moving dwelling place, which it was. However since there was a separate tent inside the fenced off space also called "the tabernacle," descriptive confusion arises unless we separate the terms. Accordingly in this chapter "the tabernacle" is to be understood as meaning the enclosed space fenced off from the outside world and "the tent" as the separate structure within the enclosed space.

Before we can approach the study of the tabernacle intelligently we must have a basic understanding of what both it and its furniture represented to the mind of God conceptually that is, by-passing much detail. The tabernacle the House of God was a structure surrounded by the camp of God the tents of the children of Israel. They are at rest around this tabernacle. Three tribes have pitched their tents to the east,

three to the south, three to the west, and three to the north. The only reason God can dwell among them, a sinful people, is that they are provisionally redeemed by the Passover lamb's bloodshed in Egypt, which looked forward to the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, which cleanses us from all sin. They are provisionally redeemed yes, and so God is pleased to dwell among them but what about the sins they have committed this past year? Obviously they need a sin offering. The setting for that is the tabernacle.

The Tabernacle—a Simplified View

A few general impressions of the tabernacle emerge from the artist's drawing. First we see that the rectangular area which constituted the Court the whole interior of the tabernacle was created by a fenced enclosure high enough to prevent anyone outside observing the inside. There were three objects in the Court. The first two were the Brazen Altar of sacrifice and the Laver filled with water where the priests washed *1. The third object was a tent 10 cubits high twice the height of the fenced enclosure. It was rectangular, partitioned into two rooms the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies and overlaid with four curtains which hid the interior from view.

The whole structure had three gates. Entering from the outside, the first gate led into the Court, where the Brazen Altar and Laver were located. Walking past these objects one comes to the tent, which is entered by the second gate. The third gate called "the veil" was the entrance to the Holy of Holies which contained God's throne the Mercy Seat, resting on the Ark of the Covenant. A simple but unique formula ties together the Mercy Seat and the Brazen Altar the furniture farthest separated from one another.*2

Suppose a man who did not know God were riding past the tabernacle on his horse. What would he think of it? Not very much. He would see the tent projecting above the tabernacle enclosure. He would dislike its appearance, noting that it was covered on top with badger skins see Ex. 26:14. That was because the tent spoke of Christ, who is despised and rejected by men Isa. 53:3. Closer up, the fence prevented the curious from viewing the inside. There was no flooring anywhere. Everything rested on the desert terrain on which the tabernacle was pitched. This tells us that if we look down at the desert sand or rock i.e. if we occupy our minds with earthly things, we will lose interest in heavenly things. In spirit we will become like the man of the world outside, who was offended by the badger skins the external appearance of the tabernacle. But if we look around and up, we see patterns of divine things ablaze with imperishable glory.

This brings us to an overview of what the tabernacle represented to God's mind God, His creation of heaven and earth, and the question of how to deal with sin, which had defiled the universe and challenged His throne. The holy places made with hands what were they but figures of the true? 9:23, 24. The Holiest of All is a pattern of God dwelling in unapproachable light, and the Holy Place is a pattern of the heavens. The Court is the earth. This explains why there are three gates. The third gate called the Veil barred man who was a sinner, from God's presence in the Holy of Holies. The second gate spoke of the separation of heaven and earth due to sin. But the first gate, which admitted man to the Court, led to the Brazen Altar. This piece of furniture was located in the Court because Christ died in this world of which the Court is a figure, putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. "I am the door," He said, "by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved" John 10:9.

If man were designing the tabernacle he would have made the Court small and the Tent enormous, to correspond to the earth's relative insignificance in size in the universe. Not so with God who looks at the earth as the place where His Son glorified Him in life and death. So He reverses the natural order. The new creation is the inverse of the old creation. God can be happy with His people clustered around His throne in the tabernacle, secure in the knowledge that His Son will shed His blood for them at the appointed time. The people saw two things which confirmed this, although they did not understand them at the time. They saw the smoke of the sacrifices from the Brazen Altar rising up to God, and the glory of God descending in the pillar of cloud over the Holy of Holies. Today we understand the meaning of these things. The Brazen Altar was located far away from God as sin must be but God was pleased with the sacrifice and showed His approval with the cloud of His glory, speaking of His presence among His people.

The Tabernacle Furniture Paul Mentions

A man's house needs furniture to give it character. It tells us much of what occupies his mind. So does God's house. But in Hebrews Paul is selective, and only writes about the tabernacle furniture which is pertinent to his theme. What then was before God's mind in His House? We believe the answer is the two ways in which He has made Himself known creation and redemption. The vacant House of God i.e. the house in its skeletal features without its furniture, is a figure of creation in its various spheres. The furniture of the house, however, represents the other and greater work of God redemption. In our chapter Paul ignores the Court except for a hint of it in the expression "ordinances of divine service" and starts with the heavenly figures, grouping them into those which are seen and those which are not seen:.. The visible things in the Holy Place In the Holy Place Paul singles out the Golden Lampstand and Table of Showbread for our consideration. The Golden Lampstand represents the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ *3. Connect it with the Brazen Altar outside His death in the world and here in the heavens, the Holy Place you have not only His death but His resurrection. Figuratively the heavens are illuminated by the light of the man who died outside but who was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. The Golden Lampstand was placed opposite the Table of Showbread to illuminate it specially. The table had twelve loaves on it, representing the twelve tribes of Israel whose tents were pitched outside. Of the Golden Altar of Incense nothing is said. To the spiritually minded Jewish reader of Hebrews this way of presenting the furniture in the Holy Place would be convincing proof of the futility of the Jewish system. Since the nation had rejected Christ, what further need was there for an altar of incense? How could those who had crucified God's Son offer praise and worship to Him? The opposite side of this truth is God's faithfulness to them in spite of that. This is shown in the figure of Aaron lighting the lamps at evening, only to go out in the morning. Consequently, during the night of Israel's darkness the light of the lampstand shines on an Israel God has not forgotten. They are still before Him represented in the twelve loaves. So Paul says "our twelve tribes, instantly serving God night and day" although the outward evidence contradicted the statement. The light of the lamp-stand will shine until the night ends for Israel, and they are brought into the morning of a new day... The hidden things in the Holiest of All Here we have the Golden Censer *5 whose function when full of incense was to hide man from God, and the Ark of the Covenant whose contents were hidden from man but seen by God. The Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies is a figure of Christ in Manhood. But lest man in any way challenge His divinity it is also a figure of Christ as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. It was the beginning for it was to be built before the tabernacle itself Ex. 25:10. It was the end for it went over the Jordan and came to rest in the Temple.

The contents of the Ark the golden pot containing manna, Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the Covenant were hidden from man's eye intentionally by a veil. The veil was a figure of Christ's flesh 10:20 He being Himself both the Holy of Holies John 2:19-21 and the Ark of

the Covenant. But they were constantly before God's eye in the figures of the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy seat. The cherubim looked inward and downward telling us of God finding perfection in His blessed Son as Man.

The golden pot containing manna spoke of God treasuring up the remembrance of Christ as the bread of God come down from heaven to feed His people. Christ as the manna, the true bread of God which came down from heaven that man might eat it and not die, is the subject of John 6. Only God's real people, entering into God's thoughts of Christ, feed upon this bread. To those who know Him not, the bread is hidden from their sight.

If the golden pot which had manna speaks of Christ's life, the tables of the covenant speak of death (as the penalty of a broken law) and Aaron's rod which budded (in this setting) of priesthood in resurrection. Christ alone kept the law and made it honorable, but bore in His own body on the tree the full penalty of God's judgment against sin "cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" Gal. 3:13. We find Aaron's rod which budded in Num. 17. It "brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." As already mentioned the almond tree in Scripture is a figure of resurrection since it buds so early in springtime. Thus in these three figures we have the life, death and resurrection of Christ constantly before God's eye, as well as the priestly office He should assume in resurrection after a new order of priesthood.

The Day of Atonement—Introductory Thoughts

Paul ended his digest of the tabernacle and its furniture with "the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy seat." Why? Because the cherubim symbolically guarded the throne of God. When man sinned they drove him away from God's presence. Here in the Holy of Holies they are a mute witness in pure gold that man cannot re-enter God's presence in the Holy of Holies because he is a sinner. He can, and does go into the Holy Place as Paul points out in the persons of God's appointed priests. But into the Holy of Holies where God was, dwelling between the cherubim? No. However there was one exception. The High Priest was permitted to go into the Holy of Holies once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement and its ceremonies is in the Book of Leviticus. This book is the Old Testament counterpart of the epistle to the Hebrews, for both deal with the same subject approach to God. The approximate center of each book is the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16 on one hand, and in the descriptive contrast to the Day of Atonement in Heb. 9:1-14 on the other.

The High Priest's Preparation for the Work of the Day of Atonement

Apart from the Day of Atonement, which fell only once a year, the High Priest went about his duties in the Holy Place wearing his garments of glory and beauty see Ex. 28. These were garments of representation, for he represented the people before God in the Holy Place. However he was not allowed to wear these garments when he entered the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day he must take off his garments of glory and beauty, and wash himself with water an admission of his imperfection and uncleanness. Then he was to put on the holy linen garments which spoke of righteousness and sacrifice. The underlying thought behind all this was the sinfulness of the people including the High Priest and his sons. The High Priest, his sons, and all the people needed a sin offering. They had even defiled the sanctuary with their sins. This is the background to what follows.

In addition to his holy linen garments Aaron needed incense, and animals for sacrifice. The latter consisted of a young bullock, two kids of the goats, and two rams. Once inside the tabernacle Aaron was alone with God. No man could be present while the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement were going on. The question of sins before God and the High Priest required the tabernacle to be vacated. The meaning of true atonement is expiation of sins, propitiating a God offended at sinful man, pardon of the guilty righteously through the shed blood of Christ so that the sinner is reconciled to God. Since Christ had not yet come, atonement in Aaron's day could only be provisional. The ritual acknowledged that.

Aaron Enters God's Presence With Blood for His Own Sins and the Sins of the People

The High Priest had a double duty to perform. He had to sacrifice a bullock for his own sins and those of his family, and he also had to sacrifice one of the goats for the people's sins.

Aaron sacrifices the bullock for his own sins and those of his family Aaron takes the bullock's blood and a censer full of burning coals of fire from the Brazen Altar, into the Holy of Holies. When he enters he puts the sweet incense he was holding in his hands on the coals in the censer. Immediately the incense rises up in a cloud. It is not only fragrant, filling the Holy of Holies, but it hides his sinful presence from a Holy God. But that is not enough, for God requires blood i.e. life given and accepted in atonement for sin. The principle is established in Lev. 17:11 "for the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make an atonement for your souls, for it is the blood which makes an atonement for the soul." So with his finger Aaron sprinkles part of the bullock's blood seven times on the mercy seat and part before it.

.. Aaron sacrifices one of the goats for the sins of the people Aaron goes outside and casts lots to see which of the two goats shall be sacrificed. The goat on which the Lord's lot falls is killed. Aaron takes its blood into the Holy of Holies. With his finger he sprinkles the goat's blood seven times on the Mercy Seat and before it, just as he did with the bullock's blood.

Aaron Cleanses the Defilement of the Holy Things From the Uncleanness of the Children of Israel

The people had broken the law. They had worshipped a golden calf, but Aaron had his share in that too. His two sons Nadab and Abihu had been destroyed for offering strange fire before the Lord a great offense to God. *6 In short the people had defiled God's sanctuary with their sins. It must be cleansed.

.. Cleansing the Holy Place Aaron was to make an atonement also "for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation that remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness."

.. Cleansing the Brazen Altar of Sacrifice Aaron now goes into the Court. He takes with him the blood of the two sacrifices. He puts part of the blood of the bullock and part of the blood of the goat on the horns of the altar. Then with his finger he sprinkles the blood on the altar seven times.*7 In this way the altar is cleansed from the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and hallowed.

The Release of the Living Goat

Up to this point one bullock, for Aaron and his sons and one of the two goats for the children of Israel had been sacrificed. They were both sin offerings, so that the sins of both the priestly family and the people had been dealt with. One of the two goats had not been sacrificed however. Aaron now puts his hands on the head of this live goat and confesses all the sins of the people over it. By this act he transfers their sins to the live goat in a figure. Then he has a capable man release the goat into the desert. The two goats taken together give us the meaning of atonement. It is one work looked at in two ways. The sacrificed goat is the death of Christ for our sins the live goat is God remembering them no more, in the figure of the goat lost out of sight in the desert.

The release of the live goat completes our understanding of the dual character of Christ's work for God and man. The blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat was to propitiate God in His holy nature and character. Sin had entered and must be put away. The scapegoat is substitution for our sins. These are carried away by Christ and remembered no more. He has confessed them as His own and borne their judgment.

The Phasing Out of the Ritual

Sin having been dealt with, Aaron returns to the Holy Place. He takes off the linen garments of sacrifice and leaves them in the Holy Place indicating that this character of work is over. He washes himself and puts on his garments of glory and beauty. *8 He comes out to the people in these garments and sacrifices the two rams one for his house and the other for the people. The rams had been reserved for this moment. All the previous sacrifices had been sin offerings the rams were burnt offerings. *9 Sin has been dealt with, and the High Priest, a distinct figure of Christ as Melchizedec—Priest in His coming earthly glory, comes out at the end of the Church period to offer burnt offerings.

The Meaning of the Ritual

God delivered His people from the lash of their masters in the iron furnace of Egypt. Sheltered by the blood of the Passover Lamb they were a redeemed people. He took them through the Red Sea and into the desert because He loved them. They were clustered around His house the tabernacle. But until His Son came and shed His blood for their sins, He had to restrain the fullness of His love. They were near and yet distant. The nature of His relationship to His people comes out in the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement in several ways:.. Under the law man could not enter God's Presence. The great overall teaching is that Israel had no access to the presence of God at all not the people not the priests and most surprising of all, not even the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. We know of course that the people had to remain outside the tabernacle even though their tents were pitched around it and they could see the glory of the God of Israel rising in cloud form from the Holiest of All. What about their priests then could they not enter? Not at all. They could perform sacrificial duties at the Brazen Altar and priestly duties in the Holy Place. But always, when in the Holy Place, they saw the veil which prevented them from going into the Holy of Holies where God dwelt. How about Aaron, their High Priest then? To dramatize it let us put it this way for 364 days in the year he was just like the other priests. He could look at the veil but not enter. Well, you say, he did enter once a year, on the Day of Atonement, didn't he? Paul admits that he entered but in such a way that he acknowledged he had no right there "but into the second went the High Priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people. The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was yet standing" 9:7,8. So Aaron had to sacrifice for himself and his house as well as for the errors of the people. He had to bathe his flesh in water signifying his personal unfitness for God's presence the way he was. Then he had to clothe his flesh with the special linen garments of righteousness and sacrifice. He had to enter with incense to hide his flesh, figuratively speaking, from the eyes of a Holy God. He had to enter with blood, for nothing less could propitiate God. This is mentioned three times in Hebrews 9:7 9:25 13:11. Finally the Holy Place and the Brazen Altar the two places to which alone there was access had to be purified because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel Lev. 16:16, 19.

Flowing from this overall teaching that under the old system of things Israel had no real access to the presence of God, is the revelation of the grace of God which bore patiently with them until the death of Christ, which these forms all spoke of, was accomplished. "For the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God" Rom. 3:25 describes the old order. Israel accumulated their sins for a whole year until the Day of Atonement, when they were added up and totaled, so to speak, and the people provisionally cleansed. Then they began sinning again and had to wait another year, when once more they were provisionally purified. And so the provisional sacrifices and outward cleansings continued on year after year until the death of Christ ended the need of them, for

.. The ritual looked forward to Christ our High Priest entering God's presence for us. This was unknown until God was revealed in Christ. Now we can understand Aaron's entrance into the Holy of Holies with incense as a figure of Christ in Manhood entering the presence of God in all the fragrance of His Person represented by the incense. Unlike Aaron He needed no blood sacrifice for Himself to enter, for the Divine Presence is His by right. But sin has entered God's universe and offends Him. It can only be answered for by the blood of a spotless sacrifice the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son. Three spheres are involved in each of which the question of sin must be taken up. These three spheres correspond to the threefold division of the tabernacle and the order of service on the Day of Atonement.

Aaron goes into the holiest of all first with the blood of the bullock and then with the blood of the goat. Here it is a question of meeting God's throne itself in the heavens beyond creation "Thus saith the Lord, the heavens are My throne and the earth is My footstool." Paul was caught up to the third heaven 1 Cor. 12:2 The other two heavens being respectively what we call outer space and the atmospheric heavens. While it is impossible to confine an infinite God physically, the general thought is approach to God in the Highest above and beyond the universe He has created. The majesty of God's throne is in question because sin has to be answered for. He has found full satisfaction in the blood of Christ. Aaron now leaves the holiest of all with blood and cleanses the Holy Place. Then he goes out to the Brazen Altar and makes atonement for it with blood. This speaks of heaven and earth the creation as the Holy of Holies spoke of God above and beyond His creation. Thus God, in the intrinsic holiness of His Person and the majesty of His throne, has been satisfied with the death of Jesus. The question of sin entering the universe has been dealt with. There remains only man, the crown of creation. Aaron takes up this question confessing all the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their transgressions in all their sins on the head of the live goat, just as Christ confessed His people's sins as His

own when He bore them on the cross.

And so the live goat secures his freedom. He goes away into the wilderness out of sight. It is a beautiful figure of how God has been pleased not only to forgive us our sins and the judgment they deserved, but not even to remember them. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." The two goats are really one being two ways of looking at one work. In one way we look at His death and blood shedding in the other way the carrying our sins away from God's presence never to be remembered any more.

The typical teaching outlined above is confirmed in the three reconciliations in Col. 1:19-22 The things on the earth, the things in the heavens, and believing man. Are you a believer? Then God has forgiven your sins, because one goat was slain. He has also forgotten them because the other goat has gone far away from where God was away into the desert. That is why it is written "as far as the East is from the West so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" Psa. 103:12. You can't measure the distance between the East and the West and measurement is a figure of judgment. But suppose you are not reconciled to God through the death of His Son? Well, God can measure that distance "if the tree falls toward the South or toward the North, in the place where the tree falls there shall it be" Eccl. 11:3. Think about that. The distance between the North and South poles can be measured, but not the distance between the East and the West. The tree falls when it dies just as the sinner's state is frozen by death. The goat however is free. Such is the salvation which is in Christ Jesus a bright picture if accepted somber in the extreme if rejected.

The Church and Israel our common salvation. This is readily understood once we see that there are two classes of sacrifices one for Aaron and his house (figures of Christ and the Church as a company of heavenly worshippers) and another and distinct class for the children of Israel. Aaron has to bring the blood of each class of sacrifice in separately to God but when he goes out to the Brazen Altar the blood of both classes of sacrifice is applied to it. The separation of the blood in the holiest of all speaks of relative intelligence as to the work of Christ. As worshipping priests in the holiest of all (the veil having been rent in Christianity) the Church, being in the presence of God, is supremely intelligent as to the value of Christ's work. This is the bullock. So our song will forever be "to Him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father to Him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen" Rev. 1:5, 6. With Israel there is much public confession of guilt outside. This is the goat. While we learned the value of Christ's sacrifice in the Holy of Holies, they will have to learn it in the world. The prophet Zechariah tells us that they will gaze both on the spear wounded side of Christ and the nail prints in His hands "And they shall look upon Me whom they pierced" Zech. 12:10. "What are those wounds in Thy hands? And He will say 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'" Zech. 13:6. Then, with Christ fully made known to them as their Messiah, Israel comes into the blessedness of what we already have. The High Priest changes from His linen garments to His garments of glory and beauty Lev. 16:23, 24. That means that the character of Christ's Priesthood which is for help now will be changed to worldly power then. Christ will be Melchizedec—Priest on His throne.

Heavenly Things, Chapter 1.11 (9:11-28)

THE PERFECTION OF CHRIST'S WORK

(Suggested Reading Heb. 9:11-28)

In Chapter 1.10 we learned about the imperfection of Aaron's work. That taught us that the law was only a system of things imposed upon the early fathers of the Hebrews and those who followed them "until the time of setting things right" v.10. In other words God set up and tolerated the ritual until the death and resurrection of Christ, which would both explain it and set it aside.

Christ's Perfect Work Contrasted to Man's Imperfect Works Under Law—a Review

The blood of Christ does two things for man. First it gives him forgiveness of sins, so that he no longer is fearful of meeting God, and secondly it enables him to come into God's presence as a worshipper. Before Christ died these truths were conveyed to man by the shedding of the blood of animals. First the Passover Lamb was slain in Egypt. Because of this, which anticipated the sacrifice of Christ our Passover 1 Cor. 5:7 the Lamb of God. God could dwell with man for the first time. This would be in the Tabernacle, and the people rejoiced at the thought as they sang at the Red Sea "He is my God and I will prepare Him an habitation" Ex. 15:2. When Moses finished his work he erected a veil in the tabernacle to show that man could not approach God under law, but when Christ cried "it is finished" God tore the veil in half, allowing man to enter the Holy of Holies. The end of Moses' finished work is thus in contrast to the end of Christ's finished work. Now man is as sinful under Christianity. as under Judaism but the blood of bulls and goats did not speak of a finished work, so the veil had to separate man from God. The blood of Christ speaks of a finished work and under Christianity we have access to God's presence. So the Hebrews should forsake a system of things which kept them away from God and embrace the privileges of Christianity with its full access to God's presence.

The Jew should have been able to compare not only the work of Christ eternal rather than temporary when animals were sacrificed, but the glory of the contrasting priesthoods. Christ has gone on high and represents us in the presence of God. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant grace. The Old Covenant the law failed because of man's sinfulness. God now comes out in Christ in mediatorial glory. Indeed J.B. Stoney once remarked that the universe was made in order that it might be filled with mediatorial glory.*1 Indeed it was. Heaven and earth are no more than a stage for the display of God's glory found in all its fullness in His beloved Son in Manhood. Could Judaism offer anything like this? The ministry of its priests was confined to the Court outside and the Holy Place inside. Even the High Priest dare not break these confines. There was one apparent (not real) exception to this. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, Aaron was permitted entrance to the Holy of Holies. But the conditions imposed "on him really showed that he had no right to be there at all. This was Judaism, the people, the priests, and even the High Priest must keep away from the God who dwelt in the midst of His people.

In vs. 7-10 Paul tells us what happened on the Day of Atonement without directly mentioning that day. The great teaching of the Day of Atonement is that the law made nothing perfect. Christ's work did. The contrast should help us appreciate the perfection of the finished work of Christ.

Perfection of Work Forgiveness of Sins and Approach to God by the Precious Blood of Christ We Have Seen How the Blood of Animals Sacrificed in the Jewish Ritual Could Not Open the Way to the Holy of Holies. Now We Come to One of Those Contrasts for Which Hebrews Is Noted, for the Rest of This Chapter Is Devoted to What God Really Required to Enable Man to Enter His Presence the Precious Blood of Christ. Here It Is Looked at in Three Ways. First for Purification It Purifies Our Conscience From Dead Works to Worship the Living God 6:14. Secondly As Confirming the Covenant 9:20 Moses' Action Looking Forward to the Lord's Words "This Is My Blood of the New Covenant." Thirdly It Gives Us Remission of Sins 9:22.

Christ's work and its consequence is eternal, not temporal. Eternal things here are in contrast to temporal things the tabernacle and its services. "The things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal" 2 Cor. 4:18. Now in the tabernacle gifts and sacrifices were offered but they could not perfect the conscience of the worshippers v.9. The divine services of that day were imposed on the people as a temporary measure until Christ died.

"But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come by a better and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say not of this creation. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in ONCE into the Holy of Holies, having obtained eternal redemption" vs. 11, 12. Notice the contrast with Aaron's priesthood here. Aaron entered the Holy of Holies once a year but the blood he took in was ineffectual since God could only be satisfied with the blood of His own Son. Aaron had to leave the Holy of Holies and return the next year repeating the same ceremony. Not so with Christ. He has entered ONCE with His own blood. He does not leave. He has obtained eternal redemption, which Aaron could not. No wonder He is called a High Priest of good things to come.

The next question raised is the purifying of the conscience. The law provided for this with the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean 9:13 and this set aside in holiness (the idea behind sanctifying) the man who brought the necessary sacrifices but "to the purifying of the flesh only." But how much more efficacious is the blood of Christ and here the second eternal note is struck for He offered Himself in contrast to those who brought offerings through the eternal Spirit. He offered Himself to God a spotless sacrifice and through the eternal Spirit. Knowing this our conscience is purified not our flesh as in v.13. Our conscience is purified from dead works to worship the living God. So it is more than the first eternal thing eternal redemption. Because Christ offered Himself through the eternal Spirit spotless to God we become worshippers of God rather than those who only sought to appease Him with dead works.

The third eternal thing is the promise of eternal inheritance. It is still a promise. The land was a promise to the tribes of Israel gathered around the tabernacle as the glory is to us. But it is "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away reserved in heaven for you" 1 Peter 1:4. Then in closing off the subject of our eternal inheritance Paul takes advantage of a dual meaning of the Greek word which can be translated either as "covenant" or "testament" (in the sense of a man's last will and testament) "for where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: of no strength at all while the testator lives" vs. 16, 17. Clearly "covenant" would make no sense here for a covenant or treaty is effective as soon as it is signed and has nothing to do with whether the signatories are living or dead. All this is simply a beautiful figure. In his death Christ has, so to speak, willed us an eternal inheritance.

The value of the blood of Christ to God and man Now that the work has been accomplished and the blood of Christ shed, the Spirit takes up the question of the threefold application of that blood. First blood was required as the seal of the Old Covenant vs 18, 20 which only looked forward to "My blood of the New Covenant" Matt. 26:28. Secondly the tabernacle and the vessels of divine service were sprinkled with blood v.21. Sprinkling is for purification and since the tabernacle, as already stated, is a figure of the universe, the teaching here is that both earth and heaven have been cleansed from the defilement of sin having entered them by the sprinkling of Jesus' blood. This opens the way too for our entrance into the heavens, both God's people and their heavenly home having been purified from the defilement of Satan's sins. The "heavenly things" in v.23 are the things in heaven connected with the service and worship of God. The Lord told Nicodemus that He could not talk to him about these heavenly things because he did not even believe earthly things John 3:12. The Hebrews to whom this epistle was written had not advanced much beyond Nicodemus' state of soul when he came to Jesus by night.

Thirdly man is lost and "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" 9:22. Remission is the deliverance of the sinner from God's judgment of his sins because Christ shed His blood for him. Practically applied, remission becomes the forgiveness of sins. You could not get remission of sins under the Old Covenant. But at the institution of the Lord's Supper Jesus Himself said "this is My blood of the New Covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins" Matt. 26:28.

How the Three Appearings of Christ Summarize the High Priest's Work on the Day of Atonement

The three appearings are not given in chronological order and the meaning of the appearings here differs from the general meaning in Scripture. *2 In the order in which they are listed here, they are present v.24 where Christ appears in the presence of God for us the past v.26 when He appeared on earth to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself the future v.28 when He appears the second time to give us the salvation of our bodies.*3

The reason for the lack of chronological order is that the appearing of Christ in God's presence for us highlights the perfection of Christ's work for us in contrast to the imperfection of Aaron's work. Christ has entered God's presence in heaven with His own blood the proof of eternal redemption. While we understand the reason for the emphasis we can better understand the passage by reverting to chronological order.

The first appearing of Christ on earth The cardinal point in His appearing is that He came to deal with the sin question "in the consummation of the ages" as it should read v.26. This expression means at a time when God had tried man in every way without government, with government, without law, with law, etc. and man was found wanting. So Christ Himself must deal with man's condition and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Christ has been offered once only v.25 and suffered once only v.26 in contrast to the Jewish system of perpetual offerings and sacrifices. Understanding this truth would cause us to reject any system of theology claiming to return Christ's actual body to earth to perpetuate His sufferings. Perpetual offerings and sacrifices could only be returning to a Jewish system which has passed away. This first appearing then is analogous to the sin offering on the Day of Atonement.

The second appearing of Christ this time in heaven As already pointed out this appearing is mentioned first Christ appearing in the presence of God for us because it is so momentous an event to God. A man in the glory of God representing us before God! Think of it. In time sequence it is analogous to Aaron wearing the holy linen garments of sacrifice appearing with the blood of atonement. The heavens are cleansed and sanctified. Moreover the veil is rent and the way opened for the High Priest to appear on earth "a second time."

The third appearing of Christ this time on earth again The first time Christ appeared on earth He dealt with the question of our sins. Because we believed His word He gave us the salvation of our souls. So when He appears again He won't have to reconsider that question. It is settled. Why is it re-introduced in the text again? Simply because of the mixed condition of the Hebrews some real Christians, others only nominal professors. The wages of sin is death and since man is a sinner it is appointed to him once to die. He must collect his wages. Death only partly pays those wages. The judgment following death is the final installment.

For us however there is no judgment, for we are in Christ Jesus Rom. 8:1. On His first appearing He took up the question of sin and we received the salvation of our souls. The second time He appears it is for the salvation of our bodies. Our present bodies of humiliation hide from the world and ourselves the greatness of God's salvation soul first and body later which lies ahead for His beloved. God will not rest until He has given us glorified bodies, and we are in His presence holy and without blame before Him in love. In the meantime He gives us the services of His High Priest in heaven to sustain us. When that service ends that is, at the end of the Church period He will put off His holy linen garments. Then He will put on His garments of glory and beauty and come out as Melchizedec—Priest in blessing to Israel.

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